Welcome Home

Spring 2019

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Traditions of CAJUN Culture

Story by Sydney Moxley
Photos by Loryn Monceaux
Layout by Jessica Mouton

The cool, fall breeze rush past Devin Griffin's face as she steadily tries to withstand her balance against the wind. The sound of the rushing wind seems to drown her voice out every time she tries to speak up. The magnolias in the oak tree continue to fall above as the conversation of her family background, family traditions, the origin of her ancestors and much more continues.

Griffin hails from the city of Raceland, Louisiana and has no shame in expressing where she was born. However, Griffin does not hesitate to express pride in the location of her family home, which is Golden Meadow, the heart of where deep Cajun culture is.

Griffin would often learn about the history of how Cajun culture came to be in elementary school. She had learned that the French immigrants who were called Acadians from Canada were forced out of Canada. They then migrated down the Mississippi River to the area that the French had brought from the Spanish during the Louisiana Purchase. There, the Acadians settled and built their own community, which later became a Cajun community.

Griffin said her family made the journey from Canada down to the southern United States.

"They originated from Canada and settled in Golden Meadow, Louisiana. Both sets of my grandparents are from Golden Meadow and Galliano, Louisiana. They were born and raised near the church hospital," said Griffin.

Jeremy Serigny

Devin Griffin

Griffin's family all became settled within the same area based on the idea of when one person within the family has a child, nobody leaves. This way it was easier to have and rely on a close-knit family to help raise the children. It was more convenient this way since it was not common for women to have a job and earn an education, along with raising children. However, Griffin said things were different with women around her home.

"Women I grew up with made small careers in registered nursing, working in schools, just simply being stay at home parents or being secretaries for my uncle who is a fisherman," Griffin said.

When it comes to weathering out storms, Griffin said her family either stays or takes shelter in her grandparents' house. The furthest that Griffin's family evacuated from a storm was across the Pearl River line into Mississippi.

When it comes to her family history, Griffin said she knows how her grandparents met and how their love grew into an extended family.

"My grandparents on my dad side met while my grandfather was working as a carpenter in Leeville, Louisiana," said Griffin. "The interaction consisted of my grandfather telling my grandmother he's not much, but he is a commercial fisherman for trade and a carpenter, and my grandmother just went along."

Griffin said her grandparents on her mother's side were being really into Cajun culture and released their own Cajun cookbook.

Every Christmas, up until her grandmother got sick with cancer, Griffin's mother would read it to her grandmother. The only thing that Griffin regrets about her true Cajun heritage is not having a legit accent. However, she is okay with it due to the stereotype that evolve around the Cajun accent, which makes people think Cajuns are not educated enough.

During the early years of her life, Griffin was very fluent in the Cajun French language. When she got to school, she was taught a different version of French from the Cajun French she was learning. Because of this, she faced the challenge of losing the accent she was taught in an "if you don't use it you lose it" kind of way.

Griffin also shares the tradition in which her family partakes in almost every Christmas. Her mother reads a book to the family called Cajun Night Before Christmas. Instead of the ordinary story where Santa Claus is being pulled by reindeer, alligators are taking Santa by the sleigh. Her mother takes the time to read it to all the children by the fireplace.

Griffin looks at being Cajun as being different and unique. Griffin said she considers this heritage as a resource used to educate people about the true nature of Cajun culture.

**The unofficial cajun culture border runs along the border of Iberia, Assumption, Ascension, and St. John Parishes.*

CAJUN FACTS

The name "Cajun" comes from the Nova Scotian refugees named "Acadians"

Traditional Cajuns Spoke French

"Cajun" was officially recognized as a national ethnic group in 1980 due to Supreme Court case Roach v. Dresser

As with other Louisiana subcultures, Cajuns shared their foods and recipes with other ethnic groups to form modern day Louisiana staples

Most Cajuns were farmers and country people, compared to Creoles whom were from bigger cities

Most Cajuns were poor, so they used water in the base of their stews and gumbos, instead of milk like Creoles

Cajuns are credited for several louisiana specailites - Boudin, Sauce Piquant, and Jambalaya

Traditional Cajun Music is sung in french, Accompanied by fiddels, banjos, guitars, and accordians

Graphic by Alphonzo Wilson

"You can look at it as being a different nationality. People find novelty in different nationalities, and they look to other people for them to preserve different cultures," Griffin said.

The greetings among Cajuns consist of hugging, kissing on the cheek and other affectionate greetings that show great admiration among Cajuns. Everyone seems to know everybody through church or other big businesses.

Griffin said she knows deep down that the Cajun culture shaped her to be who she is today, because she was brought up running around barefoot in knee-deep water and always fishing with her hands. She plans on sharing these stories with her children so that they can continue to carry the Cajun tradition in the family.

In south Louisiana, these traditions prove to be common interest as Jeremy Serigny has heard all about these stories from his grandmother. Similar to Griffin's story of learning her version of the overall history of Cajuns, Serigny also shared what he learned about how Cajun culture came to be in Louisiana. Instead of learning it in formal school, Serigny said his grandmother took the time to tell him the history, but with a little twist that sounded a little like a fantasy.

"The Acadians had came down to flee the soldiers, and a man dressed in wolf's clothing came to scare some of

the soldiers away and escaped with his son to here [Louisiana]," Serigny said. "Then they developed the [Cajun] culture along with the Native Americans."
"I come from the town of Larose, Louisiana, which is not that far from Grand Isle and Galliano."

Serigny said that his family is French through his grandmother's side, but he is unsure about what his grandfather's side. Serigny said he thinks it would be Native American. Overall, his grandfather disowned his heritage due to him living in a time period of heavy racial tension.

Serigny said his family was spread out along the bayou region of Louisiana.

"My family was in Louisiana for the time being, but they were kind of spaced out. They were all down the bayou, but in different places like Cut Off, Larose, Golden Meadows and Grand Isle. It was until after a major hurricane that most of them moved to Larose," Serigny said.

Griffin is confident that she will be able to pass on her Cajun culture and traditions to her future bloodline and maintain it throughout all generations. On the other hand, Serigny said Cajun culture is dying and he does not enjoy that. Yet, he said he still plans on teaching and passing down his tradition to his future children one day to make sure they get their share of heritage from his side.

Serigny's mother, Dodie Carcisse, said she could not picture herself not living here along the bayou.

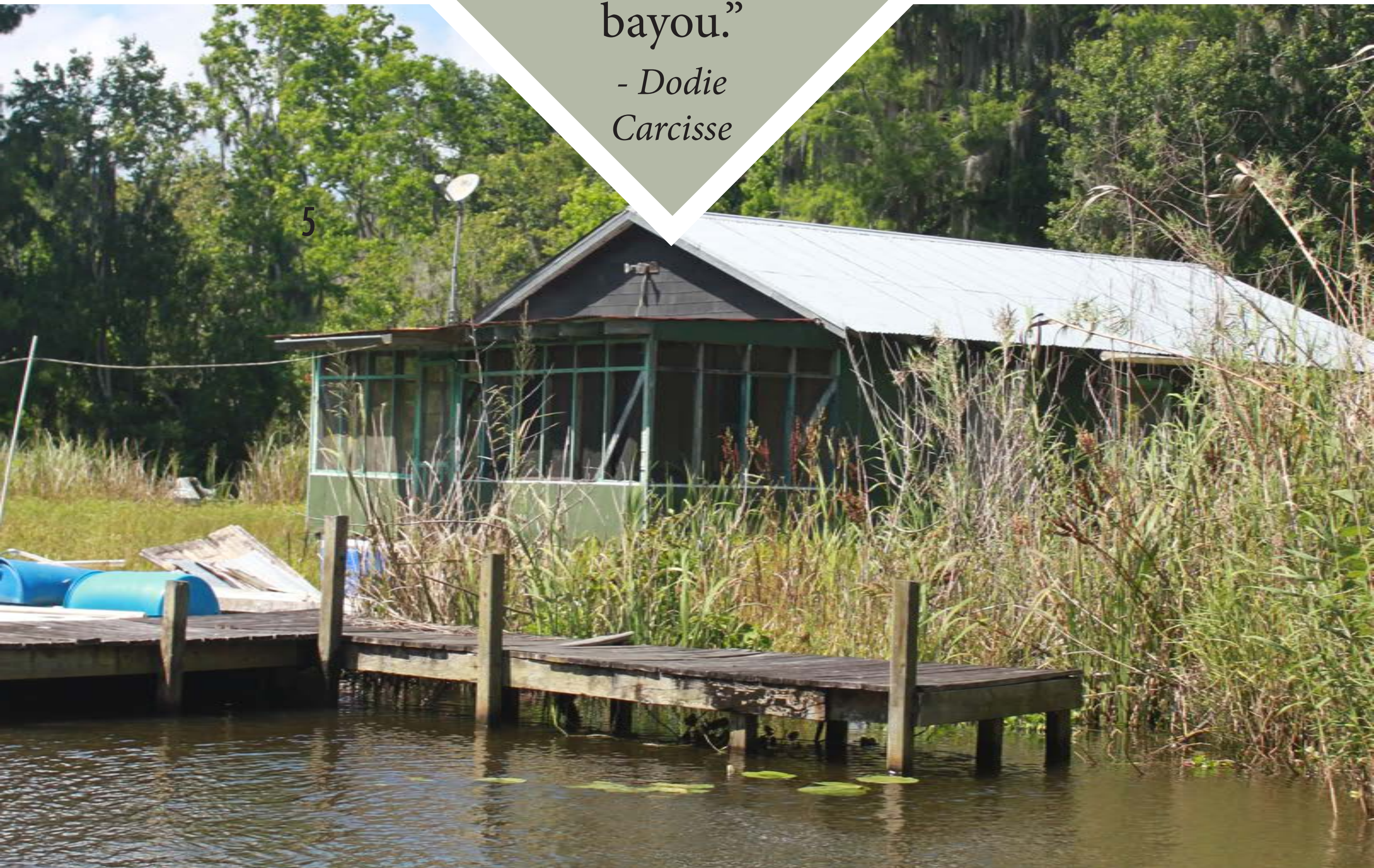
"I was born and raised down the bayou," Carcisee said. "My mother, my father, and my grandparents lived here. Frankly, I can't imagine life without the bayou."

Serigny said Cajun heritage is all about family.

"If you go down the bayou, you are guaranteed to see two strangers who are going to be hugging saying 'Hey cousin,' 'hey brother,' so we are basically a one group community."

Griffin's and Serigny's accounts of their background gives away the idea that the Cajun community is all about the closeness of friends, family and other loves ones. That is the primary value and custom of how the Cajun community interacts not only within its own circle, but wherever they go.

"I can't imagine life without the bayou."
- Dodie Carcisse



CRAFTING CYPRESS ART:
from the swamps to local homes

Story & Photos by Jessica Mouton

Layout by Jake Vincent

Two shopkeepers, Ken Buhler and Wade Cantrell, had tents set up two rows away from each other at the Southdown Plantation Marketplace in Houma, Louisiana. Although the men have a love for cypress wood, each person has a separate method for modifying the wood into art.

Buhler left the wood he found drifting in the swamps in its natural state, while Cantrell used a wood carving machine called a lathe to spin or ‘turn’ the cypress blocks into usable bowls.

The Drifter

Buhler, a Plaquemine Parish native, was stationed at a tent on the end of the second row, where onlookers got a three-sides view of his cypress wood art on sale. Clad in white loose shrimp boots, Buhler waded through untended grass, fallen hay and moss to help customers that stopped to look at his art. Buhler said there were several people fascinated by the works.

“Everyone that is from Louisiana that walks by my art can relate to it,” Buhler said. “People will nudge each other and say, ‘Oh look at that piece of wood. Remember when we were riding in the boat and saw a huge piece of driftwood like that?’”

Buhler said appreciation for cypress wood has spanned his whole life, but his appreciation for cypress driftwood started about five years ago after picking up his first piece out the water.

“From years and years of floating in the water, getting banged up against banks and washed over by boat waves,

the driftwood gets smoothed out and makes it the shape it is," Buhler said. "The wood you see was not that shape when it broke off in a hurricane or when lightning struck the tree. It's like God's art."

Buhler said he has been in the antiquing business for over 40 years and can never forget the most impressive pieces he's come across.

"A lot of really good antiques from Louisiana were made of cypress. The most valuable antiques are tables and armoires. New Orleans Auction House still sells cypress armoires made in the 1780s. When someone buys a cypress piece, they hold onto the value of history," Buhler said.

Buhler said in addition to the tables and armoires, cypress was used to build homes because of the wood's longevity.

"Louisiana and cypress are one in the same. There was no such thing as painting," Buhler said. He explained that cypress wood can be found on the bottom of walls inside houses because the wood is resistant to water incase if there is a flood.

Buhler said, "Cypress is what builders used because the wood will last forever, longer than your life." Buhler also said he has held onto many pieces over his five years of going into the swamps and scavenging for driftwood.

"I have about 400 different pieces of driftwood in my house, and I have some pieces I wouldn't sell for $2,000. Now we are talking huge pieces, literally half trees that were lying around in the water or pieces that won't fit in my boat," Buhler said.

More often than not, a tradesman will have a story in relation to his craft. Buhler said he watched a cypress stump for three years.

"I could not get that stump out the ground for three years, but the tree was cut off about 200 years ago in the swamps. I had to return often to help loosen the stump from the ground," Buhler said. "I could tell the age by counting the rings in the tree, but by the way it was cut, I could tell the tree was cut down using hatchets and handsaws."

The Carver

Cantrell drove two hours from his home in Grand Isle to set his wood bowls up in a corner tent. Many different types of wood were represented in bowl-form for customers to acquire for their home. Cantrell said the bowls had been waiting over a year to make their appearance at the marketplace.

"I have had all of my pieces that are for sale for at least a year before I started working on them," Cantrell said. "Wood takes about one year per inch of thickness to dry, so I cut the wood from one inch to an inch and a half so it will dry much faster."

Cantrell said his passion for wood cutting came from taking a shop class in high school where he fell in love with using a wood lathe.

"I did not touch the skill again until six years ago. A friend of mine from Baton Rouge gave me an old Sears Roebuck lathe. It was small, so I bought a 12-inch lathe. Then that was too small, so I got a 16-inch lathe so I could make bigger bowls," Cantrell said.

Every piece Cantrell displayed for the marketplace came from trees that were cut down by friends or tree cutters. Cantrell said some pieces came from Grand Isle where he picked up the wood off the beach.

"People cut trees down, they normally haul it off and burn it, but I get pieces from that. It's mostly a salvage business," Cantrell said. "The people who buy my bowls say they will really only use them as decorations on their tables. I still cut the bowls to where someone who buys it can use it. The wood can withstand the use on its own."

After working with the wood for so long, Cantrell said he has developed a textbook understanding for how a young cypress tree matures over time to create the look and grain it has.

"Cypress does not have any explanation for how it looks," Cantrell said.

He said the grain looks the way it does just from the way the tree grows. Some places in the cypress tree will grow faster than others, and cypress is a slow wood. The tree will take a long time to create rings so they will be close together.

To Reap a Work of Art

Buhler and Cantrell have a separate manner of treating the wood before making the final product for purchase. Buhler said he tries to not adjust the look of the wood too much from how he found it due to the wood already being in an unspoiled condition.

"The wood gets naturally aged. The only alterations I do are trim the bottom of the wood and pressure wash to clean them up. There is so much mold and algae floating in the water, so sometimes that catches on the wood. I do add metal ornaments, but only to add to the beauty of the wood" Buhler said.

In order to make the bowls, Cantrell said he must shave down the wood and change the shape into the bowl-form, but he said this helps show the inner grain of the wood.

"The first thing I do is cut the trunk to length and then split them in half to make two bowls. Then, I will use the lathe to take off the excess wood and make a rough shape. I leave the bowl thick so it will dry quicker. Once the wood is dried, I will cut the wood down again to its final size," Cantrell said.

Cutting down cypress trees on government-owned or public property is illegal in Louisiana. Anyone found cutting cypress trees can be held to pay a fine of up to $5,000 and serve up to six months in jail. The law does not prohibit anyone from cutting trees on private property.

Buhler and Cantrell believed that the law on cypress wood is justified and have found other sources for their cypress wood such as salvaging driftwood or using wood that would have otherwise been discarded.

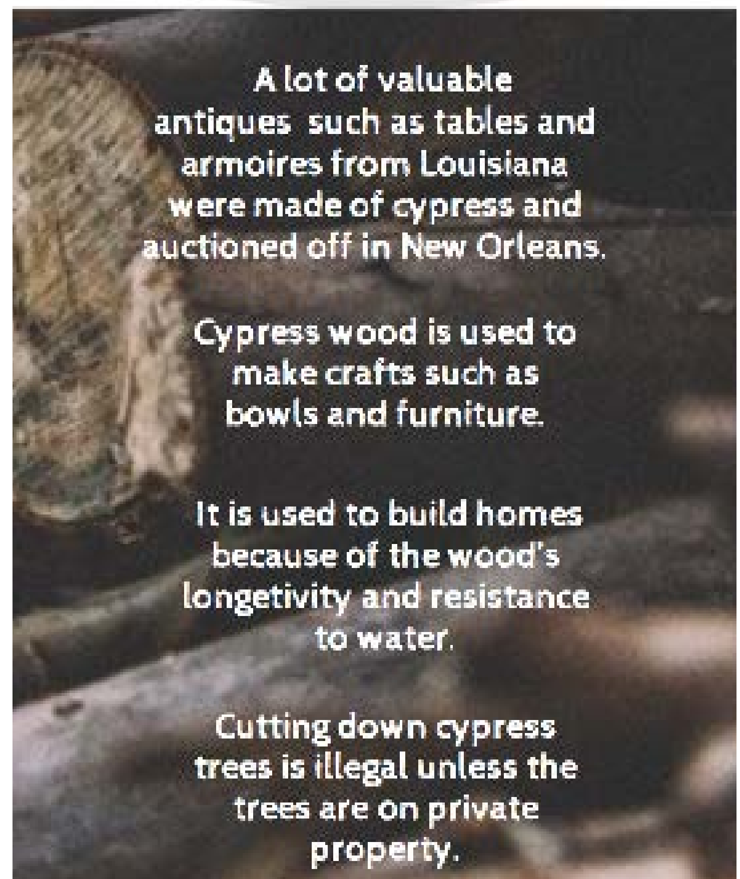
Cantrell said he used a fallen tree once and utilized it for his business. "There was a tree that fell in my yard about two years ago. Instead of getting rid of it, I put it to use in my shop. I can't count how many bowls I was able to make out of that tree," Cantrell said.

Buhler said it should not be that hard to not cause damage to these trees. "I'm just one guy, but if I can find over 400 pieces of driftwood, then it is not hard to leave the trees alone. They are a part of history, and I personally wouldn't want to change the way the swamps look by cutting the trees down," Buhler said.

Both craftsmen said they have developed a respect for the cypress wood and the way it stands out next to other wood types. "When wood is made into furniture, I can tell it is cypress just by the way it looks and the grain of the wood," Buhler said.

CYPRESS ART

FUN FACTS



Graphic by Keyja Washington

"All of the wood types I come across cut about the same, but I just look for grain pattern and stain pattern. Normally cypress does give me the best result," Cantrell said.

As the marketplace came to an end, both men packed up their works of art. They wait until there is another marketplace or craft show to attend, with the hopes of spreading their art into the homes of fellow individuals.

Story by Samuel Gruening Photos by Caity Thibodeaux Layout by Wesley Rhodes

In South Louisiana, there are many ways to make a living, and being a musician is one of the most dynamic. It is not a nine to five kind of gig, but that's what makes it special. Music is a way for many people to pay the bills, but the opportunity it brings is endless.

There are many different types of music in the region, but it shows how much culture is spread out across South Louisiana.

When most people think of being a musician, they think about all the money and fame it brings. In South Louisiana, that is not the case. In a place like New Orleans that is abundant in music culture, everyone cannot be rich and famous. All musicians have to start somewhere on the music food chain.

In many homes in South Louisiana, kids are raised in a house of music. Many musicians have family members who play some kind of instrument. In the case of Aurelien Barnes, his father has been playing music his whole life. Growing up, Barnes was around music all the time, as his father was in a zydeco band that played shows around the city. Barnes started playing trumpet as kid and by the time he was a teenager, he was playing at Jazzfest.

Barnes said music still impacts his life to this day, as he makes a living from it.

"Growing up I was around it all the time," Barnes said."When I got to be in high school, I was pretty good, so I figured I might as well try and make some money off of it."

Barnes is a part of the New Breed Brass Band, which has risen in popularity over the last few years. New Breed started in New Orleans by playing smaller gigs around the city. In the last three years, the band has been on a few tours and is currently preparing for a tour on the West Coast.

Traveling and playing music that is loved by many is a cool experience that not many people are able to do. Barnes said he is grateful for the opportunity.

"Being in college while getting the opportunity to travel around the country playing music that is so loved is a dream come true," Barnes said. "What makes it even better is I get paid to do what I love. I watched my dad do it and support a family, and now I am getting to experience everything he did."

For many other musicians in the region, their story is a little different than Barnes. There are thousands of musicians who play gigs with different bands every night.

In Lafayette, Louisiana, a man named Lee Allen has been playing the bass guitar for as long as he can remember. Playing music is all Allen has ever done in his life. The veteran bass player has traveled all over, but now that he is older, he keeps a low profile by just playing gigs in South Louisiana.Allen said sometimes it can be financially tough, but the love for music is what keeps him going.

"I've played bass guitar my whole life and never been the lead of a band," Allen said. "I've made some good money doing it, but it was never about that in the first place."

Health issues happen to people regularly but most musi-

cians don't have the funds to pay for it at the time of the issue. Allen said he had cancer in the early 2000s, and it affected him financially.

"I was diagnosed with stage three cancer. After I got treated, I had a hospital bill that was through the roof," Allen said. "I didn't stress about money, because I knew I just needed to stick to what I knew, and that was my bass guitar."

Allen said he never worried about earnings because he knew that passion for a career is more rewarding than the accumulation of wealth.

"I never worried about money; I knew that would come. I play my bass because it's what I'm passionate about. Kids these days want to do less but for more, and that's not what God gave you the talent for. If you're gonna play, play and don't complain," Allen said. Music has changed a lot over time, but Allen has stuck to what he learned from the beginning. With technology being so advanced, music can be made very easily off a computer. This software causes many musicians to lose work, but Allen said that's not it. He said that over the years, people are losing passion for playing music and just want to look at the statistics.

Before the music industry got to where it is currently, things were a lot simpler. In New Orleans you can find great musicians everywhere. Some of the best musicians are in the local neighborhoods that support local music. In the case of Snooks Eaglin, he made a lifetime out of his guitar.

Eaglin is a guitarist from New Orleans who lived in Mid City before Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Eaglin was a blind man, but that never stopped him from doing what he loved. He learned how to play the guitar by himself and continued to get better. Eaglin would become well known in the New Orleans area by the time he was a teenager. Even though he passed away in 2009, his legacy would live on for a lifetime.

Eaglin's grandson, Dorian, lives in uptown New Orleans, where he tells stories of his grandfather all the time. Dorian said he remembers high spirits, long days at Jazz Fest and late nights at Rock N Bowl.

"Snooks would play at the Gentilly stage in the afternoon, and by the time it was midnight, we were at Rock N Bowl," Dorian said."Those times were a lot of fun for me and my family. The best part about it was grandpa Snooks playing into the morning keeping the people entertained and on their feet."

Dorian explained how Eaglin always had a story to tell when you were around him.

"He played music for so long that there was a different story every time I saw him. I was a kid when he was playing those early days at Jazz Fest and being able to bowl until the early hours of the morning is something that I will never forget," Dorian said.

Dorian said, "His grandfather never allowed wealth to control him and got to play with some popular artists in the city."

"You know Snooks was never a greedy guy. He learned how to play guitar young and it was all he ever did." Dorian said. "Snooks played with some big names that are well known around New Orleans like Allen Toussaint. He always said it's not what you make, it's what you do in the process of making it."

In south Louisiana, there are many ways to make money and live, but there are only a few ways to love what you do and are passionate about a job. Many musicians grow up and play for the love of music. If some are lucky, it just so happens to financially support their life.

Around the world, there are not many places for a everyday person to be able to support a life or even family through music. South Louisiana however is such a special place because it focuses on the culture allowing opportunities to break through.

Music does more than support the lives of musicians in South Louisiana, it supports the communities that these musicians come from. Community is unmatched in south Louisiana. There are so many talented individuals in more areas than just music, but the difference between other talents and musical talent is the fact that music brings the community closer.

If music has the ability to support communities, individuals and families, the sky is the limit for the musician culture in the region. If anything can be said about the people in south Louisiana, it is that the fundamentals of it all is hard work. Passion and love for what you do makes it special for musicians everywhere, it has fulfilled all of their needs to live a happy life.

Good talent never goes unnoticed in south Louisiana and that has been shown throughout time. The region has seen many greats come and go but the ones who stuck to the community had one thing in common, passion. The passion of music has built a lifestyle for musicians and listeners to create the most dynamic atmosphere in the world.

South Louisiana has many different cultures, but they all collaborate into one. That one culture is open to new residents and old residents of the state, from young listeners to the ones who can barely hear, from the ones who can't walk to the ones who just found their boogie shoes. It is just important that residents in the region embrace the culture to make south Louisiana the most dynamic place in the world to live and work.

TOP FIVE CAJUN ARTISTS

1 DR. JOHN

Born Malcolm John Rebennack better known as Dr. John, is from New Orleans. He has won six Grammys his first acme in 1989 for Best Jazz Vocals, and his most recent came in 2013 for Best Blues Album- Lockdown. Dr. John is also a member of the 2011 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

2 THE DIXIE CUPS

They are New Orleans natives and the first African American artist from Louisiana to hit it big in Cajun music market. They are known for their hits "Chapter of Love", "People Say", "Iko Iko"

3 PROFFESSOR LONGHAIR

Born Henry Roeland Byrd better known as Professor Longhair, is a New Orlans native. He has influenced legends such as Dr. John and Fats Domino, He was inducted into the 1981 blues Hall of Fame,In 1987 Professor Longhair was awarded a posthumous Grammy Award for his early recordings released as House Party New Orleans Style. He was also inducted into the 1992 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

4 SONNY LANDRETH

Landreth is known as "the King of Slydeco" and plays with a strong zydeco influence. Landreth is one of the most advanced guitarists in the world. He is best known for his slide guitar playing and having developed a technique where he also frets notes and plays chords and chord fragments by fretting behind the slide while he plays.

5 TAB BENOIT

Tab is from Houma, Louisiana and formed voice of the wetlands. In 2007, Benoit won his first B.B. King Entertainer of the Year award presented by the Blues Music Awards (highest in Blues for songwriting).

Graphic by Leroy Triggs

Musical instruments on display at the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center

Not Your Average Museum

Story by Collin Brazan   Photos by Ryant Price II   Layout by Emilee Theriot

Nestled in a corner of Thibodaux is one of Louisiana's seven branches of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. Set in between Bayou Lafourche and the city's downtown area, the brick building has carried with it a rich infusion of culture, as told by its museum, commitment to the arts and a walkway that overlooks the nearby marsh.

Allyn Rodriguez, a park ranger, said it is amazing to have a national park in your own town.

The Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center teaches visitors about the people and the cultures that have shaped the region throughout its history.

Angela Rathle, the supervising park ranger for Thibodaux, Lafayette and Eunice said the center analyzes the connections between various cultures in the region.

"The concept of the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center is to try to look at the crossroads between life in bayou country and the Cajuns, but also the other cultures that have settled here, too," Rathle said.

The center's dedication to the region is part of some requirements it receives from the U.S. government. Rodriguez said Congress mandates the rangers to delve into the culture and history of the Deltaic Region of Louisiana.

"We are lucky enough to have three Acadian sites, and here, at the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center, we are able to discuss in depth the people that lived and thrived, if you will, in this area, and how important the wetlands are to the entire United States," Rodriguez said.

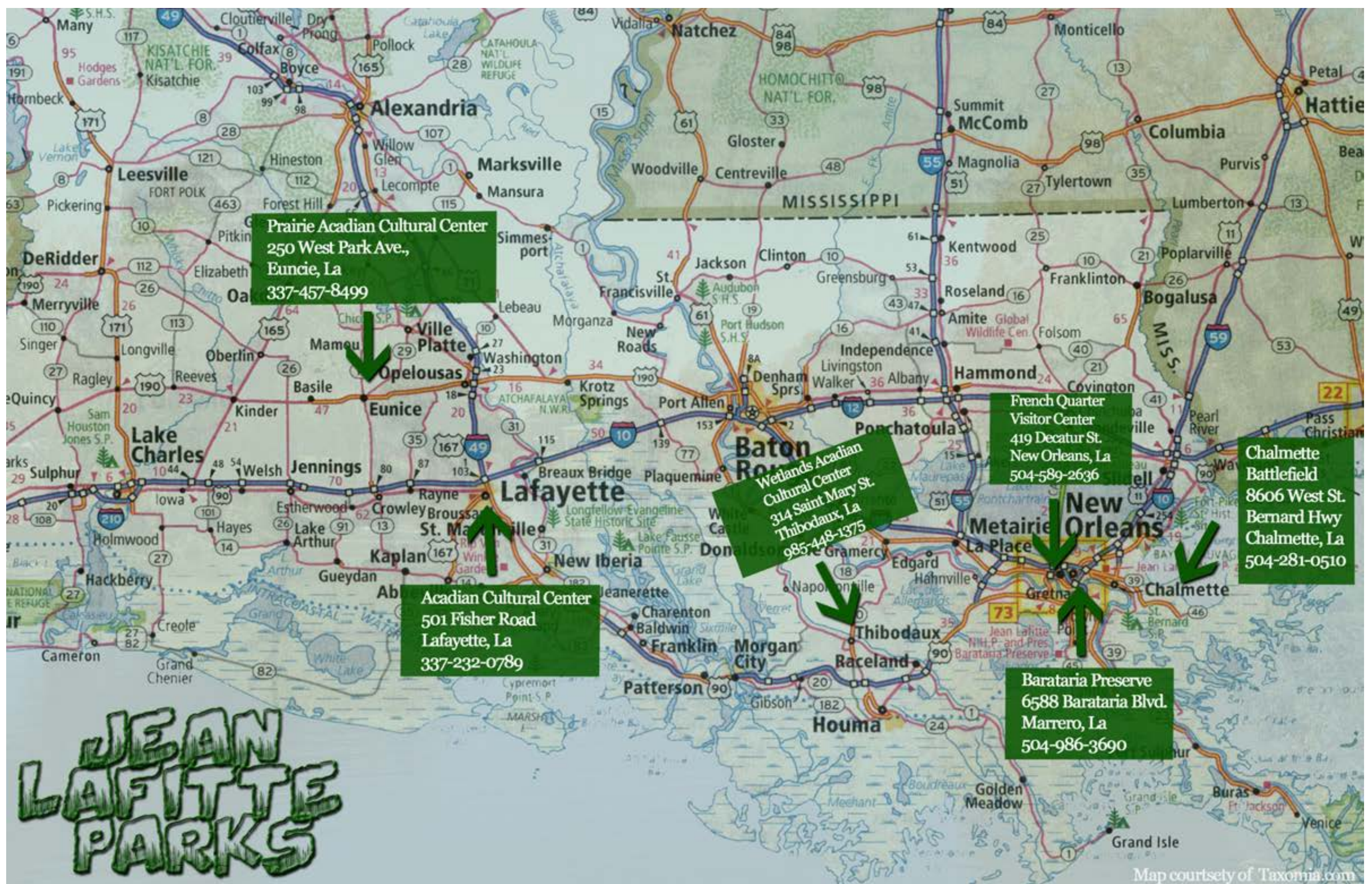
Despite the rigid outline of its purpose, the rangers at the center said that its impact reaches far beyond the idea of merely sparking a conversation about the region's cultures.

Fred Fuller, another park ranger, said the center connects people to many kinds of places.

"It [the cultural center] tells of the culture, it tells of the history, it tells of the current history being made, of the people who are living their lives," Fuller said.

"This spot is talking about all of the different occupations because everybody who comes in here are coming through different backgrounds."

One of the ways the center focuses on telling that history



Graphic by: Joycelyn Lewis

is through its museum, which contains a number of artifacts and exhibits. They detail everything from local music to the oil industry. There are tools that were crafted and used by locals, such as a handmade pirogue, pieces of bedding that early settlers would have used and toys that children would have played with.

Rodriguez said the museum acts like a portal to the past at the many cultures that developed into today's state of Louisiana.

Among its artifacts and exhibits, the museum tells a story, and it is predominantly one about the bayou on which the center sits.

Rodriguez said the anecdote describes the actions of the river and how it made parts of the region.

"[The museum is] the story of the river, and how the river made the land, and how the river made the oil, and the river laid down the clay deposits that would ultimately make the bricks that went into our houses or the cypress trees that grow that again go into our houses or our pirogue," Rodriguez said.

Combined with giving guests a historical understanding of the region's background, park rangers offer guided tours throughout the city.

Fuller said they point out information on subjects like local plant life and the development of Thibodaux's architecture.

"It gives you a slice of some obscure segment of this country, and you start seeing a kind of a connection with where you live," Fuller said.

In addition to tours of the city, the center brings guests directly to some of Thibodaux's most influential historical landmarks, such as a boat tour down Bayou Lafourche to the house of Edward Douglass White, Jr., the ninth U.S. Chief Justice.

Rodriguez said people can see bald eagles and structures that do not exist anywhere else in the world.

The Acadian Cultural Center also offers entertainment each week. Every Monday, music performers play songs and genres that would have been prominent to the early

Cajun people, such as zydeco, gospel music and country music. For many of those performers, these weekly events have not just become an outlet for their talents, but part of a longstanding family tradition.

On most Tuesday nights, the center offers a gathering where those people who both speak and want to learn Cajun French, the rapidly vanishing language of the Acadians, can interact and share it.

The center also hosts an auditorium where Thibodaux Playhouse, the city's musical theatre organization, performs throughout the year.
Fuller said the center has information about the productions that take place at the auditorium.

"Although there's no one here to represent it, we have brochures, and then on the nights of the plays there will of course be a ticket booth," Fuller said.

Along with the hosting musical theater, the center further promotes the arts through a rotating display of local artists and painters.

Rodriguez said the gallery of these artists speak about the passion and creativity people have for their works of art.

"It helps people develop an appreciation for what's going on here, and I think that's the whole role of the park service, it's to help facilitate these connections between people, and what are you interested in, and what can I show you more and help you connect to," Rodriguez said.

Part of a source of pride for the rangers at the Acadian Cultural Center has been their wide reach into topics and cultures that extend beyond that of the Cajuns. Modern Cajun culture is one that is comprised of people from different continents and of vastly different beliefs, all settling for different reasons in the wetlands.
Rathle said the rangers get to discuss about the integration of several cultures in the bayou country of Louisiana.

"And that isn't just Cajuns, that's African Americans, Native Americans, and we're really intrigued on how those cultures all come together," Rathle said.

Rodriguez said that dynamic of cultural combination has been reflected in the food that locals still eat today.

"You have gumbo, which is an African word that means 'okra,' and some gumbos to this day are thickened with okra. You can also have gumbos that have potato salad in it, which is a contribution from the Germans that were here," Rodriguez said. "If you look at Jambalaya, which is a rice dish, it is very, very similar to the Spanish dish paella."

That dissemination of cultures is seen beyond just the types of food that the locals eat, as it is also seen in the very methods that many still use to prepare those dishes.

Rodriguez said a prime example of this is filé, a thickening agent made from grinding dried herbs.

"You can also use filé, the leaves of the sassafras tree, which are cured and processed. That whole process was shared by the Native Americans."

The rangers said they have placed an emphasis on communicating this culture to the youth, who might grow up without the knowledge of how the place they live came to be.

Rathle said the park strives to allow the youth to engage in the center's activities and preserve the culture of the region.

"The Jean Lafitte National Park was created to preserve and protect the culture and resources in the Mississippi Delta Region. So, for us, it's not just something we think is important from a youth engagement [standpoint], but it's legislatively what we're supposed to do," Rathle said.

The idea of passing stories down to the youngest members of society is one of history's oldest concepts, but Rathle

said summer camps are an adequate method of reaching the youth of the region.

"The idea was to just offer a place where kids could explore the delta, the land, how it was built, why people live here and actually the cultures that have just settled here and their contributions."

As the camps continued, though, they became more than just a series of lessons to the children like they were in classes.

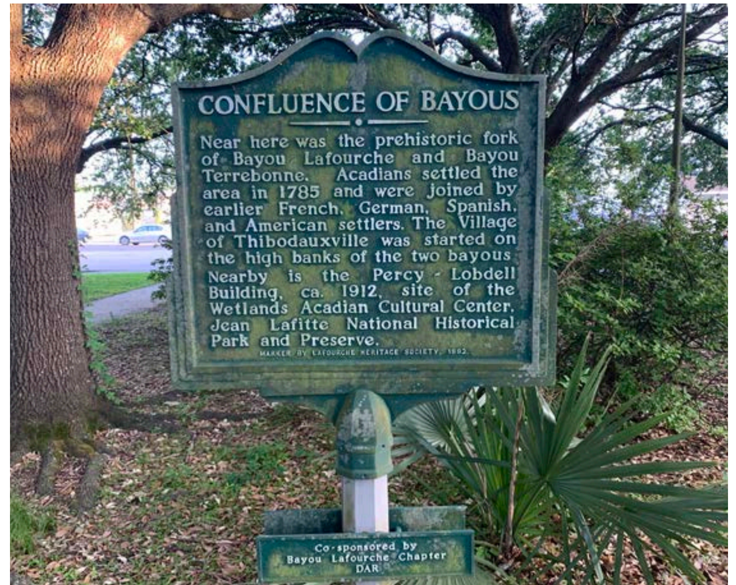
Rathle said they have evolved into a combination of science and culture.

"We try to reach a different aspect for the kids and we take them on field trips to the resources and really try to get them to start thinking about where they live and what kind of things are special here," Rathle said.

The message of getting people to understand why the local culture is important has established the brick building and its surrounding nature as a focal point of town.

"This is not the end of the story, this is the beginning of the story, and I want you to be turned on and I want you to go out and I want you to explore as much as you can," Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez said she wants people to realize how fascinating the area is and how many different cultures came together to make the region what it is today.



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