# Rex 2025 Howell Crosby looks back on reign as King of Carnival

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Rex 2025 Howell Crosby waves to carnival goers on Napoleon Avenue during last year's parade. Photo by Kathy Anderson Photography.

Howell Crosby (BSM '81, MBA/JD '85) thought he'd been summoned to the Rex den to inspect damage from a roof leak. Instead, he was there to be offered one of the

most prestigious honors a New Orleanian can receive.

Crosby, general partner with the law firm of Chaffe McCall in New Orleans, reigned as Rex 2025, King of Carnival. In taking up the scepter, he joined a long lineage of civic and community leaders selected to lead the city's oldest continuously parading Mardi Gras krewe. In doing so, he also became the 14th alumnus of the Freeman School to serve as Rex.

Crosby has been a member of the Rex organization since 1994 and has served as a lieutenant since 2000. As Rex's legal council, he played an instrumental role in establishing the Pro Bono Publico Foundation, the philanthropic organization founded by Rex in 2006 to support the rebuilding of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. He also introduced actress Sandra Bullock, a friend he'd met when he did legal work for her when she was filming a movie in Mississippi, to Warren Easton High School, which led to her becoming a major contributor to the school's post-Katrina recovery.

A distinguished real estate attorney with more than 40 years of experience, Crosby serves on Chaffe McCall's management committee and led the firm as managing partner from 2014 through 2019. He serves on the board of Methodist Health System Foundation, and previously served on the New Orleans Industrial Development Board, the City of New Orleans Human Relations Committee and the New Orleans Alcohol Beverage Control Board as well as the boards of Metairie Park Country Day School, Crescent City Farmers Market, the Young Leadership Council, Louisiana Children's Museum, the City Park Improvement Association, and the Crosby Arboretum.

As this year's carnival season shifts into high gear, we spoke with Crosby about his reign as King of Carnival, last year's weather-shortened parade, why Rex matters and the impact of his Freeman School education.

**Every year when *The Times-Picayune* announces the identity of Rex, the honoree says it was a complete surprise. Was it a surprise to you last year?**



Howell Crosby. Photo by Noel Marcantel.

The annual selection of Rex is made by the organization’s Executive Committee. One is not a member of Rex thinking or expecting that one day you’ll be selected to be the King of Carnival. The committee absolutely maintains strict secrecy, and when they do ask you, it is usually under the guise of another matter. In my case, as legal counsel to the organization, I was called by the Captain to see if I could meet at the Rex Den to examine damage we had sustained from a roof leak. When I got there, there was in fact damage from the leak, but when we walked into the King’s Room to see if there was any damage there, the other Executive Committee members were waiting. At first, I thought I was interrupting a meeting. They invited me in and said they were trying to find someone to follow last year’s monarch as King of Carnival. I started to make suggestions of all the worthy members of Rex when they interrupted me and said, “No, we were thinking of *you*.” After a few celebratory champagne toasts, I went home to tell my wife that we would have a very busy Carnival season.

**Last year's parade was abbreviated due to the threat of severe weather. How did that affect your experience as Rex?**

Because of the weather, we had to shorten our route slightly and start an hour earlier than normal. We also were not allowed to have any of our bands or the marching units in the parade. But with all that said, the weather held up, the floats were spectacular, the crowds were fabulous and enthusiastic, and I actually got home early enough to take a quick nap, which is rare for Rex Monarchs and helped me that evening, which ended after the ball at 3:30 a.m. at F&M's, dancing on the pool table with the Queen of Carnival to "Pink Pony Club," surrounded by our families and friends. I am just happy that Superintendent Kirkpatrick allowed us to parade, and as I said to her that day at the review standing, “Without the NOPD blue, there would be no purple, green, and gold for the rest of us.”

**What's the first thing that springs to mind when you think about last year?**

The absolute beauty of the floats for our 2025 parade, which had the theme "La Belle Epoque." Annually, the Rex parade artistically and traditionally illustrates an educational theme rich in references to culture, history, mythology, literature, nature, geography and the arts. The Rex 2025 parade theme, "La Belle Epoque," carried that long and important tradition forward and was one of the most beautiful processions we have ever had.  It also coincided with the 1872 origins of the Rex Organization. La Belle Epoque, spanned roughly 1871 to 1914, and was not only a period of peace, cultural flourishing and technological progress in France, but it also saw the advancement of political and social freedoms. With a very Parisian theme, Rex presented a beautiful procession featuring some of the greatest known works of art, astounding innovations and many of the groundbreaking women who helped to define the “Beautiful Era.” I was honored to lead that procession.

**What was the day's highlight for you?**

Seeing the beautiful smile of my wife, Katie Andry Crosby, at the reviewing stand at Pascal Manale’s as the King’s Float pulled up for me to greet and toast the Rex and Comus courts. Katie, who is chairman of Fidelity Bank and a Freeman School grad herself (EMBA '07), was all in from the very first moment I told her I had been asked to be Rex 2025. Katie was involved in all aspects of the planning and preparation, which there is a lot of, leading up to Mardi Gras Day. So that moment, when we saw each other, and before I made my toast to her and the Queen of Carnival, was a very

personal, special and memorable moment for me, even though we were surrounded by the crowds and media presence.

**Given the state of the world today, some might argue that dressing up in tights and pretending to be royalty for a day is frivolous. From your perspective, why does Rex matter?**

Rex matters today for the same reasons it mattered when it was first established in 1872 and adopted its motto “Pro Bono Publico” -- for the public good. For the past 154 years, Rex and its members have followed that motto, which is more important today than ever before. 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, selected in 1872, are to this day the colors of Mardi Gras, not only in New Orleans but worldwide. The song played in the first Rex Parade, "If Ever I Cease to Love," has become Carnival's anthem. This year, through the Pro Bono Publico Foundation, Rex and its members have continued Rex’s ongoing investment in New Orleans public schools and high-quality public education by making over $1.3 million in new grants. My grandfather, who I am named after, had a silver loving cup in his office that had been given to him for his philanthropic endeavors which was inscribed, “Some men so live that those who follow after them forever walk on higher ground.” I can’t think of a lovelier or more meaningful way to express what “for the public good” means, because in the end, that is what we do, not only through the Pro Bono Publico Foundation but through all the other organizations and causes that Rex members serve and support individually. I like to think of it as the “great Rex multiplier.” And to me, that is what “for the public good” means and why Rex matters.

**Of Rex’s charitable and civic contributions, is there any one you're most proud of?**

As Rex’s legal counsel, I was asked after Hurricane Katrina to establish the Pro Bono Publico Foundation, the Rex Organization's public education philanthropy association. Since its founding in 2006, the foundation has donated more than $15 million, including more than $1 million annually for the past 10 years, and committed over $1.3 million in 2025, 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 Pro Bono Publico Foundation’s philanthropic funds are raised from annual

donations from members of the Rex Organization.

**You're a Tulane alumnus three times over, with two degrees from the Freeman School. Why did you choose to get an MBA alongside your JD?**

Actually, it was the reverse from what you stated. I was in the MBA program initially and then decided after my first semester to pursue the joint JD/MBA program. My father suggested it, his thought being that the JD would be beneficial to me in business, which was my intent to pursue. After graduation, I accepted an associate position in the business section at Chaffe McCall, thinking it would be good training and that I'd work there a few years before moving into the business world. That was 42 years ago, and I am still here. I do, however, sit on the board of directors of Crosby Land & Resources, L.L.C., a fourth-generation family business that is one of the largest non-industrial, private timberland companies in the United States. So my MBA has served me well both with my family's business interests and in my legal practice.

**Did you have any favorite professors at the business school?**

When I was starting the MBA program in 1981, Meyer Feldberg had just been appointed the new dean. He was a very dynamic person and great fundraiser who did a lot to raise the funds to construct the new business school building. Two professors who I enjoyed and felt inspired me were James Murphy, who later became the dean I believe, and Bill Mindak.

**Finally, while we don't yet know who will reign as Rex 2026, if you could give them one piece of advice based on your own experience, what would it be?**

CARPE DIEM!  Seize the day, enjoy and cherish every moment. The day goes very quickly.