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Sidney Torres IV (far left) gets the royal treatment for coming to the aid of New Orleans, his hometown. **Page 22**

The trash king of Mardi Gras

New Orleans hauler honored for helping turn around beleaguered city

By Allan Gerlat

Waste haulers tend to feel theirs is a thankless job. But in New Orleans, Sidney Torres IV didn't just get thanked, he got a Mardi Gras parade in his honor.

Torres served as Grand Marshal for a parade Feb. 15 honoring his company, SDT Waste & Debris Services, and others for their behind-the-scenes work for the city. The role of trash removal hero is one the 31-year-old entrepreneur wouldn't have imagined himself in until a couple of years ago.

The son of a prominent local attorney, Torres began investing in real estate when he was 20, acquiring hotels and developing condos in the French Quarter of his hometown. Along the way he was an assistant for musician Lenny Kravitz, who Torres calls a good friend.

When Hurricane Katrina hit in August 2005, Torres asked himself, "With all my money in hotels, what am I going to do?" He used his empty hotel rooms to set up offices for emergency government workers and money from a recent real estate deal to buy generators, water and trucks for them. Torres tried to get trash removal for the makeshift operation, "but the price was ridiculous." So he purchased a garbage truck, encountered more demand from a desperate population, bought another truck. SDT won the bid to collect waste in St. Bernard Parish, adjacent to New Orleans and devastated by the storm. And then beginning Jan. 1 of this year, the company took over hauling for the French Quarter and the city's commercial business district.

Torres did it with his own flair. He picked a white bull for the company's logo because of his family's bullfighting heritage. His workers sweep and flush the streets with water, which he's scenting with lemon, and pressure wash the sidewalks. If garbage falls off when the crews are picking up, the scraps get collected. He's used local musician Trombone Shorty in SDT commercials. "Our hearts are in it," he said. "We take pride in what we do."

And Torres has been financially successful: SDT has 110 employees and 50 trucks, and expects revenue of \$25 million this year. He hopes to grow beyond New Orleans.

SDT just finished handling the giant waste challenge of Mardi Gras for the first time. With extra hoppers and 50



LAISSEZ BON TEMPS ROULE: Waste hauler Sidney Torres IV lets the good times roll as Grand Marshal of a Mardi Gras parade Feb. 15 in New Orleans. At left, a worker at Torres' SDT Waste & Debris Services cleans up some of the mess left behind by revelers the day after Fat Tuesday.

additional employees, the company had everything cleaned up by 6:30 a.m. the day after Fat Tuesday; usually it takes three to four days. "I actually was thinking it was going to be a little harder than it was," he said.

Dave Peralta is chief administrative officer for St. Bernard Parish, and also was a policeman in New Orleans for 20 years. "I can't tell you how pleased I am with the work they've done," he said. Of the French Quarter Peralta said, "I've never seen it that good." St. Bernard Parish just signed a 10-year deal with SDT.

It's dealt a good hand to a city down on its luck. "I didn't realize how important it is for the city to have good collection," Torres said. "It can change the image of a city." ■

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