

## Alumnus holds 8th annual Chaz Fest in his backyard

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Chaz Fest is named for Washboard Chaz, who founded the fest along with Tulane alumnus Alex McMurray, right, and McMurray's wife, Kourtney Keller. (Photo by [Zack Smith](#))

It's lucky for music lovers that Tulane alumnus [Alex McMurray](#) decided one day in 1992 to ask himself what would happen if kept riding his bike into the unknown ? beyond the French Quarter. The journey took him to the Bywater neighborhood of New Orleans, where he co-founded the local music festival [Chaz Fest](#) that takes place in his own backyard on Wednesday (May 1).

Along with his wife, Kourtney Keller, and musician Washboard Chaz, McMurray pulled Chaz Fest together in a matter of weeks, starting with one stage and seven acts, and drawing a few hundred people.

Now in its eighth year, McMurray expects to see more than a thousand people

enjoying two stages, 14 acts, and a bevy of food and art at what he calls the truck farm at 3020 S. Claude Ave.

McMurray came to New Orleans from New Jersey to study English and philosophy at Tulane University. He graduated in 1991 and remained in the Crescent City, drawn by the opportunities to be a working musician.

“In New Jersey, you're in a wedding band or you're Bon Jovi. There's no middle ground,” McMurray says.

No one would accuse McMurray of existing on any neutral ground in New Orleans (unless he was playing there). Aside from his solo performances, McMurray plays with [The Tin Men](#), “the world's premier sousaphone, washboard and guitar trio,” and the Valparaiso Men's Chorus, with an assortment of instruments and more than a dozen singers belting out bawdy sea shanties, punctuated by an occasional tuba blast.

Despite being a local favorite and performing across the world, it was [McMurray](#) and his friends' exclusion from Jazz Fest in 2006 that prompted the start of Chaz Fest.

Looking around his empty yard that will soon swell with revelry, McMurray wonders how a “backyard party with friends” turned into one of the highlights of festival season. “It's been a long strange road to legitimacy.”