

## Goodland boat parade a fantasy event to raise money for good cause

By LANCE SHEARER (Contact)

Originally published 7:56 p.m., Saturday, February 21, 2009

Updated 7:56 p.m., Saturday, February 21, 2009



LANCE SHEARER

**Mickie and Minnie wave to the crowd from the Magic Kingdom, while competing in the 13th annual Mardi Gras Goodland Boat Parade. The boat was entered by Chuck and Sue Thomas of Marco Island. Photo by Lance Shearer.**

GOODLAND — When Goodland residents throw a party, they do it their way.

The fishing village tucked away on the southeast corner of Marco Island has its own style, a little funky and down-home, and that applies to even a serious, high-minded affair like the 13th annual Mardi Goodland Boat Parade held Saturday afternoon.

Sure, the goal is raising money for the work of Avow Hospice, but that certainly doesn't mean you can't have fun in the process.

When participating in a fund-raiser doesn't involve anything more strenuous than soaking up rays on a beautiful winter day, enjoying a cold beverage and buying a couple of raffle tickets or some beads, opening one's wallet doesn't seem too painful.

Crowds packed the shoreline restaurants, although the inside dining rooms were largely empty as patrons gathered along the waterfront to watch the boats cruise by.

Bands, including the Mullet Brothers, J. Robert, and the Raiford Starke Band, provided a musical backdrop.

Cars filled every available square foot of parking space and lined the road all the way from Stan's Idle Hour back to State Road 92.

People came from all over – license plates indicated Massachusetts, Minnesota, Michigan, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio and Ontario. Florida vehicles were in a distinct minority.

"You can only fit so many cars on Goodland," said local resident Jimmy Ketchum, who beat the traffic by riding his motor scooter. "It's the only way to get around on weekends."

The boat parade consisted of 19 vessels decorated to reflect this year's theme: Make Believe -- "any idea that is fictional, superstitious, rumored to be true or unable to be proven."

Ranging from pontoon boats, airboats and runabouts to several yachts in the 50-foot range, entries depicted The Good Ship Lollipop, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, I Dream Of Jeannie, and the Monster Mash.

"Show us your Heinies," implored a sign on The History of Beer, entered by Rob Reiley of Marco Island.

Top honors and a round of golf for four at the Links of Naples went to The Rat Pack Is Back, captained by Goodland resident John Hackett.

Vicki Wood and Jack Miller, also hometown favorites, took second place and a gift certificate to All Marine Services for their entry The Sandman and the Bearded Woman.

Popeye, captained by Tommy Shell of Fort Myers, won third place, and the Boogieman, entered by John and Lauren Ritchie of Pennsylvania, came in fourth.

In addition to winning overall, the Rat Pack won for most original entry, best music, and best props and costumes.

The parade judges, including Patty Foth and Collier County Commissioner Donna Fiala, graded each entry from one to five on those categories, plus appearance, and vessel control – making sure the vessel stayed between sandbar and seawall.

Fund-raising included raffles for numerous prizes donated by local merchants, and the sale of T-shirts and Mardi Gras beads, along with entry fees from the competing boats.

Last year, the event raised \$22,000 to benefit the end-of-life care provided by Avow Hospice.

"When I first had the idea for the boat parade, I never dreamed it would become so popular," parade founder Elaine Ritchie said. "The whole community has come together to make it a success."

She thanked the participating boaters, event volunteers, and the Kiwanis Club of Marco for helping.

Ritchie and her organization, Mardi Gras Goodland, and Parade Grand Marshal Stan Gober received awards from Avow Hospice after the parade in recognition of their support.

Contact Lance Shearer at [lances22@gmail.com](mailto:lances22@gmail.com)