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Alabama Sea Grant
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It never fails; I get caught up in the excitement every year. The crowds of parade goers, the festive music, the brilliantly decorated floats, the chocolate moon pies, and the throws are things I start to look forward to as soon as the calendar turns over to the New Year. The sights and sounds during Mobile Mardi Gras are something everyone should witness at least once in their lives.

After the carnival is all over, however, and the floats are put away, the Kings and Queens retire, there is plenty left to do. City workers and volunteers, who have been picking up trash since celebrations began in January, are still out on the street cleaning up after the revelers. Discarded beads line the gutters, shiny trinkets that somehow got passed over by collectors.

Beads are not only discarded on the streets, but also tossed in the trash within a few weeks after they're caught. Being a confirmed packrat, I use my beads around my house year round for decoration, send them to friends and family in other states, and look for other ways to use them – but I still end up with so many beads that I don't know what to do with them. To throw them away has always seemed like such an extravagant waste.

Fortunately those world famous Mardi Gras beads can be recycled, given new life and breath for another year. Renowned for their doughnuts, Krispy Kreme in Mobile has been teaming up with local special needs school Augusta Evans in a partnership that benefits us all. Area Manager Chris Brown from Krispy Kreme calls it the “12 for 12” program, or the “Beads for Doughnuts” program. From March 5-7, bring in a bag of

Mardi Gras beads weighing 12 lbs or more to a Mobile Krispy Kreme and receive a free dozen Original Glazed doughnuts, or one coupon that can be redeemed at a later date.

Those beads will then be donated to Augusta Evans Special School where they will be cleaned, sorted and re-bundled in the school's Employment Training Center. The goal of the Employment Training center, school Principal Allen Baggett says, is to "teach special needs students the basic life and work skills that will prepare them to become independent and successful." Working together as a group, the students prepare the beads for re-sale, providing the school with much needed extra income, as well as providing the students with improved mental and physical capabilities, job training, and increased self sufficiency.

Instead of tossing out your old Mardi Gras beads, take them to be recycled and lend a hand in helping your community – and let's not forget the free Krispy Kreme doughnuts! To purchase beads throughout the year from Augusta Evans Special School, contact Moryne Breckenridge at 251-656-1113.