



Three Kings Day parade revelers have blast despite chill

Thousands braved the rare frigid weather to celebrate the 40-year-old tradition of the Three Kings Day parade on Calle Ocho.

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SPECIAL TO THE MIAMI HERALD

Bundled in four layers of clothing, Amarilyn Sanchez stood on a Calle Ocho sidewalk with her two young children braving an unusual South Florida cold afternoon for the Three Kings Day

Parade in Little Havana.

It was worth it: The parade brought back vivid memories.

"I remember coming here with my mom when I was 3 years-old," said Sanchez, 22, who was accompanied Sunday by her mother and a friend. "She would bring me every year."

Sanchez and her group were among the thousands who lined up on historic Calle Ocho and braved the rare Miami 37-degree weather to celebrate the 40th annual Parada de los Reyes Magos, or The Three Kings Day Parade.

On the coldest Three Kings Day Parade to date, the crowd watched more than 130 units including local fire department trucks, floats, high school marching bands, giant balloons, and folkloric groups dancing and parading along Calle Ocho between Southwest Fourth and 17th avenues.

It has become a tradition for many families. Many parents, who have grown up watching the parade, now bring their children. Sanchez is one of them.

"Since now I have my kids, it's important to share this moment with them," she said.

Local radio host Alberto Sardiñas said the event unites the community.

"This is a free way to come together and identify our community and realize we aren't alone," said Sardiñas, who attended his fourth parade.

Sardiñas added that every year the parade brings new entertainment.

“The parade gets bigger and better but also creative,” said Sardiñas, referring to the wackiness of local radio personality Enrique Santos and co-workers who entertained the crowd while riding on a boat attached to a boat trailer shirtless in the cold weather.

Before the festivities started, more than 100 underprivileged children gathered at Jose Martí Park, 351 SW Fourth St., for a toy giveaway presented by Univisión radio and Amigos for Kids.

The recent cold front brought gusts of strong winds making it a challenge for parade participants to hold onto a giant Ernie from Sesame Street balloon similar to one from the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade.

Fans tried to keep warm by dancing to cumbia, a Colombian musical style.

Fabiola Kappen's daughter was one of many who danced to Cumbia in the parade.

“We want people to know that our culture and traditions are in our kids because they are the future,” the proud mother said.

Sporting a green and white Cumbia traditional dress from Barranquilla, Colombia, her daughter, Adjany Kappen, danced with nine other girls through the parade route.

“I like typical dances,” Adjany said. “I want all the kids to join me in our carnival.”

Her Cumbia dancing group was one of six folkloric groups that participated in the parade.

Wearing traditional biblical clothing, the Three Wise Men followed by their three camels kicked off the parade, while Hispanic celebrities like actress Angelica Valdes, Disney characters Goofy and Mickey Mouse, Santa Claus and local politicians waved to parade-goers.

Revelers also enjoyed a static helicopter pulled by a police vehicle, exotic animals and motorcycles.

The parade has become a tradition in South Florida. It was started by local radio personality Juan Amador Rodriguez. It is now the fifth largest Hispanic parade in the country.

Three Kings Day celebration is a Hispanic tradition with roots in Catholic traditions. Every Jan. 6 Hispanics celebrate the coming of the three magi to offer gifts to baby Jesus.

“Parades are street festivals that bring people together and have the young people come out,” said Coral Gables Mayor Don Slesnick who attended Sunday's parade.

Slesnick added that it's a great way to display camaraderie between Miami and his own Coral Gables

“It's our next-door neighbor and the city I grew up in,” said Slesnick, who walked in his eighth appearance at the parade. “We count on our mutual aid support.”

Parade watchers were grateful for all the participants.

“This is entertaining because you meet television and radio celebrities in person,” said North Miami resident Evelyn Martinez, who hasn't missed a parade in almost 20 years.

“It's great for the family.”