



Malia King is crowned queen at the 2011 Newport Winter Carnival Queen Pageant held at the Newport Opera House.

Paul Howe

Winter Wonderland

The Newport Winter Carnival has been coaxing people outside for 97 years.

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It's February. It's cold, there's snow on the ground, football season has ended, what is there to celebrate? The town of Newport knows. Residents of the Sunshine Town celebrate community pride every year with the annual Newport Winter Carnival.

"It's time to get out in the middle of winter, after having cabin fever, and know that spring is just around the corner," says Scott Blewitt, recreation supervisor of the Newport Rec Department. "Newport is such a beautiful town, and the carnival offers a little bit of everything."

The oldest in the country

The Newport Winter Carnival has been coaxing people outside for 97 years. According to the Newport Historical Society, it started in 1916 as a one-day, YMCA-sponsored event with winter games held at Cutting Meadow (now the site of the shopping center on John Stark Highway). The *Argus & Spectator* reported in the Feb. 11, 1916 edition: "A parade was formed at one o'clock, composed of skiers, snowshoers, sliders and skaters and proceeded to Bela Cutting's meadow (on the western slopes of the Pinnacle and leading down to Wilmarth Flat, just north of the Newport Middle High School) where races and exhibition jumps were held." >>>>

Winter Wonderland, the theme of the 97th Annual Newport Winter Carnival, will take place on Feb. 5 to 12, 2012.



(above) Skaters participate in a skate-a-thon on the ice skating rink on the Newport Common.

(right) The annual Karr Classic hockey game takes place at the Newport Middle High School.



Beth Rexford



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Beth Rexford



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(first) Finalists in the Great Mustache Contest: Rob Armstrong, Rob Martin, Steve Lucas (Overall winner) and Mark Shultz

(second) Esther Ahiafor sings at the 2011 Newport Winter Carnival Queen Pageant.

(third) The common is a festive scene.

(fourth) Princes and princesses dance at the Newport Winter Carnival Queen Pageant.

The event drew 600 people to town, and local businessmen decided to plan a larger carnival for 1917. John McCrillis suggested flooding the common for ice skating; the Newport Outing Club built a toboggan chute and a ski jump on Judge Barton's meadow (today the grounds of the Newport Middle High School); and Austin Corbin III sponsored a deer drive on snowshoes at Blue Mountain Park.

The event did grow in 1917 — from one day to three days — and has continued to evolve over the years to include new activities, like broom hockey, dodge ball, a fry pan throw and a Finnish Wife Carry Contest. But one thing has remained true: the people behind the event. According to PJ Lovely, director of Newport Rec, the carnival happens because of the hard work of 15 nonprofit organizations and a couple hundred volunteers, like Larry Bell, who heads up the Frozen Open (golf on snow). David Hoyt and Eddie Schinck coordinate the snow sculptures on the Newport Common. Brian Tait, Jim Wilson and the Twin Ridge Mountaineers organize casino night. The Newport Ambulance Association directs the Winter Carnival Parade. Ken Dennis, Lori Flewelling and countless others help out with the pageant. Beth Rexford creates the scavenger hunt list for hundreds of participants. Joan Willey and her crew put on a ham and bean dinner at the Newport Senior Center. Richard Vincent gives kids of all ages a wagon ride around the common. Ron Beaudet coordinates the ski jumping meet at Newport High

School. Jeff Miller and Steve Smith put together the program. Graphic arts students at the Sugar River Valley Regional Technical Center design a button for the event.

Newport residents give their all for the event. Even as the 2011 carnival ended, organizations were making their plans for next year. >>>>>

“Why do people love the Newport Carnival so much? Because it’s ‘always’ happened. It’s a tradition, and it’s just what people do,” says Steve Smith of WCNL Radio.





Paul Howe



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(top) A castle made of snow on the Newport Common even has gargoyles!

(above) A horse and wagon roll down Main Street during the Winter Carnival Parade.

(right) Newport Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Ella Casey and Newport Winter Carnival Queen contestants light the torch to start the Winter Carnival.



Paul Howe

(above) The Finnish Wife Carry has become a popular event at Newport's Winter Carnival.

(below and right) Spectators watch as someone takes the plunge and slides into the icy water.



Beth Rexford



Paul Howe

Ella Casey, executive director of the Newport Chamber of Commerce, says that she loves to see all the nonprofits come together to offer activities, and make a little bit of money for their causes. Although the chamber runs the Newport Winter Carnival, she notes that “it wouldn’t happen without the folks at the rec center: PJ Lovely, Scott Blewitt and Beth Rexford. They are absolutely fantastic, and they are a big asset to the town.”

Something for everyone

It is impossible to see it all. You would think that you could over the course of five days, but sometimes you just have to make a choice between playing broom hockey at the high school or watching horses pull skiers at Parlin Field. So this year the Winter Carnival will last seven days. It’s one of the reasons people love the carnival so much; “There’s so much to do, and there is something for everyone,” says Smith, second vice president of the Newport Chamber and general manager of WCNL Radio in Newport.

Casey agrees: “If someone can’t find something they like on the program, they’re not looking.”

Everyone has their favorite event. It could be last year’s mustache competition, which resulted in a Guinness world record, or snowshoeing through the Newport Town Forest. But Saturday on the Common seems to top the list. It could be the barbeque, notes >>>>

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Beth Hexford



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(top) The fishing derby

(above) Candy Bliss enjoy the festivities on the Common.

Blewitt, who has been cooking food on the common for 15 years. But more likely it's the possibility of seeing your neighbor or an old friend. "People you don't see all the time, you'll see on the common for Winter Carnival," he says.

But the event isn't just an old home day for Newport residents. "The Winter Carnival is fun for anyone, anywhere to come and explore the town, take part in the events, and come have fun!" says Smith. "It's family friendly; it's small-town New England. Events are usually a buck or a button (you can buy your button for \$1 and get into anything). The Winter Carnival is a great way for people from all over to explore Newport. We'd love to have them!" 



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