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Mardi Gras 2015: Charlotte Lane Langenstein reigns as Queen of Carnival

Sue Strachan FEB 15, 2015 - 4:00 AM



Bill Langenstein reads the names of the court on the back of a 1949 photo that includes his wife's mother as Queen.

Rex Queen of Carnival profile

Charlotte Lane Langenstein, seen here with her mother C.C. Langenstein, is the 2015 Queen of Carnival.

(Dinah Rogers / NOLA.com / The Times-Picayune)

When Charlotte Lane Langenstein wakes up on Mardi Gras morning (Feb. 17), she will be poised to participate in one of the city's oldest Carnival traditions. Unlike other reveling New Orleanians, however, her day, which starts at 6:45 a.m. and ends at 2 a.m. (or later), will be a regimented affair. She is, after all, the Queen of Carnival.

Discipline and a sense of humor: A queen needs both on a day when this city's citizens, never known for restraint in the pursuit of happiness, push toward the communal bliss that is Mardi Gras.

Langenstein, who family and friends call Laney, is ready to jump in with both feet. Never one to shy away from adventure - she counts a turn on a gorge swing, paragliding, rappelling, skydiving and bungee jumping among her activities - she is ready for this day when eyes will be on her and Rex, king of Carnival.

Leading up to her reign, Laney, a full-time college student, already has had a full social schedule, with three debutante presentations and at least four Carnival balls. A party in December held in honor of her and close friend Katie Whann, which was hosted by the young women's parents, was the talk of the town. (Katie is the daughter of Leah and Sandy Whann; she was recently crowned Queen of Mithras). Before Laney was a debutante, she was well-versed in protocol by participating in sub-deb presentations: Squires (maid and reindeer); Les Pierrettes (maid); Apollo (first maid and page), Osiris (princess), and Harlequins (maid).

Still, after all of these years, this seasonal spectacle has lost nothing of its allure for this native New Orleanian.

"Mardi Gras has always been very exciting to me, very special and magical," she said.

Among her favorite Rex parade memories from her childhood are that of being on a ladder, usually in a princess costume, waiting for her father to pass by on a horse, as he always had an assortment of special gifts for her.

Laney's parents, C.C. and Bill Langenstein, also natives of the city, have strong ties to and a love of Mardi Gras. Since the 1800s, Laney's family has included two Kings of Carnival as well as a number of maids, queens, dukes and pages. Her mother, Edith Charlotte (C.C.) Parker Langenstein, was a Rex first maid, 1973; and Laney's brother, William Henry Langenstein IV, was a Rex page, 2003; duke, 2014. It is her grandmother, Dolly Ann Souchon Johnsen, Queen of Carnival 1949, who served as inspiration for the design of Laney's Suzanne Perron St. Paul gown for the ball Mardi Gras evening.

That cherished history binds the Langenstein family through the ages. Laney's mother C.C. Langenstein describes Carnival this way: "It's the camaraderie of old and young."

Laney's father Bill, who is a partner at Chaffe McCall and a member of various Carnival organizations, is a collector of Mardi Gras items, particularly krewe favors. He looks for pieces that have "uniqueness and history," he said. His eye for detail also figures into how Laney found out about how her Mardi Gras would progress.

In late March, her parents gave a few hints on what was to come via two gifts: a ring her step-grandfather, Erik Frithjof Johnsen (Rex 1991) had bought for grandmother Dolly Ann Johnsen, which was meant for Laney to wear during her debutante season. The second was a watch with "Her Majesty, Queen of Carnival, Love Rex" inscribed on the back, which Dolly Ann received when she reigned as queen. And with that, Laney knew. Tears all around, a Champagne toast to the queens of 1949 and 2015, while the Rex anthem, "If Ever I Cease to Love," performed by John Rankin, played in the background. (Dad searched for this particular version.)

Between all of her Carnival obligations, Laney attends Vanderbilt University; she is on the dean's list studying for two bachelor of science degrees, one in cognitive studies, the other, commerce in corporate strategy, with a minor in creative writing. This past summer and early fall, she attended University of Cape Town, South Africa, where she took business classes: "It was enlightening to study business with an international perspective," she said.

A graduate of the Isidore Newman School, Laney also has a strong sense of civic duty: Among the many projects she has participated in is that of Magnolia School's Accessible Herb Garden Project, which evolved out of her work as a camp counselor at St. Michael Special School in New Orleans.

"She wanted to do some kind of community service project for the adults at the Magnolia," states a June 21, 2011, article about the garden by Times-Picayune columnist Sheila Stroup. Laney was a primary force in raising money to create the garden. It has been open for two years.

When asked about what she wants people around the country to know about Carnival - beyond its usual portrayal on television and the Internet - Laney said: "It's about having a great time, but also about giving back to the community, to celebrate a city."

And when Laney waits for Rex on the grandstand come Mardi Gras morning, she relishes being part of the city's biggest celebration of all.