



## *Chamber of Commerce*

### **Mardi Gras Nocona Style: Then and Now**

The mid 2000's in Nocona, Texas probably didn't look much different than what one would imagine of a town of 3000 people. The once red clay brick streets had been removed to make better passage for the large trucks hauling oil from North Field (oil field north of town that has a few wells still producing from the 1930's). A decade had passed since the closing of Nocona Boot Factory. Downtown businesses, all mostly closed or in ill repair, were a memory of the vibrant merchants and retail that once occupied them. The highlights that remained were community unity, pride in the past and hope for the future! Nocona never seemed to stay down long.

Nocona was still home to Nokona baseball gloves operating since 1934. Cowboy boots were still being manufactured, just by another name. Small businesses were struggling but managed to keep their doors open. There was a sign of hope as dreamers and visionaries worked together on the Tales and Trails Museum; Times Forgotten, a unique and historic 1880's style restaurant, opened. There was live entertainment such as the annual Chisholm Trail Rodeo, a bull riding festival and high school sports. The future was looking bright for the small town of Nocona.

In 2010 a group of young men had an idea to start an annual event that would be "fun" for our little town. The event would consist of a Mardi Gras parade, complete with throwing beads and trinkets and a gumbo meal to be served in one of the few restored buildings downtown, Daddy Sam's Saloon (a private venue restored to look like a saloon in the 1800's). The first Mardi Gras event was small with less than 12 parade entries; spectators came out to watch and were extremely intrigued by the "throws". The Gumbo meal, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, served close to 125 people. For a town this size it was deemed a success, and the decision was made to make it an annual event.

The next year, February 2011, the momentum, and enthusiasm had spread; the second annual Mardi Gras Nocona Style went from a parade of less than 12 entries, the year before, to over 100 entries! The once vacant downtown streets seemed to "come alive" with spectators filling the sidewalks to catch beads and trinkets. It

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was hugely successful and seemed to be just what Nocona needed to get them noticed after years of no recognition.

By the 3rd annual Mardi Gras Nocona Style, 2012, a revival was taking place, year after year the parade attendance grew to thousands of spectators. Pete & Barbara Horton (Nocona natives) who had been living in NOLA for many years, attended the first Mardi Gras Nocona Style, were inspired to come "Home" and help rebuild the community. They invested in Nocona by opening their company office, building a downtown residence, establishing the Horton Classic Car Museum and so much more.

Year after year another person, family, or industry saw the uniqueness of our little town. Buildings were restored, restaurants opened, lodging was created, and one could say the "rest is history". The story continues today as 90% of all the buildings downtown are restored or in the process of being restored. Most all the retail businesses are committed to making Nocona one of the friendliest, safest and fun small towns in all of America!

Come see for yourself!

Nocona will celebrate its 15th Annual Mardi Gras Nocona Style, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and March 1, 2025.

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