



'OUT OF THIS WORLD'

At 75 (again), Jake the Alligator Man is still legend



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

TOP: Jake the Alligator Man parties at an earlier edition of Jake the Alligator Man's 75th Birthday and Car Show, an annual event held in Long Beach. He hasn't been back for several years, but is always on display at Marsh's Free Museum. **LEFT:** Jake the Alligator Man's Birthday and Car Show features burlesque performers, musicians and other artists from all over the West Coast, as well as Florida. The event, put on by the Long Beach Merchants Association, is Aug. 3 and 4 at the Long Beach Elks Lodge and Veteran's Field. **RIGHT:** Jake's 75th Birthday and Car Show has been an annual event in Long Beach since 2007. The birthday bash includes live music, burlesque performers, vendors, a parade, and more. The event takes place Friday and Saturday, Aug. 3 and 4.

Celebrate the Peninsula's 'patron of the lowbrow arts'

By KATHERINE LACAZE
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Jake the Alligator Man is a creature of legend. His past is obscure, he has his own fan club and his 75th birthday has been celebrated in style in Long Beach for the past 11 years.

"Jake is kind of an ambassador and patron of the lowbrow arts," event chair Wendy Murry said.

Jake's 75th Birthday and Car Show, held Friday and Saturday, Aug. 3 and 4, will once again include a bachelor party bash featuring burlesque performances; a parade; live music; vendors; and the traditional Bride of Jake Contest. The theme this year is "Out of this World."

"It's like a carnival, sideshow extravaganza," said Marina Anderson, of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., who is returning to emcee the event. The Caribbean native is known widely as MeduSirena Marina, the fire-eating mermaid, and her eccentric-yet-athletic aquatic performance is the perfect fit for such a gathering, she said.

Humble beginnings

The event started in 2007 as a simple party, with cake, balloons and party hats, and the mayor presenting the key to the city to its most famous resident, Jake the Alligator Man — a taxidermied half-man, half-alligator-looking creature on display at Marsh's Free Museum. The next year, Murry got involved and added a burlesque show, live music and the Bride of Jake Contest. Those quirky features help create the atmosphere so befitting the alligator man, as well as the area itself.

"I love the humor involved in it, that he's always celebrating the same birth year," said Anderson, who, upon joining, anticipated the event would be "a little skewed, a little different."

After all, Long Beach is a working-class vacation destination, famous for its quirkiness, with attractions such as the World's Largest Frying Pan, Go Karts and Crazy Kars, Marsh's Free Museum and The Rides, Murry said.

"Part of what makes the Peninsula so great is the diversity among our towns," she said. "From Oysterville to Chinook, there's something for everyone."

National curiosity

Jake has a bit of a murky history. Rumors abound of Jake — before he was mummified — roaming around Long Beach, smoking cigars and drinking whiskey; working in a New Orleans brothel; or terrifying residents in Pakistan sand dunes. Since the early 1990s, his image has periodically resurfaced in tabloids, accompanied by shocking headlines about the creature causing mischief in Florida or being a distant relative of the human species, making him a national curiosity.

Murry said she finds the real story, that Jake was created by a taxidermist to travel with side-shows as a circus gaff, more interesting.

"I love old carnival circus history and imagery," she added.

Junior and Marian Marsh purchased Jake for \$750 from an antiques dealer in the 1960s. He's a "controversial fella," Murry said.

"A few of us get Jake for what he is, and we love the creepy vintage-carnival-circus-type edge he brings to town," she said. "Others are totally creeped out by him; others would rather we were famous for more highbrow cultural things."

An offbeat birthday bash

The real Jake made appearances in the early years of the event — including the time Murry had to file a police report when he went missing at the end of the night. He hasn't been back in a while, but there is a stunt Jake, "a partier," Murry said, and cosplayers.

The event, put on by the Long Beach Merchant's Association, kicks off Friday night with Jake's Burlesque Bachelor Party, at the Long Beach Elks Lodge. Doors open at 6 p.m. and the cover charge is \$15.

The burlesque show, hosted by Anderson as MeduSirena Marina, features Ms. Hattie Hot-pants, Baby LeStrange, Nina Nightshade, Bettie Beelzebub and Sugar Kane.

"As an emcee, you get to observe, as well as participate, so I rather love that," Anderson said. "Burlesque is based in humor, and it's a perfect match for Jake, as well."

She and her husband, Roy, also will perform Saturday as Ronin Taiko, a duo act featuring a dynamic combination of Taiko drum, fire and stage elements. Additionally, Saturday's entertainment lineup features a variety of music groups, such as The Surfbroads, Exacerbators and The Shaken Growlers.

Free activities, including the car show and parade, take place throughout the day at Veteran's Field. The highlight of the day is the Bride of Jake Contest, during which "bachelorettes" from far and wide vie, time and again, for Jake's hand in marriage.

It's more of a lighthearted talent show than a beauty pageant. Entrants are encouraged to be creative, have fun and take advantage of the theme. They can perform a joke, a song and dance, or a full-blown profession of undying love, and it "gets to be quite hilarious," Murry said.

Anderson said she's always interested to see what new acts or features will be added to Jake's birthday party from year to year.

"I love that an event like that can give more attention to what can be considered a sleepy little hamlet," she said. "It's an opportunity for people from Oregon and Washington to come together and do something different in a great atmosphere."

For more information, or to sign-up as a Bride of Jake contestant, visit jakethealligatorman.com. 