



Open container laws, especially on holidays that warrant parades, are relaxed in New Orleans. Parade marshals in the St. Patrick's Day Parade carried beer, beads and paper flowers.



Ronald Carter has seen some strange things in the more than six years he has been working in the French Quarter. Much of it he has seen from his post as a doorman at Silver Frolics.



After a night of St. Patrick's Day partying on the quarter, this man felt the effects of the many drink specials.

Holiday draws diverse crowds

By Matthew Waite
Senior Editor

NEW ORLEANS — Standing in the middle of Toulouse and Bourbon streets, Blossom takes a break. It is creeping up on midnight this St. Patrick's Day. Most of the good folk of the city have gone home. The morning drive to work is a short eight hours away.

But Blossom is already at work — dressed like a leprechaun.

And Blossom is his real name.

"It's what I have been going by since 1972," he says, standing in the middle of the infamous French Quarter. It was in 1972, after he returned from Vietnam, that he started as a street clown on the quarter.

Blossom is dressed for St. Patrick's Day — every other day he is here dressed like a clown, performing for money.

St. Patrick's Day is geared more toward the locals, New Orleans cabbies say. It does bring tourists, but not like Mardi Gras, the city's more famous holiday.

People from as far away as Norway and as near as up the block come out in green. Many go home feeling the same color after sampling the bars' drink specials.

The regulars turn out to work or watch.

Sonia Acosta has been working on the quarter for more than four years. Standing along Bourbon, she draws a crowd.

Acosta is a female impersonator — a man dressed like a woman. He/she is also a stripper.

But don't call him/her a freak.

"Don't include me in there," he/she insists. "I have a girlfriend."

His girlfriend works in the strip club next door.

Another regular here on St. Pat's is Allen "Sticky" Gesick. Lying on a street corner, Gesick says he is from everywhere.

"I am a traveler," he says. "Some people might call me a gutter punk. Some people might call me a squatter. I call myself a traveler."

The gutter punks, who number in the hundreds in New Orleans, travel across the south, living in abandoned buildings.

They stay in New Orleans because of two reasons: a large number of abandoned buildings and an abundance of half-full drink glasses lying on Bourbon Street.

Gesick, like other gutter punks, lives to get drunk and high. They say they are living off the waste of America and use castaway booze and Robitussin cold medicine to get their fixes.

Not all are regulars, however.

Octavia Sower, a college student on spring break from New Hampshire, sits at a bus stop on Canal Street fondling the beads draped around her neck.

A Mardi Gras tradition on the quarter continued all year long by tourists, people are given beads after they show off their naked bodies to strangers. Women show their chests, while men show their waists.

Sower has more than two dozen bead necklaces. She is having trouble standing, and uses a friend for balance.

"I didn't have to show nothing," she says.

Her friend just shakes his head in disbelief.