

FRANK BOUTTE, KING ZULU 2008



BY SUE STRACHAN When the floodwaters finally receded from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, few at first thought that the city could come back to what it was before the storm, thereby posing a real possibility that treasured traditions would be lost. Though many of the city's citizens are still struggling 29 months later, soon after the storm individuals and organizations came back to establish their homes and traditions. The Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club was one those: It opened the doors of its storm-damaged headquarters at 732 N. Broad St. on Dec. 11, 2005, and marched proudly on Mardi Gras day 2006.

Like a good portion of the Zulu organization, the home of Frank Boutte King Zulu 2008, was damaged by the storm – “I had eight inches of water that sat for eight weeks,” he says. Boutte and his wife, Joycelyn, have resettled in Cypress, Texas – where they have family – but he remains active in Zulu and, like his fellow members, worked hard after the storm to reconnect membership and attract new members.

The Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club first marched in 1909. It evolved out a group of laborers who organized a club called “The Tramps,” many of whom belonged to a Benevolent Aid Society. “Benevolent Societies were the first forms of insurance in the black community where, for a small amount of dues, members received financial help when sick or financial aid when burying deceased members,” states the official history of Zulu. The Tramps, like many other clubs at that time, were connected to neighborhood wards and those ward clubs also joined the Zulu mix.

Throughout the years, Zulu has remained a mainstay of the city's black community. (Though at the height of black awareness in the 1960s the group was frowned upon by a number of black organizations because its tradition of dressing of grass skirts and donning a black face was perceived as demeaning. Membership dwindled to 16 members.) Zulu's community outreach programs include giving (in partnership with Cox Cable) Christmas baskets to needy families, organizing toy drives, visiting the elderly at homes, participating in an Adopt-A-School program, and donating funds and time to other organizations.

Carnival aficionados are looking forward to the parade on Mardi Gras morning – this year, Feb. 5 – and to the reign of Frank Boutte King Zulu 2008 and his wife, Joycelyn Boutte Queen Zulu 2008. (She is Queen Zulu the 72nd. He is King Zulu the 94th. They are the 11th husband and wife to reign as King and Queen Zulu.) They succeed Larry A. Hammond King Zulu 2007 and Lillian P. Hammond Queen Zulu 2007.



CARNIVAL 2008

And, of course, many in the crowd will be vying for the decorated coconuts – a prized throw – as no New Orleans home (here or far away) is complete without one.

Age: 62 **Born:** New Orleans
Lives: Cypress, Texas (Until Hurricane Katrina, he lived on Leon C. Simon Boulevard near the University of New Orleans campus.) **Family:** Wife: Joycelyn Cobette Boutte; daughters: Michelle Boutte and Dana Cobette Boutte
Education: Booker T. Washington High School (now closed); Loyola University
Profession: Retired from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (In multi-family housing development. My last project was the Cotton Mill.)
Favorite movie: *It's a Wonderful Life* **Favorite book:** *Roots* by Alex Hailey **Favorite TV show:** *The Cosby Show*, old movies on TV **Favorite food:** A good poor boy – shrimp, oyster, whatever.
Favorite musician: The Temptations, but I have to say that I like to listen to my cousins John Boutte, Lillian Boutte and Lady T.
How long have you been involved in the Zulu organization? Twenty-nine years. Friends from high school and college enticed me to join and I have really enjoyed it. Among the positions I've held are president and vice president (both twice) and secretary.
The King of Zulu is elected in a very hotly contested race each year. How many candidates for King Zulu 2008 did you run against? Two other candidates. And I had to run my campaign from out of town, since I was not living in New Orleans. It was pretty

arduous. There were a lot of new members that had to get to know me. There was canvassing in Washington, D.C., Detroit and Denver.

When is the election held?
The fourth week in May. I am the "King elect" until I am crowned at the ball on Feb. 1, 2008.

How many members of Zulu are there currently? Five hundred. Zulu lost members after the storm but new members have joined, bringing the number back to where it was before the storm.

What community projects have you participated in as a member of Zulu? I, along with other Zulu members, go to schools. I've adopted the Laurel Elementary School, where I will give toys to students. We also visit with children in the summer, show them how to do right, as well as what they can aspire to. We try to help where we can.

What do you look forward to being King Zulu 2008? It's a great feeling to be King Zulu after serving the organization. I've been on the administrative side of Zulu for more than 25 years, so this is fun. I have a Charge D'Affaire who does everything for me. I'm looking forward to the ball and the parade.

What do you miss most about New Orleans? I miss everything. I do like Texas but it's a different lifestyle.

True Confession: I am the type of person who likes to listen. When I'm being confronted by someone I sit back and listen, though people sometimes tell me that I need to stand up. I served in Vietnam and I've seen fear, so it's not fear that makes me stand back. You learn more by letting a person vent. ❁

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