Cajun humor: State senator among joke tellers competing for prizes

By PAUL KEDINGER
Editor

Armed with several Cajun-flavored stories he has personally experienced and riddles shared by his wife, Susan, Senator John Saunders competed with 11 other Cajun humorists in the second annual Cajun Joke-Telling Contest set last night at the Quality Inn in Opelousas.

After a social hour and banquet, judges will determine the winner of an International Cajun Joke-Telling Champion in both the English- and French-speaking categories.

When contacted by The Gazette Tuesday afternoon in Baton Rouge, the local lawmaker even asked if we had a joke we could share — a mark of a good humorist: always searching for a better tale to tell.

"You only have 10 minutes," Saunders said about the contest rules, "That should be enough time for three full stories and a few riddles."

He explained he was keeping his repertory of jokes flexible, because he might have to suddenly substitute an alternate joke or tale before his turn on stage.

The Ville Platte attorney-legislator admitted that he tried to convince his law partner, John Larry Viddine, to enter the contest. "But we couldn’t make him do it," revealed Saunders.

During the telephone interview, the state senator "tested" one of his favorite personal experience stories when legislators were courting the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Cultural Preserve for Eunice. Because we don’t want to spoil the punch line, let us suffice to say it involves boyhood dreams of pirates.

Others who competed for the top joke-telling honor last night included:

- A.J. Smith of Lake Charles, last year’s first runner-up.
- Athalie Dupuy of Opelousas, a Ville Platte native and Daily World columnist.
- Col. Ricky L. Hulon of Basile, an auctioneer.
- Leslie Tassin of Baton Rouge, assistant secretary for the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism and head of the Department of Cultural Development.
- Thelma J. Daigle of Scott, volunteer tour guide with 25 years of joke-telling experience.
- Ed Taylor of Baton Rouge with 20 years of experience.
- Joe Lillie of Lafayette, a Breaux Bridge native and electrical engineer.
- Allen Simon of Maurice, a native of Vermilion Parish.
- Helen A. Recourt of Rayne, mother of seven and area entertainer.
- Larry Tromblay, retired Opelousas Police Department captain.
- John Hess of Carencro, an oilfield employee with five years experience telling Cajun stories.

The contest was sponsored by the Opelousas-St. Landry Chamber of Commerce and the Acadiana Profile Magazine.