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Sidney Torres IV is the head of the waste management company entrusted with cleaning up the thousands of tons of post-Mardi Gras garbage in the French Quarter.

By Tim J. Mueller for USA TODAY

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Katrina, Mardi Gras, Super Bowl made him trash king

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[Enlarge](#) By Bill Haber, AP

The Iris parade winds its way through a large crowd during its march through the streets of New Orleans Saturday, Feb. 13, 2010. This is the last full weekend of parades before Tuesday's all day celebration of Mardi Gras.

By Rick Jervis, USA TODAY

NEW ORLEANS — It's part of Mardi Gras: Bourbon Street will be lined with knee-high, dank-smelling mounds of cups, beads, trash bags, beer bottles, paper plates and pizza crusts. By the next morning, the mess is largely gone, the smell vaporized by a patented perfume.

The person responsible for the disappearing act is Sidney Torres IV, whose company, SDT Waste and Debris Services, holds one of the biggest tasks of Carnival season: picking up what's left of the party.

Mardi Gras is normally the company's toughest challenge. This year, however, the

job is even greater, because Mardi Gras arrives just after the [New Orleans Saints'](#) first-ever [Super Bowl](#) victory, Torres, 34, says. A bigger party with more visitors undoubtedly will bring more trash, he says.

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Usually, from Friday to Fat Tuesday — which is this Tuesday — SDT workers pick up 8,000 tons of trash in the French Quarter, Torres says. That's enough to fill three Olympic-size swimming pools.

"Mardi Gras is the Super Bowl of trash," he says. "This is going to be huge."

In a city that relies on its image for revenue, reliable trash pickup is as vital as good jambalaya and jazz bands, says Eric Reitman, chairman of the French Quarter Business Association.

"It's absolutely imperative," Reitman says. "If the (French Quarter) is completely dirty and nasty, people are not going to want to come back. It doesn't work well with the image of the city."

Torres, who once toured with musician [Lenny Kravitz](#) as his personal assistant, is also trying to bring glamour to garbage. On Thursday, the cable television channel TLC premiered *Trashmen*, a reality show based on Torres and his crew tackling the city's cleanup challenges. He has already acquired a rock-star status to those whose businesses rely on prompt pickups.

"I enjoy what I do and I love my city," Torres says. "It feels even better when people appreciate it."

Torres grew up in nearby St. Bernard Parish, son of descendants of the Canary Islands, off the coast of Spain, who populated the area in the 18th century. The bull's head emblazoned on the side of his cleaning trucks is a nod to his heritage's bull-fighting tradition, he says.

He worked for 2½ years for Kravitz while in his 20s but left the tour life after becoming entangled in drugs, he says. He then borrowed money from family members and began restoring French Quarter mansions, opening them as boutique hotels, and soon became a successful developer.

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When Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, nearly drowning New Orleans, garbage companies fled the ruined city, he says.

The French Quarter and his hotels were left without service. The trash companies that stayed were overcharging residents, Torres says.

"I thought, 'I could do this better and at a better cost,'" he says.

He bought a dumpster, then a truck, then another truck. He charged residents pre-Katrina prices. Before he knew it, he was clearing garbage and flood debris for businesses across the French Quarter, he says.

Around the same time, Torres put an ad in the paper for a driver. Jason McDaniel, an out-of-work delivery truck driver, thanks to Katrina, answered.

"I don't think anyone envisioned it would become what it is today," says McDaniel, today the company's vice president of operations. "Except for maybe Sidney."

Today the company owns 150 trucks, services 1,700 households and businesses in 15 parishes and generates about \$3.5 million a month in revenue, Torres says.

Shortly after Katrina, one of the first major challenges the company faced was combating that ill-famed "Bourbon Street smell," a vile mixture of stale booze and human excretions, Torres says.

Commercial fragrances didn't cut it. Eucalyptus wasn't strong enough, and strawberry made the street smell like a daiquiri, he says.

Torres flew in a chemist who concocted a lemon-based fragrance with extra enzymes to cut through the smell. He named it "Superfresh" and patented it. To the delight of local bar owners, it neutralized the Bourbon Street funk when sprayed from water trucks.

Joseph Licciardi, who owns two Bourbon Street bars, the Maison Bourbon Jazz Club and Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop piano bar, says the French Quarter has never smelled and looked cleaner.

"They keep it as clean as Disney World," Licciardi says. "It's helped out business tremendously."

Cherie Boos, owner of My Bar on Bourbon Street, said the post-party smell of the street was so wretched it would drive customers away. Today, clients compliment the scent. "It's been incredible to watch," she says.

Sometimes SDT workers pick up more than garbage. Cellphones, wallets, watches, underwear — even a live water moccasin — have been scooped up by his workers, Torres says. Once, the company helped police locate a murder weapon in the garbage.

Mardi Gras will either boost his reputation — or foul it, he says.

"When the national spotlight comes on Bourbon Street, I wanted it spotless," Torres says. "No lunch breaks. I'm going to clean everything."

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