

Russel "Potic" Rider



Cajun Mardi Gras Run

Mr. Rider is the president of the Basile Mardi Gras association and one of the dedicated people that have kept the Basile Mardi Gras run going throughout the years. Russell was born in 1945 in Basile. He self-identifies as Cajun and speaks both French and English. He grew up in the Mardi Gras tradition. His father Eloi Rider, his uncles, and other family members were actively involved in the traditional celebration throughout the years. As a boy, Potic always followed the Mardi Gras riders.

Potic learned to make masks from his father and uncles. He produced his first mask in 1955 or 1956. Since then, he has made one hundred or more masks. He still owns eight of the first he made, but has given the others to family members, friends, and to anyone in need of a mask on Mardi Gras. In forty years of making masks, his materials have changed but his technique has changed very little. Mr. Potic prefers the heavy shell shaker screen used in the oilfields to make his wire screen masks. He paints the screen with a base coat of white or black before shaping the screen and then painting features on it. When he has finished, his wife Sandy adds an elastic border.

Russell learned to sing the Basile Mardi Gras song by listening closely to older Mardi Gras celebrants, copying their actions. He says, "We'd go as kids. That's how I learned it, you know. I'd go and I'd watch the Mardi Gras, that's how I learned to run Mardi Gras, watching them, and listening." Potic is recognized as one of the best singers of the Basile Mardi Gras songs and he often leads the singing of the "chanson de Mardi Gras" at the homes the Mardi Gras procession visits. "The songs have been here since Mardi Gras has been here. It's just handed down from generation to generation. It has essentially unchanged from the time when, as a child I'd go and I'd watch the Mardi Gras. That's how I learned to run Mardi Gras, watching them, listening. You have to be doing Mardi Gras to sing it to where it sounds like where everything sounds good. When Christmas is finished, I start to get the feeling. And after Christmas, I'll get the feeling and I can sing it any time and then it sounds good. It's just, you know Mardi Gras is coming so the feeling's there."

To be a good Mardi Gras participant, Potic says that "one must be a good beggar and a good clown. That's what makes a good Mardi Gras, one that will joke around. If you perform for the people, they will give. You can't let them go until they give."

Potic Rider feels strongly about his community's Mardi Gras tradition. He says, Mardi Gras is in his blood. "I don't want to see it die. I was born and raised with it, it's my culture."

