

Travel & Life

A PARADE OF SOUTH FLORIDA'S QUIRKIEST MASCOTS

BY DIANE C. LADE | Staff writer

Mascots aren't just for sports teams and schools.

Many South Florida civic programs and organizations have crazy creatures fronting for them at conventions, parades and community events.

Some are a bit ... well ... unique. Take, for example, the Broward Water Partnership's new mascot: a human-sized plush toilet named Sammy Save-a-Lot. "Well, it reinforces the message of water conservation," Samantha Baker, a

specialist with the county's Environmental Planning and Community Resilience Division, said when announcing the mascot's new name earlier this month.

Sammy has some serious competition on the festival circuit, though. Here are five other quirky mascots you might see working the crowds around South Florida.

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Sandy Pelican

What connection does a pelican have to water safety education?

"Pelicans learn how to swim before they can even fly," said Jay Sanford, manager of Broward County's Swim Central program.

"They have keen eyesight, and they're social animals."

That's why Swim Central picked Sandy Pelican two years ago to "bring a friendly face" to a serious topic, said Sanford, whose program has offered water safety instruction and education to more than 430,000 Broward schoolchildren.



Pompano Pete

Charisma is a must for a mascot. And Pompano Pete has it, say city officials who created the character for the centennial in 2008.

A giant red-white-and-blue fish, Pete walks upright on his flippers, high-fiving kids and waving his fins. Through the years, he has ridden on floats, done the weather on television and promoted the city's seafood festival (which must have been a little awkward).

"People get such a kick out of him, and children go wild," said city spokeswoman Sandra King.

Ribby

The mascot for the annual South Florida Fair in West Palm Beach could be excused for having an identity crisis. Ribby is a giant blue ribbon — Ribby, ribbon, get it? — sporting a cowboy hat that combines symbols of fair competition and its country roots.

"But people sometimes think Ribby's a blue M&M," said Vicki Chouris, chief operating officer of South Florida Fair & Palm Beach County Expositions.

Ribby replaced former fair mascots, including Fair Bear and Percy the Pig, during the event's centennial in 2012, when organizers decided they wanted a more child-friendly frontman, Chouris said.

Mr. Sunny

Talk about sweat equity. Mr. Sunny, the new and first-ever mascot for the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau, hits the beach dressed in the equivalent of a bulbous orange fur coat.

James Carrey, a Miami-Dade County school teacher and part-time actor, was picked this year to play Mr. Sunny after an extensive search, bureau officials said. Mr. Sunny made his debut in February, doing yoga sun salutations on the sand and frolicking in the surf while being filmed for promotions.

Quiggley

The most famous alligator mascot may belong to the University of Florida in Gainesville, but there is a gator right here in our own backyard doing public relations work: Quiggley.

He's been the mascot for the Broward Sheriff's Office for about eight years, said BSO spokeswoman Keyla Concepción. Quiggley makes appearances at schools and events, where he's hard to miss.

Inside the costume? Usually one of the youths in BSO's Law Enforcement Explorers Program, Concepción said.



FILE PHOTO

Nat King Cole is the subject of the documentary "Afraid of the Dark."

Love and hate: The humanity of Nat King Cole

BY BEN CRANDELL | Staff writer

Behind the pristine baritone and charismatic sophistication, Nat King Cole was a gentleman struggling to find his voice in an era when even a universally adored cultural figure could have the N-word burned into his front lawn.

It is this private ordeal that propels the documentary film about the singer's life, "Nat King Cole: Afraid of the Dark," which benefits from exclusive access to his personal papers — granted by his late wife, Boca Raton resident Maria Cole — and interviews with some of his closest confidantes, including Harry Belafonte, Nancy Wilson, Tony Bennett, Buddy Greco, George Benson and Johnny Mathis. "Afraid of the Dark" will screen Sunday and Thursday at the Palm Beach International Film Festival.

"He was an incredibly generous man, a very quiet man, a very kind man," says the director, British filmmaker Jon Brewer. "He approached things in a slightly different way, which was frustrating to many people."

The Alabama-born Cole, a prominent jazz pianist who became famous for singing such hits as "Unforgettable," "When I Fall in Love" and "L-O-V-E," died in California 50 years ago, shortly after being diagnosed with lung cancer. He was 45.

The film includes memories from the singer's twin daughters, Timolin and Casey, who further their father's legacy with the Boca Raton-based music-education nonprofit Nat King Cole Generation Hope.

Timolin Cole says that while there have been other films about her father, the family was intrigued by Brewer's approach to his life. Timolin says that she and Casey, who will both attend the

See **COLE**, 11



IN TRAVEL

A secluded corner of the Northwest

Few people know where it is, and even fewer can pronounce it correctly, but Coeur d'Alene is worth getting to know. From its stunning lake to its vibrant downtown, the Idaho city of 46,000 gives new meaning to the old phrase "get away from it all."

Page 12

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