

\$2.95 • February 2018 • Volume 14, No. 2

Homes & Lifestyles

of South-Central Indiana



homesandlifestylesmagazine.com



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Mardi Dog
Mystical Krewe of Barkus
a howling good
Mardi Gras parade
Story and photos by Jackie Sheckler Finch




Jacey and her husband Alex Broussard pose with the two trophies won by their dogs Rosie and Diesel.

She proudly struts down the street, her long slender legs clad in gold boots. Peacock feathers atop her head sway in the breeze as parade watchers cheer and clap when she passes by.

Accepting the adulation with calm poise, she seems to know she is top dog.

In fact, the beautiful Rosie is a Rhodesian Ridgeback and she will be crowned the grand winner Mystical Dog in the Mystical Krewe of Barkus Parade in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Held along Lakeshore Drive, the annual event is a family-friendly Mardi Gras celebration featuring costumed human companions with their dressed-up doggies.

"I used to go the parade when I was a child but this is the first time we ever entered the contest. We were shocked when we won," said Rosie's companion Jacey Broussard. "We put a lot of effort into our costumes but so did many other people and their dogs looked amazing."

Not only did Jacey handcraft Rosie's showgirl attire, she also turned the family's small Schnauzer/Yorkie mix named Diesel into a gold nugget.

"You wouldn't believe how I did it," Jacey began explaining. "I used cans of expanding

foam and I carved the foam down to look like a gold nugget. Then I sprayed it gold and fixed it so it would fit over Diesel."

When she emailed some photos to her parents, however, Broussard said she got a different response. "They said Diesel looked like a baked potato."

The Golden Nugget

Tiny Diesel had the easy job. All he had to do was rest comfortably in a wagon pulled by Rosie along the parade route. To complete the trio look, Jacey cut out some gold letters and pasted them onto a black T-shirt to wear proclaiming herself Nugget Security.

"I actually had a few people approach me and ask how long I had been working for Golden Nugget," says Jacey, who is not a Golden Nugget employee but a farrier—a person who specializes in equine hoof care and puts horseshoes on horses.

"I always wanted to work with animals. I've been a farrier for five years now and I love what I'm doing."

The Golden Nugget parade getup, of course, is a nod to the \$600 million Golden Nugget Casino Resort that opened in Lake Charles in

December 2014. "They actually have a real gold nugget on display there. That's what gave me the idea to make Diesel a little nugget," Jacey says.

More than 100 costumed dogs paraded in the hour-long procession to the delight of about 1,000 viewers lining both sides of the riverfront road. Sponsored by the local Cumulus Broadcasting, the Barkus Parade was started in 1995 in response to radio listener requests.

"They wanted a way to get their pooches involved in the Mardi Gras tradition," says Ashley Reed, Cumulus morning show host for KYKZ96. "This is radio. We love to think outside of the box."

Parade for a cause

Not only is the parade a fun celebration, it is also a fundraiser for local animals. Parade participants pay a \$10 pre-registration fee or \$15 the day of the parade to enter a dog.

"KYKZ96 chooses an animal shelter every year to donate the money to," Ashley explains.

Families look forward to the yearly activity and children grow up taking part in the tradition, says Devin Morgan. "It's an important part of Louisiana culture to celebrate Mardi Gras and this is different from the normal kind of Mardi Gras parade you think about. People of all ages really like this one."

Judging from the wagging tails, the decked-out dogs really do, too. Imaginations ran wild as costumes included a dignified doggy pharaoh, a tiny pup as a pouf of popcorn in a popcorn machine, a wagonload of gumbo ingredients with a black pooch masquerading as a frog, a fairy princess, knight in shining armor, pirate, two "wiener" dogs, court jester, Popeye and Olive Oyl, bright red crawfish, the Grinch, a chef and much more.

Most dogs walked on leashes with their human companions, although a few canines rode in decorated wagons, baby strollers or yard carts. Some small ones were carried in loving arms.

One teeny dog wearing a crown sat atop a mountainous purple, gold and green Mardi Gras wagon. Some paraders tossed beads, Frisbees, plastic cups, bouncy balls and stuffed animals to appreciative children along the route.

Each year, the parade seems to get bigger and better, with many participants returning, says Elizabeth Blackstock, market manager for Cumulus Lake Charles. "We at Cumulus are very excited to continue to host the Krewe of Barkus Parade and it seems to get more creative with the animals in costume."





For six-year-old Tiffany Mitchell of Mobile, the chance to see so many dogs in all their finery is what persuaded the youngster and her grandparents to spend the weekend in Lake Charles. "We're staying in a hotel and eating in a restaurant because that's what I wanted for my birthday," she says, already warning her grandparents. "This is what I want for my birthday again next year."

The 2018 Barkus Parade will be held Saturday, Feb. 10 at 3 p.m. at the Lakefront

Promenade, 900 Lakeshore Drive, and participants are already starting to plan those special costumes.

"Just seeing all the fancy dogs here has given me ideas," says Karen Sanders. "We've been taking pictures of our favorites and plan to be in the parade ourselves next year. It's fun and it's all for a good cause."

For more information, contact the Lakes Charles Convention & Visitors Bureau at 337-436-9588 or check out website at www.visitlakecharles.org. ❧



Four-legged friends parade in costumes with human companions.