

“Energetic, creative, positive, smart, pleasant, adventurous...” Master seamstress, loves life, loves serving others” These quotes from the nominator’s essay describe 1967 Murphy graduate, Patricia Ann Halsell- Richardson.

Pat grew up in Mobile, an only child of older parents whose religious views did not approve of Mardi Gras. They did place great value on education and sent Pat first to Toulminville High School in 1964, one of 3 black students, and later moved her to Murphy High School, where she was one of six black students. Her experiences were, in her words, “very, very, very bad.” One place of refuge for her was the home-ec room. Patricia had been taught to sew by her mother and the home-ec instructors recognized her abilities and ordered fine fabrics for her clothes making.

After graduating, Patricia went to Bauder Fashion College in Miami and earned a design degree with the idea of opening her own shop in Mobile, but the political and social upheaval of the times denied her that. She instead sewed at home and worked in an insurance office.

Mardi Gras was a special interest of Pat which led to being a guest commentator on the live radio broadcasts of the Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association (MAMGA). When her niece was named a lady of the MAMGA court, Pat had the opportunity in 1989 to make her first Mardi Gras train. She then began making trains and dresses for royals and court members of multiple Mardi Gras organizations. She also forged a partnership with a costume designer in Biloxi where she learned basics about embellishments. It was also around this time that Halsell-Richardson went back to school to earn her LPN and RN credentials. In 2000, the MAMGA queen selected Patricia to make her regalia. The controversial train design got her noticed and she decided to “up her game.” She connected with prominent Mobile train-maker Karen Thornton and learned about hand-sewing beads and crystals, and about the fine fabrics used. She preferred to see and touch these elements, spurring her to travel around the world, buying for herself and for Thornton, who Patricia said “was like a mom” to her until Thornton’s death in 2014. Halsell-Richardson’s business, Patricia Ann’s Regal Regalia, has made nearly 100 trains; and countless dresses, costumes, and collars for societies in both Mobile and New Orleans. She has been featured in numerous print publications and in documentaries, and won an ARTYS Award in 2018.

In addition to the economic contributions of her business, Patricia also donates her talents and time in her community. She mentors young girls and women in sewing, as well as leading Adult PROM (People Recreating Old Memories) for local nursing home residents who missed their high school proms. She also works with LeFlore High School and Chestang-Fournier K-8 teaching grooming and etiquette classes, helps in the Read-a-Thon at Gilliard Elementary, works with Bring One, Teach One (supports women who are experiencing difficulties), and serves meals to homeless at the Wings of Life. She donates sewing machines and makes outfits for Women on a Mission, sending clothes go to Africa. These community activities make it obvious that success has not made Pat forget her origins or the struggles she faced to achieve her current status.

The Murphy Alumni Association is .proud to induct Patricia Ann Halsell-Richardson into our Hall of Fame.