

NOLA Pyrates hit the Crescent City for 'Pyrate Week' Mar. 25-April 5



Captain John Swallow and Quartermaster Seika Hellbound held captives in quite a different way than one normally associates with pirates. There wasn't one student nodding off or daydreaming during this history lesson.

Mardi Gras has ended, but don't be surprised if you soon see folks in full pirate gear roaming the streets of New Orleans. Captain John Swallow, Quartermaster Seika Hellbound, and the rest of the NOLA Pyrates will be kicking off the 8th annual NOLA Pyrate Week from Mar. 25 to April 5.

The NOLA Pyrates have perhaps a slightly different methodology than the pirates of yore. The mission statement for this crew is "Take what ye can, give something back!" --and that is just what they aim to do.

After Katrina, Swallow and Hellbound came to New Orleans wanting to lend a hand. It was Swallow's first trip back since the 1970's, and Hellbound's first time in New Orleans.

"We were crushed by what we saw. Local folks we spoke to helped us connect with community based groups where we could really make a difference, and who were happy to receive aid from a bunch 'o' Pyrates," Swallow said.

Many of those they connected with remain friends to this day, and the idea was born that a pirate organization could be formed that was fun, educational, and service oriented. Despite living on Lake Ontario, New Orleans seemed like the place for their venture.

"NOLA Pyrate Week was an idea that's time had come, 'pyrates' giving back to a place that was home to some o' the greatest 'pyrates' ever in the world," Swallow said.

The group has grown every year, and now includes people from Australia, France, Holland, the United Kingdom, and all over the United States and Canada.

"We welcome everyone to join us during NOLA Pyrate Week, 'pyrates' and landlubbers alike. The idea is to share in the history, culture, and good times, while taking some time to give back by donating time, effort, and doubloons," Hellbound said.

During Pyrate Week, Swallow and his mates travel around south Louisiana educating and assisting where they find a need. While many events are just for the fun of it, just as many serve a purpose, but all promote the culture, food, art, and music of south Louisiana.

What better place to kick things off than at the Pirate's Alley Café and Olde Absinthe House. This location earns the title of their unofficial headquarters, where they all plan to meet up on Mar. 25 at 9 p.m. until the party ends. The late party calls for a later start the next day, with a pirate brunch at Croissant d'Or Patisserie.

Later that afternoon, the pirates will finally put their feet on deck with a riverboat ride on the Creole Queen to the Chalmette Battlefield. Along the way they plan to regale folks with the tales of how it was pirates who turned the tide in those battles.

"Folks are surprised to find that many pyrates were well educated, and that the largest pyrate fleet in history was captained by a woman," Hellbound said.

She said they peel away the Hollywood stereotypes to reveal a truth that is often much more compelling than any fictional account.

On Mar. 28, the group meets up for a volunteer dog walking at Villalobos Rescue Center. Those wanting to participate in this event must be 18 or older and comfortable around very large dogs and are asked make advance arrangements by contacting the [NOLA Pyrates group via their website](#).

It only makes sense that the group make at least one stop in the local town named for the famous pirate who used the area as a base for his smuggling operations. Last year the Town of Jean Lafitte was almost missed due to a

traffic mishap, but the crew rescheduled, and Lafitte Mayor Tim Kerner was thankful they did.

Excited at having them back this year at the Barataria Museum and Wetland Trace he said, "We have such a rich and wonderful history here with Jean Lafitte in the war of 1812 and the battle in 1815. This is just one of many ways we try to keep the memory alive."

In fact, the NOLA Pyrates won't be making just one jaunt out to the small town, they'll be visiting again to catch a few middle and high school classes for a history lesson they'll never forget complete with booty.

In Houma they'll be welcomed back for the fourth annual Pirate Day at the downtown marina on April 2 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The event not only provides historical information and a good time, it raises awareness for the Keep Terrebonne Beautiful organization.

All of their dates are not yet filled and Swallow expects for more events to loom on their horizon.

"We are always surprised in some way, always a new adventure. What we treasure is the way this event has reached far beyond its humble beginnings. We meet new and interesting folks all the time and frequently discover new places and new information about Louisiana's history. It's an ongoing journey," he said.

For those who want to join the NOLA Pyrates on their adventures, or just want more information, you can visit their [website](#).

Those who also want to continue giving something back are welcome to join this year's last Fourth Saturday Cleanup Effort at Jean Lafitte National Park on April 23 from 9:30 to 12:30. Each Wednesday through Sunday at 10 a.m., visitors can explore the Louisiana swamp and marsh on a ranger-guided walk. These and most regular [events at Jean Lafitte Park](#) are free and open to the public; for more information call 504.689.3690 ext. 10.

To reach Lafitte Lagniappe Columnist Lara L. Arceneaux, email lara.arceneaux@gmail.com, or text 225.276.1559.