Acadians invited 'home' to New Brunswick congress

BY CALVIN LEAR

LAFAYETTE — Acadians are being invited home.

It isn't the second expedition in history. It's the first World Acadian Congress set Aug. 12-22 in New Brunswick, Canada.

"We have not been all together since the 1755 deportation," said Wilfred Roussel, director general of the World Acadian Congress.

Roussel is touring south Louisiana promoting the congress, which will coincide with National Acadian Day, Aug. 15, in Canada.

"We'll visit museums from the small towns around Lafayette and work closely to give them information on the congress," said Roussel, a native of New Brunswick. "We want each man to get 50 of his acquaintances to come to the congress."

Roussel said the congress, which promises to be a huge party featuring Acadian culture from each of the four parts of the world, Quebec, Acadian east and west Canada, France, Texas and Louisiana, Roussel said.

Many of the program is already taking shape. In New Brunswick, which is home to 200,000 Acadians, they start with a fest with an "Acadian Frieze," a northern version of a fair do-do, according to Roussel's description.

The fest will last 24 hours and include traditional Acadian music, dance and arts as well.

There will be serious business too, Roussel said.

"We will have conferences to discuss what we can do to together to promote our causes, education, communications, and culture," he said. "Within that, the main goal is to create strong ties between all Acadians throughout the world. We can all build a better life by creating those links."

The congress will be used to plan another grand meeting in 2004 for the 400th anniversary of the settling of Acadian by France.

If the '94 congress goes really well, another might be scheduled in two or three years, perhaps in Acadiana, he said.

The expulsion of 15,000 Acadians by the British followed the Acadians' refusal to swear allegiance to the British crown.

Roussel pointed out that some 12,000 Acadians were forced out of the country on ships, and the majority settled in Louisiana. They now number 1 million. He said.

Most of the 3,000 who weren't put on ships ended up in the woods and settled north of Acadiana in what is now New Brunswick. They number 250,000. Roussel said. There are another 1 million Acadian descendents in Quebec, and some exiled Acadians resettled in France, he said.

"This is my second time to Louisiana. This is the way the people think, this kind of reunion they give and the way they share things reminds me of home," Roussel said.

His sister, Diane Roussel, accompanied her brother for the promotion.

"The resemblance in the way people talk, act, and their physical appearance is amazing. We've never met each other," she said.

She said Cajun French is "old French" that is still spoken by many people in New Brunswick.

The similarities go deeper.

The uncanny similarities is a key selling point being used by Wilfred Roussel to get Cajuns to go to the congress.

"You'll find Lelièvres, Richards, Heberts and Babin in New Brunswick," he said. "We want people here to know that they will feel very comfortable."

The similar surnames bode the idea for family reunions. Sixty-four are planned. A list of the surnames is available through the congress at 506-923-1593.