Bob's Shell Beach Marina, Assumption could be a set for Cajun-ized Cheers

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Lake Verret was in a dismal mood. Choppy waves hurtled across the lake's surface. Mist swirled up from the water and joined the fog that blocked vision. Icy rain beat against the windows of the bar.

Along the shore at Shell Beach (with no shells apparent), moss-draped cypress trees stood their ground against the onslaught of winter, looking like picture postcards Yankee visitors love to buy and send home.

When you work in a bar that dangles over Lake Verret, does the scenery become boring? Just another cypress tree? Just another swag of Spanish moss?

“I love it!” exclaimed Barbara Cedotal, her eyes lighting up as she sat on a stool behind the bar at Bob's Shell Beach Marina. “I wouldn't move away from it for anything in the world.”

She's lived in Pierre Part all her life, has worked as a waitress at the combination grocery store, bait store and bar for the past 2 1/2 years. Before that, she worked next door at the old store, which was closed when the new one was built.

Everybody sitting at the bar is a regular. One's retired. A railroad man. A guitar picker, tagged by the other regulars, having no regular job. A Borden's employee and his wife who is a waitress at Lafitte's Landing. It's a Cheers in Cajun country!

Men talk about fishing and gator hunting, basketball and, of course, the weather. And crawfish. A woman sits down with a bag of potatoes and begins peeling them into a cooking pot.

"That's supper," Cedotal said. "Corned beef with cabbage and buttered potatoes. When we cook, whoever's here eats."

There's a dance floor in the next room. Paintings of swamp scenes hang on the walls. Antique whiskey decanters are displayed in glass-fronted cabinets. For lazy fishermen, there's a hole in the floor. Somebody once caught a fish that was too big to pull through the hole.

Lake Verret is great for catching bream, bass and sac-a-lait, Cedotal said. "Business is slow in winter, though."

The bait shop draws customers who live and breathe fishing. "We boil crawfish in the summer. It's the best you'll find anywhere," she said. "And we have bands on weekends in the summer."

During Mardi Gras week visitors from California and Canada and parts between drifted into the bar, just taking in the scenic sights of South Louisiana on their way to New Orleans.

Cedotal enjoys meeting people. When she sees new faces, she wants to know where they're from and what they're doing in the area. She's quiet, friendly in a distant way. She said she quit school in eighth grade to help out at home. "My parents were in fishing and grinding (at the sugar house)." She's a petite, youthful mother of a 23-year-old son and a 19-year-old daughter. And she's a grandmother.

Working long hours as a waitress is tiring, she said. "I'm so worn out when I get home at night I just take a bath and go to sleep." No time for hobbies or outside activities. No doubt she likes to fish, though, living as she does in the heart of fisherman's paradise?

"I don't like to sit with a pole," she said with a quick shake of her head. "Bob fishes off the back porch," which overhangs the lake.

Bob Fleming leases the property and runs the store.

"They've started catching crawfish already," Fleming said. "The main topic of conversation is what the crawfish are doing. It's the beginning of the season, but the cold may slow them down."

He sells boiled crawfish by the sack and tells of a man in Baton Rouge who boils thousands of pounds of crawfish for sale but goes to Fleming when he wants boiled crawfish for himself.

Fleming was employed in the oil industry 8-10 years ago, hails from Alabama originally, said he has lived on the lake for 12 years.

"Fishing is real lively down here," he said. "So are the Saturday night dances and fights, although all the fighters have moved out."

On a cold day in February, nobody felt much like fighting. It took too much energy just to bundle up and keep warm.

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