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Let the Space Farce be with Chewbacchus, which rolls with same puckish and inclusive attitude despite changes

BY SUE STRACHAN | sstrachan@theadvocate.com FEB 5, 2019 - 5:06 PM

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Richard Riggs of the Krewe of Living Dead pulls a monster behind him on a bike during the Intergalactic Krewe of Chewbacchus parade in the Marigny neighborhood of New Orleans, Saturday, Feb. 3, 2018. Over 150 sub krewes marched in the Sci-Fi themed parade.

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Advocate Staff photo by SOPHIA GERMER

The din of welding and sawing filled Castillo Blanco Art Studios, almost drowning out the sounds of traffic going by on St. Claude Avenue. Members of the Intergalactic Krewe of Chewbacchus were hard at work, many after day jobs, on the krewe's title float: a flying saucer and New Orleans cityscape for this year's theme: "Space Farce."

It was not the usual timetable for Chewbacchus and its many sub-krewes. On Oct. 24, 2018, the krewe was told by the city's Department of Safety and Permits that due to police safety concerns, the parade had to move from its traditional date 10 days before Mardi Gras to two weeks earlier. Chewbacchus will roll Saturday (Feb. 9).

Chewbacchus and 'Tit Rex, which roll in Faubourg Marigny, were competing on that day for police with five Uptown parades, Pontchartrain, Choctow, Freret, Sparta and Pygmalion. The crowds for Chewbacchus and 'Tit Rex, known for its satirical and decorative shoe box-sized floats, had been getting bigger every year, and the number of Chewbacchus' sub-krewes had grown as well.

“Chewbacchus is a victim of our own success,” krewe “Overlord” Brooke Ethridge told WWL-TV. “We’ve gotten really big over the last five years.”

This change also makes Chewbacchus, which started parading in 2011, the first walking parade of the Carnival season, a title formerly held by Krewe du Vieux, which is marching Feb. 16.

And, if a parade date change wasn’t enough to create a ripple in this Star Wars-inspired krewe’s force, the 2019 parade will also mark the debut of two of the krewe’s new Overlords, what other krewes call captains.

The three founders of Chewbacchus — Kirah Haubrich (“Dilithium Crystal Hot Sauce”), Brett Powers (“MC Ghetto Fett”) and Ryan Ballard (“Space Commander Chewbaccacabra”) — retired after the 2018 parade, in which they were also honored as royalty. Current Overlord Brooke Ethridge (“Overlord Padme Almandine”) had already been appointed for the 2018 parade, with Aryanna Gamble (“Overlord Space

Goddess Snackagawea”) and Richard Riggs (“Overlord Dr. Strangelover”) joining her as co-Overlords for 2019.

All three are seasoned Chewbacchus participants. Gamble started Krewe of Remix the second year of the parade with family members and friends, and today they number about 20. Riggs started marching in 2013 with the 25 members of Krewe of the Living Dead (K.O.L.D), and Ethridge is a co-founder of the Leijorettes, about 100 marchers costumed as Princess Leia from "Star Wars," who kicked off in 2014.

There will be an Overlord rotation moving forward, said Gamble, so organizers don't burn out.

“It's a lot of work to put together,” said Gamble, by day an assistant director of marketing at Tulane University. Riggs is a distribution manager for a satellite dish company and Ethridge does sales for Pet Krewe, a local pet costume company, and is a trainer for the Big Easy Rollergirls.

The date change caused some sub-krewes to drop out. But even so, the parade will have just over 100 sub-krewes, up from 90 in 2018. And more can be added, because anyone in costume — required to participate — can show up the day of the parade and pay the \$60 parade fee (cash only). “We have some krewes that have one member, and some krewes that just participate one year,” said Ethridge. (Animals are not allowed, except certified service animals.)

The Krewe of Cher is kicking off its inaugural march in Chewbacchus by welcoming anyone dressed as Cher. Other new krewes this year are Queer Eye for the Sci Fi, Nola Ram, and Victorious, which will feature a Winnebago transformed inside and out by former overlord Ballard in honor of Colorado artist Victor Tilvaro, a friend who died by suicide in 2017. Ballard has already traveled in the art RV, using it as a way to promote suicide awareness, “transferring the sadness into a glorious outreach on wheels,” Ballard said.

Returning krewes include the Mystic Krewe of P.U.E.W.C., All Wonder Woman Walking krewe and Krewe du Who.

The STOMP Troopers, a marching group of children and young adults who have autism, will return to lead the parade with members of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. The troopers were organized by art therapist Kate LaCour, who works at NOLArts Center, an organization that finds ways for young people with autism and other special needs to engage in creative ways with the community.

The parade emphasizes handmade throws over beads, though some groups will hand out stickers, wooden beads and other custom or store-bought items with a creative hook. Controversy briefly erupted on social media this week when it was suggested that the krewe would allow advertising by sponsors, which Ethridge denied. "Chewbacchus is going to look like it always has."

Brian O'Halloran, best known for his role of "Dante" in the movie "Clerks," will rule the parade as "King Brian the First, Commander of the Space Farce, He Who Is Not Supposed to Be Here Today."

This year's parade will also decide who will rule in 2020. "We are going to have 42 special throws to hand out to random spectators," said Riggs. The throw looks like a mint box, with a question inside that the person needs to answer correctly. The questioning process continues until just one person remains. "It's like Willie Wonka meets X-Files mystery," said Riggs. "Instead of looking to the krewe or celebrities, it's giving back to the crowd who comes out to see us."

Intergalactic Krewe of Chewbacchus "Space Farce"

WHEN: Sat. Feb. 9

WHERE: Parade starts 7 p.m. on the corner of Homer Plessy Way (formerly Press Street) and Chartres Street.

For more information, go to chewbacchus.org

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