Acadians celebrate 200th anniversary

By ARDEN ALLEN DUFILHO
Entertainment Editor

It's been 200 years since the great migration that brought the Acadians from Nova Scotia to southwest Louisiana.

It was, however, during just the last Louisiana legislative session that the House of Representatives and Senate established the Acadian Odyssey Bicentennial Commission and approved three resolutions to recognize this significant event in Louisiana history.

See related story, page 10

One of these resolutions officially designated Aug. 15 as the "Fête des Acadiens" and provided for the annual recognition of the French Acadian cultural contributions. The other two resolutions officially recognized the Acadian flag and recognized the Spanish government's contributions in transporting and resettling Acadian exiles.

Tomorrow is the National Day of the Acadians and, locally, festivities commemorating the event are scheduled to be held at Acadian Village.

"We're the only ones in Acadians doing anything to mark the day," said A.J. LeBlanc, executive director of Acadian Village.

Festivities will begin at 8 p.m. with a French Mass in the Acadian Village chapel.

At 7 p.m., official ceremonies honoring the bicentennial and recognizing the Legislature's resolutions will begin with 100 Judicial District Judge Allen Babineaux making a short speech in French.

Live Cajun music starts at 7:30 p.m. with a dance contest beginning at 8 p.m.

The Fête will close with a 9 p.m. chariot parade along Acadian Village's bayou.

The custom of the chariot parade originated in St. Martinville in the early 1900s after a young boy returned from a trip to New Orleans. He was so impressed with the city's streetcars, he was determined to recreate one.

Chariots are replicas of streetcars made from cardboard boxes. A candle or light is placed inside and then children pull the chariots in an evening parade.

There will be no admission charge at Acadian Village for the Fête des Acadiens. However, LeBlanc has requested that participants wear blue in honor of the patron saint of the Acadians, Marie Stella.