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Rex, The King of Carnival, Proclaims Mardi Gras 2023 and Unveils 2023 Proclamation

*The Rex Organization, Incorporated in 1872 as the School of Design,
Continues its Legacy of Public Artwork Celebrating Carnival*

(New Orleans, Louisiana) Today, during the traditional Kings' Day celebration at Mardi Gras World, Rex, the King of Carnival, by royal edict, proclaimed Mardi Gras 2023. Rex Official James J. Reiss, III announced the King of Carnival's proclamation and plans to visit "... his beloved Capital City of New Orleans" as follows:

Rex, King of the Carnival, sends greetings and announces with pleasure his intention to visit his Capital City of New Orleans.

His Majesty invites all of his subjects to gather, from far and near, to join in the many Celebrations and Processions which will shortly unfold under the Joyful Carnival Banner. He promises that the Festivities and Pageants arranged for this Celebration will surpass in Joyousness and exceed in Beauty the most Brilliant Attainments of the Glorious Past, culminating in His Grand Procession on Tuesday, February 21st, 2023 to celebrate the great festival of Mardi Gras.

It is further commanded and ordained: that the Joyous Music of Carnival shall fill the Streets of His Capital City, Multiplying all Merriment; that Fair Weather and Blue Skies shall prevail; that Multitudes might gather and celebrate without Impediment; that the Royal Constabulary shall marshal the Grand Celebration with their Customary Skill and Tolerance; and that the Keepers of Inns, Taverns, and Eating Establishments in His beloved Capital City shall throw open their Doors to receive all Carnival Celebrants.

By the King Himself, Rex

Attest Bathurst Lord High Chamberlin



Rex's Royal Edict Proclaiming Mardi Gras 2023

“Since its founding 151 years ago, the Rex Organization’s incorporated name has been ‘The School of Design,’ which reflects its interest in advancing education and the arts,” said Rex Official James J. Reiss, III. Reiss continued, “Annually, the Rex Parade artistically and traditionally illustrates an educational theme rich in references to culture, history, mythology, literature, nature, geography, and the arts. Both the Pro Bono Publico Foundation and the Rex 2023 Parade theme, *Palio di Siena*, carry that long and important tradition forward.”

Much as Carnival helps define New Orleans, the centuries-old traditions of the *Palio* help define the ancient Tuscan city of Siena, Italy. The *Corsa del Palio*, the Race of the Banner, is an ancient Italian horse racing tradition tracing its roots to the Republic of Siena’s “golden age” in the 13th century. Annually, two horse races – one in July and one in August – occur in the *Piazza del Campo*, the city’s main square, which is transformed into a dirt-packed track covering a third of a mile. The race, which consists of three turns around the tight-cornered track, is thought to have begun as a Roman military training exercise. The word *palio* is derived from the Latin *pallium*, which means a robe or banner. The winner of each *Palio* is awarded a unique, artistically designed banner depicting the Virgin Mary, in whose honor each race is run.

Siena is divided into 17 *contrade*, or neighborhoods, each of which is named after an animal or symbol, such as *Aquila* (Eagle), *Leocorno* (Unicorn), or *Onda* (Wave); each represents a tight-knit community with roots going back to the Middle Ages. Historically, each *contrada* had its own military companies, guilds, churches, and rivalries with other *contrade*. Those traditions and rivalries have continued for more than a millennium.

New Orleans and Siena are, in many ways, spiritual sister cities. The *Palio* and Carnival are both important civic rituals that bring their communities together in celebration. Just as the foundation of Mardi Gras is religious, celebrated on the day before Ash Wednesday, the same is true for the *Palio*, as each race is run on a feast day honoring the Virgin Mary. Just as Siena is a city of neighborhoods, so too is New Orleans. Serendipitously, Siena is divided into 17 *contrade*, just as New Orleans is partitioned into 17 wards. The floats of Rex's 2023 Parade artistically represent each of Siena's 17 *contrade*, ten of which compete in each *Palio di Siena*.

Rex's 2023 Parade theme also honors Italy's strong and deep influence on New Orleans' culture, history, food, and music. From the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century, the United States economy industrialized and grew rapidly. During that time, due to conditions in Italy and opportunities in America, an estimated three hundred thousand Italian immigrants came through the Port of New Orleans to fulfill jobs that helped fuel that economic growth. A significant portion came from Sicily, and so many made their homes and businesses in the French Quarter that the neighborhood came to be known as "Little Palermo" after the Sicilian capital. To this day, St. Joseph's Day is celebrated in New Orleans each March 19th, evidence of the enduring influence of New Orleans' Italian American community, and the Piazza D'Italia on Poydras Street honors the lasting connection between Italy and New Orleans.



Poster depicting Rex's 2023 Parade theme, the *Palio di Siena*, by Matt Hales

In 1872, the Rex Organization set out to create a special daytime Carnival celebration for the city of New Orleans. It did so by creating magnificent floats, rolling works of art for the public to enjoy. At a time before internet, television, and radio, Rex's floats created a spectacle that quickly gained

notice across the entire country. Visitors flocked to New Orleans to see the beautiful Carnival procession.

While Rex's rolling works of art are well-known in the New Orleans area and far beyond, other forms of art have also flourished. Historically, Rex has issued proclamations declaring the date of the Carnival celebration and inviting his subjects to gather and join in the festivities. Proclamations were posted in train depots around the country, and Mardi Gras in New Orleans became a major tourist destination (see Rex's Royal Edict on Page 2). These proclamations were not issued after WWII.

In 1980, the tradition was revived, and each year a local artist selected by the Rex Organization creates an original Rex proclamation art print highlighting the year's theme or one of the iconic images of Rex and Carnival. These sought-after collectors' items always carry the notation "Rex Proclaims Mardi Gras."

Rex's 2023 Proclamation is by New Orleans artist Henry Casselli, a nationally respected New Orleans native of Italian descent whose work includes well-known portraits of Muhammad Ali, President Ronald Reagan, and NASA astronaut John Glenn. At the age of 21, he was deployed to Vietnam, where he served as a United States Marine Corp combat artist. Mr. Casselli is a full Academician of the National Academy of Art, and a Gold Medalist and Honorary Lifetime Member of the American Watercolor Society. His paintings are in many private, public, and museum collections both abroad and in the United States, including the National Portrait Gallery. Mr. Casselli has expressed to the Rex Organization, that, as a native New Orleanian, he feels honored to have been asked to paint this piece.



Rex's 2023 Proclamation by artist Henry Casselli

About the Rex Organization: Since the founding of the Rex Organization in 1872, its traditions have helped define Mardi Gras. Rex's proclamation invites his subjects to the grand celebration of Carnival. His royal colors of purple, gold, and green are to this day the colors of Mardi Gras, and the song played in the first Rex parade, "If Ever I Cease to Love," has become Carnival's anthem. Rex, the King of Carnival, and his consort, the Queen of Carnival, preside over the Rex Ball, Carnival's glittering conclusion. www.rexorganization.com

About the Pro Bono Publico Foundation: The Pro Bono Publico Foundation ("PBPF") is the Rex Organization's public education philanthropy association. Since its founding in 2006, the PBPF has donated more than \$10 million, including more than \$1 million annually for the past seven years, and committed nearly \$1.5 million in 2022, which was the Rex Organization's 150th anniversary year, to support New Orleans public school education, primarily charter schools, charter management organizations, and school support entities such as New Schools for New Orleans and Teach for America. Most of the PBPF's philanthropic funds are raised from annual donations from members of the Rex Organization. www.probonopublicofoundation.org