PROTEST ALCOHOL SALES

Churches Take Stand Against Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival

BREAUX BRIDGE — The hugely popular Crawfish Festival here has come under renewed attack, this time from the local churches.

Citing instances of public drunkenness, vandalism, theft and inadequate crowd control, representatives of churches in Breaux Bridge say they will attempt to abolish the biennial Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival.

This year’s festival drew an estimated crowd of more than 150,000 persons who came from all over the nation to take part in the crawfish fete. The 1984 festival, which will coincide with the World’s Fair in New Orleans, is expected to attract even larger crowds.

Clifford Hebert of the St. Bernard Church Parish council says the church council and two Breaux Bridge Baptist churches will oppose future festivals.

“We feel we can’t adequately accommodate the number of people that are attending the Crawfish Festival,” explained Hebert.

He said a major concern of the churches is the sale of alcohol on the church grounds.

“We (St. Bernard Church) gave permission for the street fair, but we did not give permission for the sale of alcohol on the church grounds. But we discovered there were people selling alcohol anyway. We won’t permit this to happen again,” Hebert said.

Breaux Bridge religious leaders aren’t the only ones expressing concern over the sometimes rowdy festival activities. In a recent City Council meeting, Breaux Bridge resident W.O. Clause suggested residents of Breaux Bridge be allowed to choose whether to continue to sponsor the festival by way of referendum.

Clause said he believes the peddlers who converge on the festival to hawk their goods are poorly regulated and supervised. He noted a number of persons sold alcohol during this year’s festival without permission from the City Council.

“I’m sure these people didn’t buy licenses and the city didn’t collect any sales tax,” said Clause. “Our city is too nice a place to have people come here and destroy.”

Rodney Broussard, another resident, said his major concern is inadequate police protection during the festival. Broussard said he surprised someone in his home in an attempted burglary during the festival.

After calling the police, Broussard said it was well over 30 minutes before an officer arrived to investigate. “Thank God there were no fires during the festival because the fire department wouldn’t have been able to get to them,” said Broussard.

Councilman Johnny Martin agreed he would like to put the Crawfish Festival question before the voters so that the people of Breaux Bridge could make the decision on whether to continue the festival.

“For two days these people (festival-goers) take over Breaux Bridge,” said Martin. “We need to do something.”

Councilman Anthony Hebert agreed the festival is getting out of hand, but does not think a referendum is the answer. The councilman said he believes some of the problems can be solved by the City Council in cooperation with the police and fire chiefs — if tackled well before the festival opens.

“We go through this every year,” he said. “We wait until the last minute to try to get anything done.”

Mayor Vance Theriot said he believes that by working together, the City Council and the churches can find a solution to the Crawfish Festival problems.

“I have mixed feelings about this,” said Theriot. “We get some extremely fine people but we also get some people who do not respect the rights of others.”

Theriot has appointed a committee to seek solutions to the Crawfish Festival problems.