Acadiana economy changing as Cajuns target tourism

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edge of the word and was met by a barrage of familiar sentences posted in unfamiliar accents. What are those white things sticking up out of the water? How do they catch them into those cages? How can that boat go in and out of bays of water? How do they cook a crawfish? How do you eat one? Gaudin was glad to oblige, once again, even though there was work to be done. It comes with the territory these days.

"It's good that other people want to know about us — who we are, what we do, what our heritage is," he said. "It's also good to do a little bit with the times we've got. It's a shared history that we're not going to be able to lose out here to do this full time."

Acadiana isn't isolated from the rest of the world, said Gaudin. There are tourists coming from Cabo Rojo, Quebec, even from Germany with the family there who were hosting them in their homes. Down in Houma, a farewell tour group organized by the Southeast Louisiana Alligator Club visited the area's fishing industry. Over in Lafayette, a couple from France visiting the Acadian Cultural Center were so enthralled by photographs of the Atchafalaya Basin that they hitched their picks to the museum staff and left immedi-
ately for the St. Martin Parish swamp so they could see cypress knees for themselves.

From Jennings to Banks to New Orleans, thousands of other visitors are flocking to the Bayou Country to see what makes Acadiana unique. It's a new cultural touchstone, and it's still a recent undertaking across south Louisiana's Cajun country. Here, as an economic and political awakening in the area's oil and gas industry fell in hard times in the 1980s, it was aimed at capitalizing on the revolutionary interest that people downstream were beginning to take in their region's food and culture.

Since then, the mass-market- ing of Cajun culture has become big business for Louisiana, helping boost the state's historically industry to record levels and creating markets for Louisiana goods. The effort has also boosted the state's economy, through tourism.

Act naturally

It started modestly, with a few conspicuous fisherman tossing painted "swamp art" signs to trees and utility poles along the roadsides. Meanwhile, migrated artists, such as the original Wic- kara's restaurant in Lafayette, began taking their first theme park, Dixie legs and other views on crawfish music. It grew quickly, with more and more businesses finding success in the Cajun music genre, including restaurants, hotel and entertainment businesses, which thrived between 1992 and 2000. From them, new residence, including the St. Martin Parish Swamp Art and Entertainment Center, was created in New Orleans.

Instead, the idea behind the new tourism is more like, "If you build it, they will come." The continuation popularity of the region's music, food and