



The Tolopka Tattler



2011 Spring Training Edition
"All the News It Gives Us Fits to Print"

Let the Good Times Roll!

Hi gang! Well, pitchers and catchers have reported for spring training, so it must be time to deliver the Christmas newsletter. As you may have intuited from the date of this missive, it's been another happenin' year here at Chez Tolopka.¹ Stick around and we'll bring you all the news in the 2011 Spring Training Edition of the Tolopka Tattler.



Beignets at Café du Monde

Laissez les bons temps rouler!²

We kicked off our year with a visit to one of the grandest parties in the U.S. Steve had finagled an invitation³ to bring the marching band to New Orleans for a Mardi Gras parade, so about a hundred of us went winging south to The Big Easy in February. We stayed just a couple blocks from the French Quarter, so we were within easy walking distance of everything from tourist sites to beignets to Things Your Mom Shouldn't Know About.

One of our band buddies had gone to school at Tulane, so he acted as "cultural attaché" for the trip. In that role he invited the band to join him at a rehearsal of the Burning Spear Mardi Gras Indians, part of a New Orleans tradition going back to the mid 1800's. [Mardi Gras Indians](#) are small groups of Carnival revelers (usually African-American) who dress in sumptuous, hand-beaded and feathered costumes and



Burning Spear headdress

chant, whoop, stomp, holler, dance, and otherwise cavort their way through the streets of New Orleans during Mardi Gras. "It'll be unique, it'll

be memorable," he promised – so about a dozen of us piled into cabs and headed off to the [Hi-Ho Tavern](#), which totally lived up to its billing.⁴ Despite the fact that we all looked like the solution to "one of these things is not like the others," it was indeed a cool experience that we'd have never gotten in any other city or without a local "guide". To cap off the evening, one of the Indians even shared a [peek at her new costume](#),⁵ something that's almost never done with outsiders before Mardi Gras.

On another evening, we strolled⁶ down Bourbon Street with friends and discovered other band members staring up into the heavens. Turned out it wasn't the Rapture,⁷ but rather strings of beads periodically raining down on the crowd from an upstairs balcony, something that Janet and I later came to think of as "the bead orgy." When in New Orleans ... soon we too stood there like baby birds staring up and waiting for mom to drop worms in our mouths. The beads were cheap, the whole thing was silly—and somehow it was IM-MENSELY satisfying. Drop by and see our beads!⁸



Calling a tune in the Mardi Gras parade

If you haven't been to Mardi Gras, you may not realize that it's not one event, but actually a city-wide party spread over two weeks with a couple dozen interspersed parades, each parade staged by a social organization called a Krewe.⁹ We were hosted

⁴ "A dive bar in a sketchy part of town."

⁵ Each costume typically cost thousands of dollars and is created from scratch each year.

⁶ A euphemism for "pushed through the crush of bodies".

⁷ Whew!

⁸ Don't ask Janet how she got hers ...

⁹ There are so many parades that there aren't enough days and locations to separate them all. In fact, our parade was

¹ This use of French is strictly for literary foreshadowing purposes ...

² Okay, so it wasn't a very long shadow.

³ By the simple expedient of asking "Can we come?"

by the Krewe of the [Knights of Sparta](#), which has been parading for over 60 years. Their parade ran a couple miles through the Garden District, past dignitaries at Gallier Hall, up Canal Street, then DOWN Canal Street on the other side, and finally ran out of gas somewhere around [Tchoupitoulas St.](#)¹⁰ The whole thing ran a little over four miles, yet seemed much shorter thanks to all the adrenaline. The whole band was lit up¹¹ and flaunting our custom-made beads with



Our custom Mardi Gras medallion

medallions that Steve designed. Screaming crowds the whole way cheered everything we did and really went ga-ga for our rendition of Poker Face.¹²

The following day we played one of our standstill shows on the steps of Washington Artillery Park, right next to world-famous Café du

Monde and directly across the street from St. Louis Cathedral and Jackson Square. In a city with amazing street performers on every corner, we managed to draw and hold an enthusiastic crowd for an hour show ... and even impressed



At Jackson Square in the French Quarter

the locals.¹³ To cap off the day, we played another show down the street at [New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park](#), our first-ever show at a National Park.

And we took the town by storm. People wrote such nice things about us afterward I'm almost embarrassed to repeat them. Aw heck, who am I kidding: "You should all be considered honorary Quarter residents. You totally embody the spirit of New Orleans."

A HUGE amount of fun, and an experience we'll look forward to reprising one of these days.

immediately followed by ANOTHER parade coming down the same route.

¹⁰ Which is in the Tattler just because it's inordinately fun to say "Tchoupitoulas".

¹¹ That's a visual statement, not an alcoholic one!

¹² Heh. Ya see what we did there? Lady Gaga ... oh, never mind.

¹³ An amazing break dance troupe that has performed at that location for 15 years told us "You don't just play music, you know how to entertain a crowd. You guys GET IT!"

Let the Ground Balls Roll!

For years we've talked about doing a "baseball vacation" someday, and this turned out to be the year. In late August, we flew to Milwaukee for a day of sightseeing followed the next day by a Brewers game, then moved on to repeat the experience in Chicago (Cubs) and St. Louis (Cardinals). We had AMAZING field-level seats for all three games and thoroughly enjoyed adding three new ballparks to our lifetime "collection".¹⁴ Through sheer luck, our first game was Cardinals vs. Brewers, which gave us a ringside seat for the beginning of the final-month drive that would take the Cards to that spine-tingling World Series Championship just a few weeks later.



The Friendly Confines of Wrigley Field

Here are a few baseball highlights of the trip:

- An Albert Pujols home run;
- An almost inside-the-park home run (the poor guy stumbled halfway between third and home and fell ignominiously);
- A grand slam homer hit by the pitcher;
- Nine broken bats;
- Stepping out of the Chicago subway and staring up at the apartment-top "bleachers" as we made our way to the fabled corner of Waveland and Sheffield Avenues;
- Reliving Cardinals history via the bronze statues of their most famous Hall-of-Famers outside the stadium;
- Soaking up the aura of St. Louis baseball on a summer evening with an enthusiastic crowd and the Gateway Arch looming over the centerfield bleachers.



View from our seats in Busch Stadium

Our sightseeing days were also great fun. **Milwaukee** has a very walkable and pleasant downtown, and we managed to cover quite a lot of it. Near the waterfront we found [Wind Leaves](#), seven 30-foot-tall towers with leaf-shaped structures covered with thousands of

¹⁴ Steve also added three new bobble-heads to his collection, which now numbers 12 (plus a Detroit Tigers stuffed bear since bobble-heads were nowhere to be seen in Detroit).



"Dancing Through Life" in Milwaukee

gerly through the butterfly room at the [Milwaukee Public Museum](#).



Milwaukee Art Museum

at the [Jay Pritzker Pavilion](#), stared at our reflections in [Cloud Gate](#) (better known as "that giant metal bean in Millennium Park"), and had dinner (swoon!) at Pelago Ristorante with a friend who had recently moved to Chicago from Portland.

In **St. Louis** we got caught in a torrential downpour in Forest Park, saw buildings from the [1904 World's Fair](#), heard a pretty terrific big-band singer at a park concert, wandered through the [Citygarden](#) sculpture park just blocks from our hotel, tried the [toasted ravioli](#) (a St. Louis specialty), and saw a cool exhibit of old railroad memorabilia at Union Station. We failed, however, to sample the Italian food for which St. Louis is



Making friends at Citygarden, St. Louis

¹⁵ Which had the added benefit of being indoors and air-conditioned on a SCORCHING hot day!

metal disks that ripple in the wind, along with a musical instrument you can play by dropping handfuls of pebbles in it. We explored the plant habitats of the three geodesic domes at [Mitchell Park Conservatory](#) and stepped gin-

In **Chicago** we had pizza at Geno's East, strolled the Miracle Mile, found a huge [collection of vintage American stained glass](#) at the Navy Pier,¹⁵ caught a free outdoor jazz concert



Steve stood in the middle of the street for this one!

famed, though not for lack of trying. Nearly as we can tell, it is against the law to operate an Italian restaurant in St. Louis on a Sunday.¹⁶

Let the Second Childhood Times Roll!

Regular readers of the Tattler will not be shocked to learn that our summer (and indeed our year) was filled with many other attempts to recapture our musical youth. Janet continues to serve as President of [Portland Community Wind Band](#); last fall she and the Board hired a new director from the University of Portland to replace the outgoing director. [Second Wind Jazz Ensemble](#), our big band group, celebrated the 10th anniversary of Monday Margarita Madness (our annual neighborhood concert) and was tapped as the band for the Sesame Dance Club's 50th anniversary at Norse Hall.



Kicking out tunes at Jeld-Wen Field

[Treble in River City](#), our rock group, is now a "stadium band" after headlining Jeld-Wen Field at the Key Bank company picnic. The **marching band** celebrated Astoria's Bicentennial, surprised 1500 Fred Meyer employees at their annual summer barbeque, paraded through the aisles of a grocery store,¹⁷ and totally rocked the Seattle Seafair Torchlight Parade¹⁸ on a gorgeous night in front of a humongous cheering crowd.

Let the Do-Good Times Roll!

In the fall we scheduled two visits back to Purdue for a dinner celebrating the fifth anniversary of the new computer science building for which we had helped fund-raise, and for Steve to deliver

¹⁶ At least three that we tried were closed.

¹⁷ We love that there were three distinct shopper reactions: hurry away and be somewhere else; groove and dance in the aisles with us; or act like seeing a marching band in the grocery store is an everyday occurrence and beneath notice.

¹⁸ Author Robert Fulghum (*All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*) [blogged about us](#): "These old geezers and geezer-ettes have attitude. The majorettes can twirl their batons as well as ever, and even though some of them can't do the high kicks, their low kicks are right on time. If I could only play trombone ..."

an invited talk on “Networking Outside the Box” to the Purdue Women in Science Program.¹⁹ When we discovered that the two dates were about three weeks apart, we took advantage of the serendipity to spend some time with Steve’s Mom by going to Glasgow, taking her to Purdue, then back home to Portland with us, then ferrying her back to Purdue and Glasgow on the second trip.



At Purdue with Mom for the WISP talk

It was great to have an extended visit, and we must admit that Mom seemed to enjoy being treated like a rock star by the Purdue folks.

Let the Foul Balls Roll Foul!²⁰

Despite a growing skepticism that we will ever make it to “The Show,” we spent another summer patrolling the softball diamond with our coed softball team Who’s on First? In accordance with years of WoF

tradition, we opened the season in the lowest coed league and played the first half season just well enough to avoid clinical depression (3-3 record). Inexplicably, the team caught fire²¹ in the second half and raced to a 5-1 record despite a drubbing by our arch-rivals, the Crazy Monkeys. This earned WoF a spot in the playoffs, where we defied the Las Vegas odds²² with a win over the Fast Chickens. That left only one last game against ... (dun-dun-DUUUUUNNNNN) ... the Crazy Monkeys.

As our steely-eyed teammates took the field for the finals, we contributed the best way we could think of: We left.

It turned out that the finals (which we NEVER expected to reach) were scheduled directly against a Treble in River City gig that we had booked months earlier. Four of our

fellow bandmates stayed to wage a titanic struggle against The Forces of Darkness, but we had to boogie since the band couldn’t easily omit or sub



Galactic champions Who’s on First?

¹⁹ The WISP director laughingly labeled him “this year’s token male speaker”.

²⁰ Janet’s traditional chant when there are two strikes on the batter since a foul ball counts as the 3rd strike in slowpitch.

²¹ Fortunately, this is a figure of speech. The way we play, ya never know ...

²² Rumor has it that the casino payoffs exacerbated the economic malaise in Las Vegas.

for us. So off we went to gig, after which we phoned Captain Jenny to see how it went. She told us a tale of woe about how the CMs scored lots of runs to start the game ... and then laughed delightedly as she reported that WoF came back and crushed them! Yeah. I League champs, “the best of the worst”. We joined them at a nearby pub to collect our championship t-shirts and celebrate. That pint of Terminator has never tasted so good!

Let the Band Times Reorg!

As many of you are aware from your work experience, reorganizations are rarely fun. Turns out that the same thing is true for music groups. To address strong operational and leadership issues, in mid-September we resigned from the marching band we’ve helped run for years and (along with friend and travel director Tom Higham) started a new adult marching band called [The Beat Goes On](#).

The transition was wrenching, although it was gratifying that 90% of the band chose to move to the new organization with us.



First gig for The Beat Goes On Marching Band

The good news is that TBGO is off to a flying start. We performed for 5000 high school kids and their families at Hillsboro Stadium only six weeks after forming the band. A few scant months later, we have a strong seven-member board of directors in place, official IRS blessing as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, and boundless excitement about the coming year. Early highlights:

- Rolling into Hillsboro Stadium for our first gig on a glorious October afternoon with adrenaline pumping. If we could bottle and sell the feeling, we’d make a fortune.
- Firing up the band in the halls of the Oregon Convention Center for the [Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing](#) while 2800 smart motivated women inside the ballroom wondered what the heck was happen-



Grace Hopper Celebration. See the tuba at arrow!

ing. Once they joined us, it became a movable feast as everyone boogied and shim-mied and took pictures and danced through the halls and down TWO staircases (a new parade record for us!).



Soloing with TBGO at Hillsboro Stadium

- Being in the right place at the right time on Veterans Day as one of our twirlers helped save the life of a veteran who had a heart attack at the McDonald's before the parade.

- Parading the streets of downtown Portland in full holiday regalia in the My Macy's Holiday Parade. I'm quite certain that we were the ONLY band that played a samba,

a sing-along, and Lady Gaga.

- Having University of Oregon mascot Puddles the Duck take a star turn with us on multi-toms at a pep rally.

When it's this much fun, you gotta export it. So in about two weeks, The Beat Goes On Marching Band is cruising to the Bahamas, where we'll perform for a high school in Nassau and aboard our cruise ship. It's another chance to share the pure sheer exuberant laugh-aloud FUN of what we do, and ya can't ask for more than that.

Let This Tattler End! (Please!!!)

A very sensible request, and so we shall. We wish you a 2012 filled with good health, good cheer, and good times.

The Beat Goes On,

Steve & Janet



Wanna see full-size versions of the *Tattler* photos? Just click the pix; they're all linked to (much better looking) full-size pix online. Back editions of the *Tattler* are available at www.tolopka.com. Our web page also has pointers to all the band websites, where you can get audio, video and more pix. And drop us your email address; we're steve@tolopka.com and janet@tolopka.com.

We'll be happy to keep you updated on our musical happenings BEFORE they take place – drop us an email and ask to be added to the Friends of the Bands mailing list. We'll send occasional email with all our upcoming events.