

# Tulane alumni bring the magic of Mardi Gras to their cities

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By Mary Sparacello

Whether it's tossing beads in Atlanta's Lanta Gras parade, dancing the night away at Chicago's Mardi Gras party or savoring gumbo at a cook-off in Denver, Tulane alumni are finding creative ways to celebrate Carnival season far from New Orleans.

These events showcase the enduring connection Tulanians have to their alma mater and the Crescent City.



Leslie Holzmark Franklin (NC '88), a board member of the Club of Colorado, summed it up perfectly: "Everything that reminds us of Tulane and New Orleans helps us relive our glory days. There's no bigger party than Mardi Gras, and many of us grew to love it as students as much as the locals. Just because we live thousands of miles away now doesn't mean we can't celebrate together and bring the spirit of the season to our current home." Franklin developed the idea for Colorado's gumbo cook-off, which has become a standout alumni event.

The festive spirit is also strong in Atlanta, where Tulanians will march Feb. 22 in Lanta Gras, a Mardi Gras-themed parade in the city's Kirkwood neighborhood. Alex Freedman (SSE '20), who helps plan events for the Tulane Club of Atlanta, recalls last year's parade where alumni decorated a trailer to look like a king cake and handed out beads to parade-goers.

"There are people walking, celebrating, having fun. It feels like a Mardi Gras parade. It's a good reminiscence of what it was like back in college, going to Mardi Gras," Freedman said.

Freedman says that after the Lanta Gras parade, a massive block party caps off the festivities, allowing alumni to revel in the Mardi Gras spirit.

Meanwhile, in the Midwest, Tulanians are keeping the party going on Feb. 15 with the second annual Krewe of Chicageaux Mardi Gras party, a collaboration between the Tulane and LSU alumni clubs.



“We’re excited to celebrate the resilience of New Orleans and kick off Mardi Gras season,” says Nina Moffa (NC ’03), president of the Tulane Club of Chicago. Guests arrive in their Mardi Gras finest and enjoy New Orleans cuisine catered by Ina Mae, a local restaurant. The Tulane Office of Alumni Relations provides king cakes and swag to complete the experience, while contests for best dressed and best decorated table add to the festive atmosphere.

“There’s a lot of New Orleanians living in Chicago, and of course, we all wish we

could be in New Orleans for Mardi Gras, so this is a fun way to enjoy the camaraderie, the good food and the togetherness that Mardi Gras provides.”

That same spirit of connection carries through the club’s other upcoming events, which include a get-together for Give Green (Tulane’s annual giving event), a crawfish boil, a Tulane team on a Chicago kickball league and an architectural walking tour of Oak Park — each offering alumni another chance to celebrate their Tulane ties.

Tulanians in Colorado are bringing a taste of home to the Rockies with their own festive tradition: a gumbo cook-off. The March 1 event, which debuted last year thanks to Leslie Franklin’s vision, was an instant hit, drawing around 100 attendees and seven talented gumbo chefs.

“Most of our club events revolve around food,” Franklin explains. “Whenever we feature Cajun or Creole fare, we inevitably hear folks talking about the Denver-area restaurants they patronize to get a taste of New Orleans. Someone once suggested we should compare those recipes to see which one was best ... and voila! An idea was born.”



Franklin saw the cook-off as more than just a fun contest. Because the main course is donated, the majority of funds collected through ticket sales can go toward beverages, the venue, live entertainment, she says. “I also believed the audience participation aspect would not just be a new twist but a fun new way for folks to engage. And truly, everything worked exactly that way.”

In addition to homemade gumbo, the event features French bread, Popeye's red beans and rice, along with king cakes provided by the Tulane Office of Alumni Relations (OAR).

In another exciting addition to Colorado's culinary lineup, Colorado Board member Lara Stepneski-Mintz (NC '06, SLA \*13) owns and operates [Sweet Nola Snoballs](#), a New Orleans sno-ball stand right there in Denver (opened summer 2024) which, unlike its Louisiana counterparts, is open year-round. Sweet Nola offers all the classic flavors, including nectar, wedding cake, Tiger's Blood, Hurricane, and more. Emphasizing the nostalgic connection that many alumni have for sno-balls, Franklin says, "If you close your eyes, you are instantly transported to Plum Street or the sidewalk on Tchoupitoulas outside Hansen's. So, in addition to king cakes, we'll have sno-balls for dessert too. Another way we are literally bringing a taste of New Orleans to Colorado!"

Board member Teresa Bruno Warkentin (NC '07) says that alumni of all ages participate, from young children of alumni to more mature alumni who share stories about their Tulane days.

"One of my favorite things about the gumbo cook-off is that it appeals to alumni of all ages. When you're talking about food, talking about gumbo, talking about Mardi Gras, everybody has something in common, so I love overhearing the conversations that people have over their experience at Tulane and in New Orleans, coming together here in Colorado. It's really a unique and special thing to bring people together over food and festivity."