Crawfish taking over Cajundome for weekend

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LAFAYETTE — The Lafayette Cajundome has become the focal point this weekend for those who like to raise crawfish, eat crawfish, sell crawfish or cook crawfish.

The annual International Crawfish Tasting & Trade Show got under way Friday with a series of seminars to present the latest information in the industry.

The show, sponsored by the Louisiana Crawfish Farmers Association, is open to the public this weekend with numerous exhibits displaying everything needed in the industry, from crawfish feed to processing machinery.

One of the newest innovations on display is an automatic crawfish peeler. The device, made by Duzitall Equipment Corp. of Baton Rouge, peels 40 crawfish a minute, according to Margaret Cowsar, the corporation secretary.

It uses a blast of air to separate the shell from the meat.

But don’t expect this labor-saver to be available at restaurants for diners too lazy to peel their own crawfish. It’s designed for companies to speed up bulk processing, Cowsar said.

A crab peeler is on the drawing board, she said.

Just a few booths over from the peeling machine is Original Cajun Beer. It’s brewed in Paw Paw, Mich., but a company representative said the man who came up with the idea is from Louisiana.

A leaflet being distributed tells prospective drinkers that “For years you couldn’t walk into a Cajun tavern and order beer without getting a dish of spicy hot Cajun peppers on the side.”

The brochure claims the beer has “enough spice to keep a mouth tingling for up to 30 seconds with that Cajun zest for life. This is no me-too brew.”

The company had several cases of the beer, but none available for sampling.

At one of the seminars, the executive chef for the Grand Bay Hotel of Miami, Fla., said he prefers the taste of crawfish over lobster and shrimp.

“Crawfish has one of the cleanest tastes,” said Katsuo “Suki” Sugiura.

He said he uses crawfish in a wide variety of dishes to please the international clientele at the five-star hotel.

He buys crawfish from Louisiana and California, he said.

Sugiura left Japan in the early 1970s and cooked in several countries, including Finland and England, before coming to the U.S.

He said he uses only fresh crawfish, and any of the meat that hasn’t been used in two days is hickory-smoked.

At the opening ceremony of the show, Lt. Gov. Paul Hardy said the Louisiana crawfish industry provides 15,000 jobs in Louisiana with an economic impact of $135 million. Last year, he said, the state produced 100 million pounds of crawfish.

The popularity of crawfish is part of the Cajun craze that’s swept the nation, he said.