

Gay Mardi Gras Smaller but Spirited

Story & Photos by Rex Wockner
Contributing Writer

NEW ORLEANS — It was a much smaller Mardi Gras in the gay area of the French Quarter this year but spirits were clearly high and some people said they preferred not being crushed by the crowds.

"I'd say it's about a third as many people, but we only have 25 percent of our hotel rooms," said New Orleanian Volney Hill. "Also, most people usually crash with their friends and 80 percent of the houses are gone, so their friends aren't here either.

"So, I think this is actually very promising," Hill said. "People are going to get here one way or another. I have more people staying with me this year than ever. I pretty much serve as a hotel right now."

Rafael Maldonado, who came in from Mobile, Ala., for his 15th Mardi Gras, agreed that "it's a lighter crowd. It's usually packed full of people throwing beads here [in front of the gay bar Cafe Lafitte In Exile]," he said.

Local resident Reuben said he didn't mind the smaller crowd.

"It's more tolerable. You can get around, you don't have to worry about all the crampedness," he said. "It's better to me with a small crowd."

Local drag queen D.L. Broadway agreed.

"Sizewise, I'm loving it," she said. "I like to spread out. I like my little space. I'm loving it because the city's making its money back."

It was Broadway's 26th Mardi Gras.

"It's bringing New Orleans back," she said. "It's a great party, I love to party and I love to have a great time and I see people are smiling and getting into the celebration, so it's a blessing to me."

Broadway spent three months exiled in Pascagoula, Miss.

"Now I'm back at my job at Head Start," she said. "I have a FEMA trailer; it's just my brother and I, and it's fabulous."

Paul Landry of Houston was at

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