



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

20 January 2021

CARNIVAL IN THE AGE OF COVID

ST. LOUIS, Mo.—Everything this year is different, but at Mardi Gras, Inc. we know that if there ever was a time when we all need something to celebrate, it's now. So, the show must go on in some form—what you might call Carnival in the age of COVID. But there will be no in-person parades in 2021. Because of public health concerns that are obvious to everyone by now, there will be no Souldard Mardi Gras mass-gathering events of any kind in 2021.

Nothing is more important to us than the health and safety of our fellow revelers, our friends and our neighborhood. We recognized early on in the pandemic that if there would be a Souldard Mardi Gras at all in 2021, it would have to be very different. In a normal year, it takes many months to successfully plan and prepare for Mardi Gras. In some respects, planning for the following year starts just shortly after the Fat Tuesday hangovers subside. We knew by mid-2020 that planning for 2021 could not wait for the arc of the pandemic to become clearer, so we decided to begin planning on the assumptions that COVID conditions would not improve by early 2021, that restrictions related to public health would remain in place and that planning for 2021 would pose unique challenges.

We also knew that we would need four key elements to be successful in 2021: 1) close cooperation with the City of St. Louis, from the aldermen and the Mayor's Office to the Health Department and the police; 2) support from our key sponsors to help pay the bills for largely virtual events; 3) a creative approach, learning what does and doesn't work when trying to create engaging events—either virtual events or those that people can participate in within their own COVID "bubbles" and which can help support the Souldard businesses and their employees who are struggling; and 4) clearly communicating what we are and aren't doing in 2021 in order to avoid "pop up" mass gatherings in Souldard (and therefore a possible super-spreader event), particularly on what would have been Grand Parade Day on Saturday, February 13.

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First, we've developed a plan for a safe, responsible and fun 2021 Soulard Mardi Gras, in close consultation with local public health, our elected officials and other city officials. So the show *will* go on—it will be fun, it will help you to connect with friends, but it will be different, it is designed to protect public health and all events adhere to the latest safety recommendations from federal, state and local officials to make sure that we can all *laissez les bon temps rouler* safely and responsibly in 2021 and many years to come.

Second, several of our key sponsors, Bud Light, Bud Light Seltzer, Purina, Southern Comfort, Tito's Handmade Vodka, Ezra Brooks, Red Bull, Raising Cane's, Randall's Wines and Spirits, and Missouri Lottery along with many others, stepped forward to give us the tools we need to keep the Soulard Mardi Gras tradition alive even in these difficult times. They've been creative, responsible partners through this whole difficult process, and we can't thank them enough for their continued support.

Third, combining the help of these two critical groups (the City and our sponsors) with our own depth of experience and creativity we've come up with a calendar that will provide the Mardi Gras faithful with fun experiences that offer a respite from these trying times in formats that:

1. Are fun and capture the spirit of Soulard
2. Are safe for participants, organizers and the community
3. Promote public health, and
4. Meet our obligations to the Soulard neighborhood and our wider St. Louis family

Details on all our events can be found on our website stlmardigras.org. We urge everyone to check there for the latest and most accurate information.

- ★ *January 6:* Twelfth Night (Virtual)
- ★ *January 23:* Shoebox Float Parade (Virtual)
- ★ *January 23:* Cajun Cook-Off @ Home (Virtual)
Including a chance to purchase the Cajun Cook-Off @ Home Party Box
- ★ *January 30:* Scavenger Hunt (COVID guidelines compliant)
- ★ *February 4-13:* Missouri Lottery Run for Your Beads Virtual 5K (Virtual)
- ★ *February 6:* Drive-Thru Taste of Soulard (Curbside carryout)

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- ★ *February 13:* Mardi Gras Derby Day featuring the Wiener Dog Derby (Virtual) Including a chance to purchase the Mardi Gras Safe @ Home Party Box and be automatically entered for a chance to win the Mardi Gras Party of a Lifetime on the 2022 Grand Parade route for you and 50 of your closest friends
- ★ *Fat Tuesday, February 16* (registration opened December 28): Purina Pet Parade (Virtual)

At Mardi Gras, Inc., we have been working closely with the Soulard Business Association to strongly encourage its members to offer ticketed or reservation-only experiences on Saturday, February 13, in a limited number that complies with City COVID capacity restrictions. By promoting this, we can support our Soulard businesses and also discourage “pop-up” street parties in Soulard on February 13. While Mardi Gras, Inc. cannot mandate business operations within any individual business on February 13 (or any other day), we think this approach makes sense for Soulard businesses and the community.

Fourth, we are taking additional steps to address any issues unique to 2021, including minimizing the chance of large gatherings throughout the Mardi Gras season, but especially on Saturday, February 13. We are creating a traffic and signage plan for the Drive-Thru Taste of Soulard on February 6. In an effort to not send mixed signals about what will be happening in Soulard, no portable restrooms will be placed in the neighborhood, no streets will be closed and no special parking programs will be in place on February 13. We are working closely with the police to be ready to address any “pop up” crowds that may arise and we will have clean-up crews ready in the event we need them on the weekends of February 6 and 13.

Finally, Mardi Gras friends, please be careful about online misinformation. Some of this has already arisen on Facebook with a false event claiming that we will have a mass-gathering Grand Parade as in normal years. We have reported this false event information and the user who posted it to Facebook, which quickly removed the event. We will continue to keep an eye on this sort of thing, but it takes a team effort. Again, visit our website STLMardiGras.org, and our social media channels—Facebook @STLMardiGras, Twitter @STLMardiGras and Instagram @STLMardiGras for reliable, accurate information on Soulard Mardi Gras 2021.

Here’s to a fun and safe 2021, and let’s look forward to a much-needed party in 2022.
Laissez les bon temps rouler!

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