High on the Hog

Acadiana residents enjoy Le Boucherie Merci

BY KEVIN THIBODEAUX
Special to The Advocate

Almost no part of the pig was spared to make boudin, cracklins and other Cajun delicacies Sunday as part of the second annual Le Boucherie Merci.

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TOBY RODRIGUEZ, Lache Pas Boucherie et Cuisine

The event was a throwback to boucheries—the communal butchering of hogs—of the past when people killed what they raised and raised what they ate. Proceeds benefited Vermilionville—a living history museum that celebrates the times and traditions of the Acadians and Native Americans.

The event was hosted by The 705, a leadership organization in Lafayette, along with the Lafayette Convention and Visitors Commission and the Vermilionville Living History Museum, which is where it was held.

Toby Rodriguez, of Lache Pas Boucherie et Cuisine, taught local chefs from restaurants like Astra Modern Market, Bread & Circus Provisions and Charley G’s, the art of the traditional boucherie.

Professionally, he said, he’s been hosting these types of demonstrations for about five years with Lache Pas Boucherie, but it’s an instinctual skill he learned from childhood, living on a farm.

“We raised all our own animals and had our own meat,” Rodriguez said. “This was just one part of it. Every farmer had to be a butcher if they wanted to eat.”

Virtually all parts of the pig were used—no organ, bone or muscle was wasted.

The pig was cut open with an incision down the middle of its stomach. The heart, liver, spleen and kidneys were scooped into a silver mixing bowl to make frassiers, or organ soup.

The stomach would be emptied, washed out and then stuffed, sewed up and cooked later.

The head and feet were boiled to make

ABOVE: John Norbert adds meat to a grinder for boudin Sunday during the second annual Le Boucherie Merci at Vermilionville in Lafayette. The event, sponsored by the young professional group The 705, brought local chefs together to learn traditional Cajun butchering and cooking techniques.

BELOW: Participants prepare to cover pork roasts with corns Sunday.

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headcheese, a kind of meat jelly.

Rodriguez oversaw the dismemberment of the pig, doing out knowledge as only someone who's been doing this their entire life could.

"One shoulder for sausage, one for boudin," he shouted.

"Use the knife and follow down the spine," he told chefs as the ribs were being cut apart from the backbone, which would be used in a backbone soup.

At the end of it all, a 250-pound pig was broken down, almost all of its body used — even the brain. Some cuts of the pig were barbecued, others were smoked and boiled, and one station had an oven-roasted stuffed ham.

But the butchering of the pig wasn't all that was taught Sunday.

Rodriguez tried to instill a reverence for the animal that provided the day's food.

A prayer was said over the animal before it was killed, its body carried in a funeral-like procession.

"We share a planet with them. It's something that we put pride into — it's our crop. It's our livelihood," he said.

But Rodriguez also said that people should have respect for the animals.

"Just because we're consuming them doesn't mean that we should have less respect for them," Rodriguez said. "It's a living being just like your mother, father or child. So their killing should be held in the same reverence as the execution of anything else."

Aimee Winnime and Alex Ray, both of New Orleans, agreed that the entire process from death to consumption on Sunday was important to witness.

"There's a huge disconnect between the food that we see in packaging and the way it's raised and the way it's butchered and processed," Winnime said.

"... And I think it's really important to see that this animal was sitting in a pen at 7 o'clock this (Sunday) morning, and to be like this is actually a really huge thing, that this is the way it used to be and now it's this mindless consumption of final product," she added.

Ray said he was glad a prayer was said at the beginning of the ceremony.

"We all were there, witnessing that, gave thanks to that animal whether we were physically saying it, but we witnessed that moment and that this animal is going to be honored today like it's not just a package of meat — it's a pig. It gave its life today for this experience," Ray said.