News
Arts and Media



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Christine Bordelon

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The butterflies are waving on Robert E. Lee Boulevard in New Orleans, as are the ragdolls and pink panthers.

These Mount Carmel Academy class mascots are among the larger-than-life decorations on a two-story residence that is home to several Mount Carmel sisters and part of the citywide "Krewe of House Floats" campaign.

Over the past few weeks, Mount Carmel art students created Mardi Gras-style imagery with wood, corrugated plastic and outdoor paint for the 7-foot-tall class mascots; the Mount Carmel shield; a super-size rosary hanging from the balcony; the Sisters of Mount Carmel order cross; and the school's cub mascots CoCo and Camille.

Another design was a huge scapular with words often spoken to students by school president Sr. Camille Anne Campbell: "Love in your heart wasn't put there to stay; love isn't love 'til you give it away."

"It was fun," said eighth grader Lindsay Curry, who helped create two decades of the 3-D rosary with her classmates using plastic, Styrofoam balls and rope to hold them together. "I feel like it doesn't replace Mardi Gras, but it is still like it."

Art teacher Bridget Gillane said students were introduced to how the Krewe of House Floats evolved after it became apparent there would be no traditional Mardi Gras floats or parades this year. The philanthropic idea behind the krewe was to support artists, float makers and those affected by the pandemic.

Art teacher Melissa Kossick consulted float-builder friends on proper installation and materials that would sustain weather for several weeks, and students also watched videos of float artists working.

Seniors normally would have been working on gym night banners and other decorations, but those events were canceled by COVID-19.



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"They were so intrinsically motivated to do this," Gillane told the Clarion Herald, archdiocesan newspaper of New Orleans. "It's really a big, creative engineering project."

The idea of involving the school's art students came from Mount Carmel Sr. Mary Ellen Wheelahan, who loves Mardi Gras. She approached principal Beth Ann Simno and Campbell about getting students to decorate the nuns' house like a float — since she had already signed up for the Krewe of House Floats. The project was approved and soon art teachers were talking to students about designs.

"I saw the Krewe of House Floats and thought that would be beautiful for the girls to take part," Wheelahan said. "I love how they integrated different subjects."

The resulting senior design for the house required more than just upper-level art students to execute and install, so students from other art classes were invited, involving about 80 altogether.

"We wanted them to design and install it, since installation art is not something we get to do," Gillane said. "Since this is an installation project, students have to think about the environment in which it will be installed and environmental factors that might affect the creation: weatherproofing vs. waterproofing, bracing and supports, attaching and securing."

Students used geometry to make the figures an appropriate size for a two-story house and were instructed on how to create different parts of the large-scale installation.

"They took their scapulars — which they receive at Mass when they are welcomed into the Carmel family — and measured it and used what they learned in geometry and calculated the scale for a two-story house," Kossick said.

The girls chose to highlight one of Campbell's favorite expressions about love.

The Mount Carmel house float is part of the Krewe of House Floats' Lakeview sub-krewe, which chose the theme "Simply the Best." Wheelahan naturally wanted it to be about Carmel, so it wasn't hard to think of what's close to her heart as the best — "All Things Carmel." The house will remain decorated through the carnival season.

Wheelahan hoped to bring elderly Sisters of Mount Carmel, who live in retirement residences, to the decorated home on Mardi Gras Day.

Some flower installations will live on after the celebration. Gillane said class moderators asked to keep them for future class Masses and "Passing of the Colors" class traditions.

[Christine Bordelon is associate editor of the Clarion Herald, newspaper of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.]

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