ST. MARTINVILLE — Roy Blanchard catches crawfish the old-fashioned way. In the basin.
That's the Atchafalaya Basin, where the men are men and the crawfish hang out beneath 12 feet of cool, flowing water.
On top of the water, Blanchard has made his living for 28 years.
Crawfish farming has grown to the point where there's a better-than-even chance that the chunky part of your etouffee came from a pond, not a swamp.
By 1989, according to numbers from the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, the state boasted 130,000 acres of crawfish ponds.
That was also the first year that crawfish were graded according to how many go into a pound.
Pond-farming has its advantages, the same advantages that raising beef cattle has over hunting for wild game. Except, maybe, for control over the finished product.
Blanchard says the water in crawfish ponds may be only 3 feet deep. So even when the crawfish are at rock bottom, they're in water that the sun has warmed. And in warmer water, the shells turn red and get hard faster.
But Blanchard says that the Atchafalaya breeds a different sort of crawfish.
"You're fishing in 8, 10, 12 feet of water," he said. "The crawfish stays a pretty pink color."
Blanchard learned the tricks of the trade from his father, who pried a different trade — carpent