Discovering Columbus

Acadiana begins plans for 500th Anniversary

By Bill Decker
Std. Writer

Acadians, like the rest of the Western Hemisphere, will take part in the celebration marking the 500th anniversary of Columbus' first voyage to the New World.

But the 1992 quincentennial will be a cautious celebration. In fact, make that "observance." However, while our culture celebrates a man who discovered America, there is scholarly debate and others may have a different view of the man whose name means both "Christ-bearer" and "catholic.

Gloria Fiero, a UCLA history professor and chairperson for the Quincentennial Commission, 1992, a stack of articles dealing with whether Columbus was a victim or a warren imperialist— or both.

Native Americans— it was Columbus, remember, who called them Indians after making the biggest geographical mistake in history. — and is sensitive about the quincentennial. Fiero said he couldn't think of a better response to those concerns.

"We think it's fair representation," Fiero said, "so that we can understand their native cultures. Our aim is to understand the relationship between the native tribes and the Europeans."

Among the U.S. activities under consideration:

- A two-day symposium called "1492: Columbus, America and Exploration" in the fall 1992 season. The idea is to bring significant insights from the scholarly discipline to a general audience that includes the public schools.
- Plans call for lectures, panel discussions and film series.

- A $1,000 award for an original play on the first-encounter theme. Cenotennial advertising and films are in the works.
- The University Art Museum will try to bring traveling exhibitions related to the Columbus and first encounter with the Americas.
- In addition to UCLA's efforts, local physical education teachers represent the region on the Federal Quincentennial Commission. The commission will serve as a clearinghouse for Louisiana observances next year.

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- The four voyages of Columbus marked the birth of an intercontinental Spanish empire that lasted more than three centuries. But Columbus wasn't from Spain. He was born in Genoa.

- The 1492 trip became convinced that he could reach the gold, silk and spices of the East by sailing west. Putting the money together— real venture capital— he was funded by Portugal. He was rebuffed by Portugal after one of his ships was lost. The expedition sailed around Africa's Cape of Good Hope. The voyage ended in 1493.

- After Columbus landed in the Bahamas, he claimed land for Spain. The Spanish crown then sent other ships to the New World. Columbus had lived in Constantinople and had listened to tales of a powerful tribe of native Americans— who were portrayed as exterminated by his successors.