



Members of the all-female group 'The Camel Toe Lady Steppers' march.



Krewe members throw beads from floats during the Krewe of Muses Mardi Gras parade in New Orleans, Thursday, Feb 27, 2014. — AP photos

Muses parade kicks off big Carnival weekend

Parade of women with a signature float in the shape of a giant high heel had a different kind of glow this year. Among Thursday night's Krewe of Muses floats and marching bands was the group of women carrying tall, T-shaped torches known in New Orleans as flambeaux. Calling themselves "Glambeaux," the women shook and shimmied their way down city streets, paving the way for a new take on a Carnival tradition more than a century old.

Historically, flambeaux carriers hoisted torches to illuminate parades in the decades before floats carried their own electrical lighting sources. In the early days, carriers were often slaves. Though started out of necessity, many parade clubs continued to feature flambeaux carriers for aesthetic reasons - and as a nod to Carnival tradition. The 14-year-old Muses parade, one of the city's youngest, has become an unofficial kickoff to the big Carnival weekend leading up to Fat Tuesday. It's followed by days of star-studded parades, including Endymion, Bacchus and Orpheus, which will lure hundreds of thousands of revelers to the city and pack downtown hotels.

"We're pretty much sold out for Saturday and Sunday and there's strong occupancy on Monday and Tuesday too," said Kelly Schulz, spokeswoman for the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau. The Glambeaux were a new addition to Muses this year. While they are not the first to break barriers in carrying flambeaux, they are the first all-female troupe of choreographed dancers to carry the torches.

"I thought they were a perfect fit for Muses," said Staci Rosenberg, the parade's founder and captain. "It's all about empowering women but also respecting tradition and heritage, and we do."

Although Muses is a parade of all female riders, men are allowed to participate on the ground, so traditional flambeaux carriers - some second- and third-generation - marched with the Glambeaux

and in other sections of the parade.

"It's exciting, to have these beautiful ladies walking with us," said Lloyd Hickman, a New Orleans flambeaux carrier. "It's Mardi Gras. It's all good. Everybody gets to kind of do their own thing." The torches are heavy and a bit awkward, so being a Glambeaux required as much gut as glam, said Dani Johnson, the group's founder and captain.

Johnson said members had weekly boot camp-style workouts to build up strength to dance with the 5-foot-tall torches. They come with a row of four burners across the top, backed with a reflective flash plate and propane tanks the women wear strapped to their backs. "I told them, you don't get to punk out halfway through the parade," Johnson said. "This is a commitment, and we're going to be ready for it."

'Ready to wear you out'

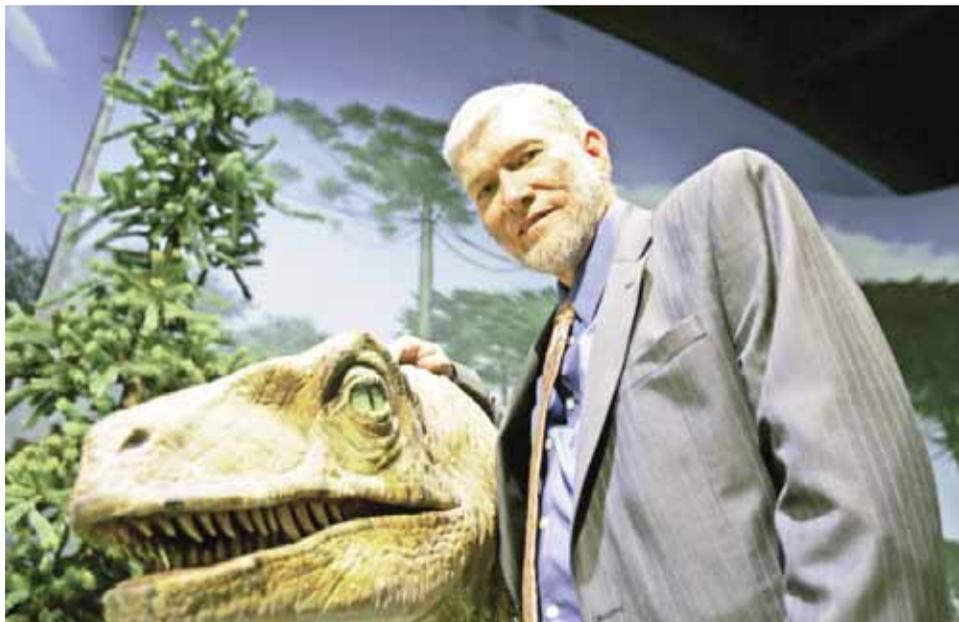
The Glambeaux fit right in with this year's parade theme, "Ready to Wear You Out." Celebrating fashion, the krewe's more than 1,000 members wore teal satin gowns as they tossed makeup brushes, fingernail buffers, ear buds, Muses dolls, rings that blink and beads that sparkle to hundreds of thousands of revelers waiting along the roughly five-mile parade route. "It's one of my favorite parades," said Paula Scheidt, a New Orleans resident wearing a bright purple wig, glittery hot pink shirt and a gold hair bow, belt and boots. She yelled for throws, hoping to land a coveted shoe. "I love all the beautiful ladies. They've got great throws, and the floats are comedic and exciting."

A favorite was the float of sirens luring sailors to their deaths with their beauty and song. The float was followed by a group of zombie-like marchers dressed as sailors. The revelry continues Friday night with Grammy Award-winner Patti LaBelle scheduled to headline the

Zulu Social Aid & Pleasure Club's annual Mardi Gras ball. Mint Condition and The Rebirth Brass Band All Star Reunion, featuring Irvin Mayfield and Trombone Shorty, also will perform. Saturday night, country music superstar Carrie Underwood is scheduled to perform at the Superdome, where the Krewe of Endymion holds its ball after its parade.

British actor Hugh Laurie, who starred for eight years in Fox's hospital mystery drama "House," will serve as the Krewe of Bacchus' celebrity monarch when that parade rolls Sunday evening, and actor-director Quentin Tarantino will reign as the Krewe of Orpheus' celebrity monarch Monday night. Also riding in Orpheus are actors John Schneider and James Roday. Schneider is known for his role on "Dukes of Hazzard" and stars in OWN Network's "The Haves and The Have Nots." Roday is star of USA Networks' "Psych."

This year the Orpheus parade will include a tribute float to rock 'n' roll Hall of Fame performer Fats Domino. Although Domino, 85, won't be riding, he has been named honorary grand marshal, and his music will be played as family members throw coaster-size, gold-record doubloons and other Fats Domino-themed trinkets from the float. The 1970s rock band Cheap Trick is scheduled to perform at the Orpheuscapade gala held after the parade. Cheap Trick's biggest hits include "Surrender," "I Want You to Want Me" and "The Flame." The Zulu parade is the first to roll on Mardi Gras, followed by Rex and two other parades. — AP



In this file photo, Ken Ham, founder of the nonprofit ministry Answers in Genesis, poses with one of his favorite animatronic dinosaurs during a tour of the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Ky. — AP

Noah's ark project to move forward

A Christian ministry's long-stalled plans to build Noah's Ark in the hills of Kentucky have been revived. Creation Museum founder Ken Ham announced Thursday that a municipal bond offering has raised enough money to begin construction on the Ark Encounter project, estimated to cost about \$73 million. Groundbreaking is planned for May and the ark is expected to be finished by the summer of 2016.

Ham said a high-profile evolution debate he had with "Science Guy" Bill Nye on Feb 4 helped boost support for the project. Nye said he was "heartbroken and sickened for the Commonwealth of Kentucky" after learning that the project would move forward. He said the ark would eventually draw more attention to the beliefs of Ham's ministry, which preaches that the Bible's creation story is a true account, and as a result, "voters and taxpayers in Kentucky

will eventually see that this is not in their best interest."

Ham's Answers in Genesis ministry and the Creation Museum enjoyed an avalanche of news media attention during the debate, which focused on science and the Bible's explanations of the origins of the universe. Answers in Genesis unveiled the proposal in 2010 for a \$150 million theme park that would include the ark. But private donations to the project did not keep pace with the construction timeline, forcing its backers to delay the ark's construction and divide the park development into phases. The bonds were offered last year by the city of Williamstown, site of the planned ark about 40 miles south of Cincinnati.—AP