African-American Crawfish Fest gets two-year franchise

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BREAUX BRIDGE — A city traditionally segregated by color lines took a step toward conciliation at Tuesday's meeting of the City Council.

By a unanimous vote, the Council granted a two-year franchise to the African-American Crawfish Festival Association, a group comprised of black community leaders.

That means the association will be able to stage its festival at the same time the Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival Association holds its world-renowned mega-fest every year in May, as it has for 30 years.

The AACFA is led by David “Big Dave” Thibodeaux, a sergeant with the St. Martin Parish Sheriff’s Office, and Joe L. Gregory, the manager of Pecan Villa Apartments. This was their first year staging the alternative festival and also the first year the city got paid fully for its services.

As with the Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival Association Inc., which has given more than $250,000 to not-for-profit organizations over the last three decades, the AACFA donated its profits this year to benevolent organizations.

One of these is Team Louisiana, an AAU basketball league based in Parks. The team has groomed players for the pro ranks for 15 years. Chris Manuel played for the Harlem Globetrotters and is playing overseas now, as are former U.SL stars Kevin Price and Carl Boudreau.

The league received $4,300 to help defray expenses, Thibodeaux said.

An after-school tutorial program at a federally subsidized apartment complex in Breaux Bridge that tutors about 30 students twice a week received $3,000 to help pay for certified teachers and aides.

The Junior Knights of St. Peter Claver got help with traveling money to the national Quiz Bowl contest in Washington, D.C., from which they brought home the first place trophies. That organization received $2,000 from the 1999 festival.

But still the question remains on the crawfish festivals: Why two of them?

“The two festivals are an opportunity to cover an entire culture, Creole and Cajun,” Thibodeaux said. “We're really trying to do something for the community, to improve the community. We don't want to diminish anything in the past, but we've now got the stats to show we did a good job and met all the obligations.

“The plan now is to do it better in 2000. Now we have the opportunity to sit at the table and plan things that will make it more successful.”

Breaux Bridge Mayor Jack Dale Delhomme says the two festivals will co-exist for the good of “The Crawfish Capital of the World.”

At Tuesday's City Council meeting, the Creole Crawfish Festival Association was denied its request for a five-year franchise. Problems had arisen in the three years the CCFA organized the festival, but Delhomme said that organization is not in the city’s bad graces.

“As a city we have an obligation to the taxpayers to see that all the bills are paid, that everybody works with the city to create a good environment,” he said Wednesday the day after the City Council's decision. “This year everyone was on the same wavelength and that's why they were so successful.”

Delhomme said this year's organizers of the AACFA worked with the city to ensure that ordinances were followed.