At the dawn of a new century, Cajun culture is at a turning point.

In the past 100 years it has stubbornly survived the rush of modernization and the ham-handed efforts of bureaucrats who have tried alternately to suppress and encourage the Cajun dialect of French — perhaps the most unifying characteristic of the people who settled in Louisiana in the mid-1700s. Cajun cooking is wildly popular. Cajun music continues to pack dance halls. And the latest effort at nurturing the language seems to be taking hold. But amid the vibrant burst of cultural pride there are worries about just how long the distinctive old ways can survive the pressures of the modern world.

Day 1 stories and photos start on page 3

ACADIANA CALLING (DAY 1)
Marketing the Cajun experience has become big business, filling the area as accurately shot in the arm after the devastating oil bust of the '80s. Day 7 stories start on page 11

VIVE LE FRANÇAIS (DAY 1)
French language, traditionally the single most important survival characteristic of Cajuns, is said to be in imminent danger of being lost. Day 5 stories start on page 10

STORIES BY Ron Thibodeaux and Angela Rozas Sla"writers • PHOTOS BY Ted Jackson stattphotographer
EDITH GARLAN DUPRE LIBRARY UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA AT LAFAYETTE LAFAYETTE, LA 70504

Just a little something I learned from my father," Roy Patin explains as he sets up a lighted lantern on a branch amidst the cypress trees of Lake Fausse Pointe. He uses the light to find his way back to his starting point after checking his long line of baited hooks while fishing at night. Patin and his wife, Kathy, live on a houseboat just minutes away. Married under the Evangeline Oak in St. Martinville, they told they cherish their traditional Cajun life: "You lose track of time and the day out here," Roy Patin says. "That's total freedom. Nobody bothering you. So peaceful."

At dawn, Dewey Patin, 92, wades into the shallow water of Lake Fausse Pointe, his eyes scanning the banks for signs of fish. "The world may have changed around him, but time might as well be standing still for Dewey Patin, who spends nearly every day fishing or hunting. In 2001, his routine hasn't much different than it was in 1921. That suits him fine."

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