



Gazette/Joyce Naltchayan

Amanda Allen, left, and Patricia Hammer, "Fire and Ice," Saturday's prize-winners of the best overall costume category.



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Revelers gathered in artist Dick Martin's Torpedo Factory studio. From left, Rich Yelle, Martin, Mary Suffoletta, Bob Means and Dave Girgin.



Mardi Gras

Torpedo Factory party features creatures

By J. KENNETH TOWNSEND
Gazette Staff Writer

"Happy Mardi Gras to y'all!" shouted accordian player Jim MacDonnel. "I recognize lotta y'all from last year!"

Well, maybe that's possible, if you number gargoyles, giant toothpaste tubes, Egyptian royalty, walking trash cans, Greek gods, harem dancers, harlequins, miniskirted pussycats, coneheads and flappers among your acquaintances.

Despite rain, cold and gloom of night, the Torpedo Factory Artists' Association's 12th annual Costume Ball drew an estimated 1,500 revelers, most of them camouflaged.

Saturday's silly-bration was the second consecutive Mardi Gras party — the previous 10 costume balls were Halloween bashes — and marked the return engagement of everybody's favorite Cajun band, Loup Garou, who kept the joint jumping with rhythmic two-step Zydeco tunes.

Long lines snaked into the Art League school on the second floor of the Torpedo Factory Art Center, and through the third floor foyer, as folks queued up for the traditional Mardi Gras dish of red beans and rice. French bread, chili spiced peanuts, marinated carrots, Cajun fudge and five kinds of cookies were likewise inhaled, then washed down by beer, wine and soft drinks.

Art League executive

director Cora Rupp was responsible for feeding the hordes. "About 100 artists helped cook," she said. "I copied the recipes and passed them out about two months ago to people who signed up. We wanted food that could be prepared ahead of time and didn't need much refrigerating."

"This year's party is better organized," Torpedo Factory Director Harriet McNamee said. "With the food in two central locations, and not scattered about in the studios, the artists can join the fun. And the decorations are much better."

Regardless, many artists opened their studios for intimate gatherings with their Torpedo Factory comrades and close friends.

"I'm from Louisiana," said Betsy Anderson, the ball's chairwoman. "Celebrating Mardi Gras is better than Halloween, when there are too many other costume parties at the same time."

The artists' association made \$5,000 last year. The money was used to install sound baffles, to dampen the noise in the hallways that disturbed many artists, she said.

This year's proceeds will be used to convert the multipurpose room into a small gallery for special outside shows, Anderson said.

Kathleen Kelly, last year's chairman, was content to stand outside her studio by the third floor stairwell, and watch the passing parade. "I love it, I love it," she chuckled, as Dave Scalzy, perched on stilts, gingerly maneuvered the stairs below her.

Watercolorist Carol Baliles, cousin of Virginia Gov. Gerald Baliles, remarked "The food

looks great!" to Phyllis Cohen as the latter dished up spicy meatballs.

The evening's highlight was the grand promenade. Master of ceremonies WMAL radio personality John Lyon announced the costumed competitors as Paul Hume, WGMS music critic, judged each entry.

The outrageous pageant of costumes was greeted by cheers, applause, verbal smirks, catcalls, whistles and laughter.

The grand prize winners for best overall costume were Amanda Allen and Patricia Hammer for "Fire and Ice."

"We're members of the Maryland chapter of the International Costumers Guild," Allen said. "We separately made these costumes for a science fiction convention, but the designs were so similar and complementary, we entered together."

"We only decided yesterday to come to the party," Hammer added.

The evening's big question: Where was Torpedo Factory artist Joyce Zipperer who won the best overall costume prize the last two years?

"She's in Europe this month. After last year's giant undulating jellyfish costume, she didn't want to compete with herself," friend Kathleen Cassedy explained.

Even with 1,500 people walking among thousands of dollars worth of art, nothing appeared to be stolen, Alexandria police officer D.L. Stull reported. "It was quiet. That's the reason I'm here."

At 1 a.m., the diehards straggled out the door, and Bruno Robinson started sweeping up the debris.

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