The boy with the cowbell can't resist.

Clink clank, clink clank.

It's not yet 6 o'clock, but one sound sets off another.

Tink tink, ta ta ta.

A woman beats on a frying pan with a wooden spoon.

She's answered by a man who blows on a red, white and blue horn —

Brrrmmp.

The bells of Eglise St. Pierre aux Liens begin chiming, and the street erupts in a deafening cacophony of noise.

The Tintamarre has begun.

Tintamarre — “big noise” — is more than a cultural event; it's a political statement.

Descendants of the Acadians still remain in eastern Canada 250 years after the Grand Derangement of 1755. Some of the French families who had settled in Nova Scotia in the 17th century, aided by the Micmac Indians, fled expulsion by the British. They traveled to the far north, to an isolated peninsula that juts out into the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the province of New Brunswick. There, the families — the LeBlancs, the Landrys, the Poiriers, the Maillets — regrouped in small villages and began again, building a life free to practice their religion and speak their native tongue.

They lived their lives in French, making little noise, until 1955. That year marked Canadian Acadiens celebrate the Festival Acadien in New Brunswick (top).

A 19th century house at the Village Historique Acadien (above).
the 200th anniversary of the deportation. On Aug. 15, the day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the patron saint of the Acadians, residents went out into the streets of Canadian Acadia. At precisely 5:55 p.m. (17:55 in Canadian time), they began banging on pots and pans or anything they could find. The big noise, Donatien Gaudet, an 88-year-old Acadian activist explains, "was to tell the world that we are still living." Dubbed the Tintamarre, last year the celebration drew 25,000 visitors to Caraquet, the capital of Acadie du Nord.

This year, a band of Cajuns happily joined in the celebration. Members of the delegation included KBON's Swamp 'n' Roll host Todd Ortego and his wife Debra; 008 magazine editors Joan Broussard and Kenny Steinocher; Fox-44 TV reporter David D'Aquin and cameraman Brandon Shackelford; KATC TV-3 anchor Hoyt Harris and his wife, Bette; Centre International Congres Mondial Acadiens coordinator Rachel Dugas; and DailyAdvertiser columnist Jan Risher. We traveled to New Brunswick to get a first hand immersion into the National Day of the Acadians and a preview of what will be happening next year, when New Brunswick hosts the 2009 Congres Mondial Acadiens.

The build up to the Tintamarre starts Aug. 1, the beginning of the two-week long Festival Acadiens. The red, white and blue flags with a big yellow star, the banner of the Acadians, are raised on every flag pole, flap from every house, and fly from the attics of tracks and cars. Decorations sprout in front yards, and even some of the facades of the neat cottages on the peninsula get a tri-color coat of paint.

We are staying at the 1891 Hotel Paulin, where the Acadian flag flies from the third-story dormer. This generation owner Gerard Paulin and his partner Karen Mersereau are melding the historic accommodations with dazzling nouveau cooking based on local ingredients. Eating at the Hotel Paulin is an education in the riches of the sea and the farm — the traditional occupations of the Acadian residents. Summer time is lobster and crab season, and Mersereau takes advantage of the bounty. Shellfish turn up in stews based on bouillabaisse, in creamy linguini, sauteed in a run butter sauce, as crab cakes and tucked into flaky tarts. Local lamb, traditional chicken and dumplings, artisan cheeses and lettuces from the hotel's garden are showcased on the menu. Dessert is another course in Acadian, from the traditional sugary pie to a Cajun pleasing blueberry bread pudding with rum sauce. Mersereau and Paulin bent over backwards to help us, be it with Internet connections or home remedies for insect bites. And the hotel, located in the heart of Caraquet, made a great base for exploring the Acadian Peninsula.

As a counterpoint to Mersereau's upscale cooking, most of the restaurants on the peninsula serve simpler, but no less, fare. It took us a while to relinquish the Tony Chachere seasoning, but slowly our palates adjusted to food with less fire. "Not too much salt," was a local mantra, "you should be able to taste the seafood." Lobster appears everywhere: in breakfast omelets, tossed with a bit of mayonnaise and rolled into a hotdog bun for lunch, as a lobster burger at McDonalD'S, or steamed whole for dinner. Scallops, mussels and clams, sauteed, steamed or fried, are local favorites. One of the best discoveries is that summer is oyster season in New Brunswick. The shallow bays are fertile grounds (or farming oysters in baskets suspended in the top third of the water column. The oysters grow quickly and are easier to harvest than our bottom dwellers in Louisiana. We tasted an oyster named for the hero of the Acadian resistance, Beausoleil Broussard, who fought on in Nova Scotia for several years before following his kins to Louisiana. The small Beaussoleil oysters, harvested in bays outside of Shippagan, Neqac and Boucrouche, taste like a sweet briny mouthful of the sea.

Nights are filled with music. When the band Grand Derangement from Nova Scotia hit the stage, it became vividly clear how Acadian traditional music birthed the Cajun sound.
The violin played lead, closely followed by the beat on a wooden box or the tapping of dancers performing a high-energy step. In French, some of the repertoire told the story of the Acadian diaspora and the close ties between the French settlers and their Micmac neighbors. At the Village Historique Acadien, where 40 historic structures are gathered to show the architecture and folkways of the people, Donat Haché, an 85-year-old fiddler, scratched out an air that, with my eyes closed, could have been played on the stage at Festivals Acadiens. He looks like he may be a close cousin to the late Creole fiddler Caney Fontenot.

Everywhere we turned we found similarities. Small towns dominated by large Catholic churches. Houses with a boat pulled up in every yard. Warm welcomes to everyone. Houses with a boat pulled up in every yard. Warm welcomes to everyone. Children the language of their forbearers. The Acadians convinced as people for the first time in 1881. They chose the day of the Assumption of the Virgin, Aug. 15, as an Acadian holiday.

and put her golden star on their flag. Pierre LeFebvre established a college in the community of Memramcook in 1884 so that the Acadians could pursue higher education, not only in French, but in their own dialect. The power of education paid off. While the struggle took a century, in the 1960s, Louis Joseph Robichaud was elected the first Acadian premier of New Brunswick. He created a program called Chances Égales pour Tois (equal opportunity for everyone) to support the rights of the Acadians to live in their language and culture. Times, passed to support dual school and medical systems, allowed the residents of New Brunswick to choose which language they wanted to speak, and by law, New Brunswick became bilingual. Every public sign is printed in both languages.

The story of the Cajuns is a familiar one in Louisiana. After arriving in Louisiana following the Grand Département, the Acadian immigrants were left to themselves for more than a century. Then, in 1921, legislation forbade the Cajuns to speak French in school. An entire generation was forced to mute its voice, and the Cajuns did not teach their children the language of their forbearers. Not until the Cajun Renaissance began 40 years ago, when the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana and Festivals Acadiens were born, did the Cajuns begin to publicly celebrate their heritage with pride. Musician Zachary Richard, who was in Tracadie for a concert, says the French language in Louisiana is a luxury. "In New Brunswick," he adds, "it is a right.

Back in Louisiana, we are struggling to maintain the Cajun language. There are more than a million people of Cajun descent, the largest concentration of Acadians in the world, in southwest Louisiana. There are French immersion schools in Lafayette, but French is still not the lingua franca of the streets. Meanwhile, 55,000 of our cousins reside on the Acadian Peninsula, living their lives in French. The Tinamarre brought us back together.

Bright sunny skies lit the streets of Caraquet, where people dressed in Acadian costumes or painted themselves red, white, blue and gold. "I'm proud to be an Acadian on a day like this," says Giselle Savoie, who wears a red and blue clown suit. "Our grandparents left us a heritage. We cannot forget. We can do everything that our mothers taught us: Making a garden. Sewing a quilt. And we like to have fun."

Also among the Lafayette travelers were Acadiens Open Channel's Lucius Fontenot, KRVS-FM host Valerie Broussard and KLFF-TV's Ponce Fontenot, host Bobby Moore (along with cameraman Tony Living), who represented the Cajuns by printing the Acadian flag to their shoulders as caps. Curious locals stopped them. When the trio explained they were flying the flag of Cajun Louisiana, they were embraced.

"Mon cousin," the Acadians told Moore, who grew up speaking French with his Baudoin, Broussard and LeBlanc grandparents.

"It brought tears to my eyes," says Fontenot.

"We were walking up and down the street," adds Broussard, "with big smiles like 3-year-olds. Everyone was so proud to be Acadians. People were glad to see us, glad we spoke French."

"Being there," says Fontenot, "it's an inspiration to speak French at home. My mother was proud to be Cajun. I want to continue the tradition.

An 18th century house at the Village Historique Acadien is populated with reenactors during the festival (top); period kitchen ware (inset); a celebrant wears the traditional Acadian costume (left).