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# New Orleans picks up after Mardi Gras: 'It's mesmerizing to watch'

BY FAIMON A. ROBERTS III | [froberts@theadvocate.com](mailto:froberts@theadvocate.com) FEB 14, 2018 - 2:38 PM



Bourbon street is cleaned up after Mardi Gras in New Orleans, Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2018.

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Advocate Staff photo by SOPHIA GERMER

Late Tuesday night, Polly Watts and a friend retired to the balcony of the Avenue Pub, which she owns, to eat some takeout, sip wine and enjoy the season's final parade, one that almost no one watches.

It was the parade of the city's cleaning crews — dozens of workers, tractors, trucks and sweepers moving down St. Charles Avenue, corralling and removing the tons of rubbish left behind by Carnival revelers.

"It's mesmerizing to watch," Watts said. "We ought to sell tickets to this."

She was watching the final round of the city's annual post-Mardi Gras cleanup, when hundreds of workers go out each night to collect millions of pounds of trash. As of Wednesday afternoon, the cleanup crews had removed at least 620 tons of trash, said Cynthia Sylvain-Lear, the city's sanitation director.

That number might approach last year's 1,300 tons of refuse collected before the cleanup is completed, she added.

The cleanup is a massive effort. More than 970 workers participated in the effort, only about 10 percent of them city employees. More than 200 were contract laborers, and about the same number came from programs for those classified as "chronically hard to employ," according to a news release from Mayor Mitch Landrieu's office. Some workers were pulled from the city's fire and police departments as well. Empire, the company that has a contract for French Quarter sanitation, provided 112 workers.

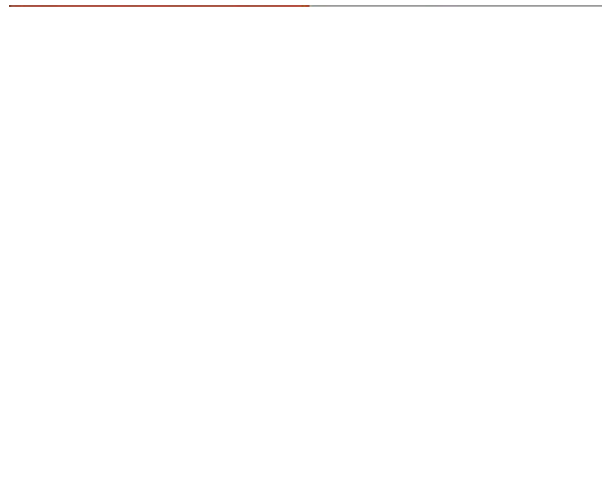
Some cleanup remains to be done. The 667 portable toilets placed along parade routes should be removed by Friday. All city-owned reviewing stands will be taken down by March 9, according to City Hall.

The coming days also will bring a review of how a new feature of Mardi Gras worked. The 250 "gutter buddies" placed in catch basins in an effort to prevent beads from clogging the city's drainage system will be removed and their effectiveness gauged, said Dani Galloway, the city's interim public works director.

Some catch basins had been checked after the first weekend of parades, and the buddies seemed to be doing well, she said. In recent months, crews removed tens of thousands of pounds of beads from previous years' parades from catch basins along St. Charles Avenue.

Watts said she noticed that both krewes and parade-goers appeared to be more conscientious this year about discarding beads during parades.

"It seemed like krewes were throwing less," she said. At her pub, she had set up a bead-recycling bin; its contents will eventually be taken to a nonprofit that recycles beads.



Joe Rabham, who owns the Avenue Inn on St. Charles near Milan Street, also praised the city's efforts this year.

"The city does a massive job with what they have," he said. "There's always something that takes a day or two to catch up on, but they usually do that."

During a foggy Wednesday morning in the French Quarter, dozens of tractors, trucks and men with rakes worked to pile and pick up the thousands of green "hand grenade" containers and other refuse that parties had left behind.

Shelly Waguespack, the president of Pat O'Brien's Bar, said the season had been good, and in fact, the bar was doing a brisk business Wednesday afternoon. But, she added, the streets didn't appear as clean as in previous years.

"It's OK. It's just not as clean as it has been in the past," she said. "The street still has a lot of the leftovers."

The city reported that from Feb. 9-16, Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport officials expect to have more than 164,000 passengers depart, a 10 percent increase over last year's Carnival season total. Approximately 19,000 of those were expected to leave Wednesday, according to a news release.

Police made 471 arrests during the season, compared with 373 last year, the news release said.

The city also issued more than 28,000 tickets and towed 1,174 vehicles on parade days, a news release said.

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