CAJUN

From A-1

accordian music started, somebody led a song, and then the couples jumped up to dance.

On the wall of The Olde Liquor Store in Eunice, there's a signed picture of Chicago Bears' special-teams player Keith Ortego. "One of the best kickers in the world," says Artichon, owner of the place. It's been a tradition among the local .

Rodrigue, a counselor at a local junior high, repairs engines after getting off work. "If you can get the red Cole sign in front of his garage and the white wood-frame house through the snow, it's like the longest street in the world, you know?" he says. One day, he said, you can throw a baseball from house to house, not run a mile, a one-foot, one-foot, one-foot one. "Grand Isle — must be 125-130 mil.

"It's not like that," he'll go out of his way to help you. He's very picky about the cars he sells, and he'll fight hard to keep it. And last December, he says, "We'll never sell it, can't be done.""

Joe Borel owns his garage in Jeanerette in 1919, when Interstate was still called "Highway 80." He's 87 now, and he doesn't come out to work on engines unless the snow doesn't come.

It was close to 70 degrees last Thursday, and Borel stood next to an old snowmobile, picked up the starter and put it to his garage, taking apart an engine, talking about it.

"I'm not that interested, myself, he said. "I like baseball... the weather, the crops, not much...I don't know much more to it."

Some people in Jeanerette are talking about going into New Orleans to see the game, said Borel, but his daughter says that if it's a snow.

Borel looked toward the street and said, "I was 20 years old and he said we'd drive back in the snow, long time to stay in one place."

So, the pair are sitting in the car, waiting to pick up a lawn-mower engine. Bode him a bill for $200 and an angle-iron frame, and it goes what he used to charge years and years ago, he said, "and he's the best damn mechanic in town."

He's lived in Jeanerette his whole life, said and they've been close, kept up the Cajun traditions. "When I first went to school, I remember... he used to teach me back."

Some people have their daughter's hair to have her French in school."

But in 1172, Ada LeBouef went out with Ad and she was happy to take with her husband, James. A few days later, hunting hunters found his body floating once. The car had been shot and weighted down with a rock, a plane crash, and it was just about the biggest thing to ever hit Morgan City, said.
Leonce Songe, 79, who went to school with Dr. Dreher’s son. “But we don’t like to talk about it,” said Songe. “It’s kind of a sore spot.”

He’d rather talk about the boom years for the city, Songe explained — like the mid-30s, when they found jumbo shrimp in the Gulf of Mexico, the dry-dock industry in town during World War II, and the years after 1947, when the oil drillers moved in.

He remembered the 1927 flood, too, when “that land where the hospital stands now was under eight feet of water.”

Examiner photos by Mark Costantini

He’s lived his whole life on the same street in Morgan City, said Songe, and “just last year, at my retirement party, the city gave me a gold watch.”

Working for the city, Songe watched shopping centers come in on the outskirts of town while the business district died a little at a time. “You go downtown at 5 o’clock in the afternoon and it’s like a cemetery,” he said.

City planner Robert Lavine agreed. “About four years ago, the oil companies just cut us off … pulled out,” he said. “We’ve lost about 5,000 people since then.”

Maybe the Super Bowl will be good for Morgan City, added Lavine. “I know every room in New Orleans is filled up, and the ones in Baton Rouge are filling up. It’d be good if people came out this far to stay, especially the ones from New England … who don’t know what Louisiana swamps are. It’d be something to see.”

Across the street from City Hall, Al Aloisio sat in his barbershop, reading the paper. “Having two teams that far from this state in the Super Bowl has got to help the economy,” he said. “They ought to be booking rooms as far away as Houma.”

Fans from Chicago and New England “are just like any football fans,” said Aloisio. “It’s like when Morgan City goes up to play Lafayette or Acadiana in the fall. We go along and raise a little hell. It’s expected.”

There’s no better place to have the Super Bowl than New Orleans, Aloisio added. “It’s a party town. They enjoy themselves.

Harry Hicks served up a plate of alligator tails at the Harbor Seafood Restaurant in Stephensville and said, “Tastes just like pork loin.”

Talk’s been going around about the Super Bowl, he said — the closer it gets, the more people want to drive into New Orleans. “My boy had his first confession tonight, and on the way back from church I was listening to 87 on the dial, a talk show, and some guy from Arkansas was going on about the Super Bowl. Everybody’s pretty excited about it.

“You know, it’s not Miami this year, or the Raiders or San Francisco. It’s a whole new ball game.”

Down the road at the Amoco station, Flo Landry pointed to the Super Bowl pool she’d started with her customers, saying, “I like football, but my husband’s the one who really goes crazy for it.”

Tim Billiot and Tommy Scully came in to buy a six-pack, Billiot barefoot in the night air. “Chicago’s going to put some hurting on New England,” he said, and Scully added, “That’s it, brother.”

Esther Bergeon was sitting at a table by the dance floor at Fontenot’s, her feet tapping in time to the music.

“San Francisco?” she said. “I was there. Must be the only person ever made a U-turn on the Golden Gate Bridge.

“I’m coming in to the toll and I see them asking for that money and I say, ‘No sir, not me, I’m not going to give over a dollar just like that,’ and I turn around, zoot, and head the other way.”

Bergeon, 68, laughed out loud. Ruby LeJeune and Bernice Ander, sitting beside her, joined in. At the microphone, Fred Charlie, who recorded “Merry Christmas to a Cajun,” hit a couple of ticks on his guitar and started singing, “Mont Coeur T’Apelle.”

With the first sounds of the fiddles, LeJeune and Ander got up to dance, still chuckling about the U-turn on the Golden Gate Bridge.