new generation explores its heritage amid a cultural awakening

By Ron Todocanuck

KNOXVILLE — It's a long walk from the parking lot at the end of Kinnickinner Street, and the scent of sweetly bay underfoot hangs heavy in the Cajun protec
ture because yesterday it rained until the dogs chased standing up.
Past the gates of the 16th an
nual World Championship Craw
dish Roundup, where the
area is a moreentries mixed of butter, tomato, salt, and crawfish, Danielle Girriffon has been all morning slicing the roux that will bury 16
pounds of crawfish at 2 p.m. today just one more food
for this family.

Cajun, originally meaning a group of people from the south of France, known to be a
"national" as well, was birthed in the 1840s by a group of people from Louisiana who
were forced to leave their homes due to a severe flood. This group of people was known as the Cajuns.

Cajun singer, songwriter and guitarist D.L. Menard shares a tip on playing guitar with his grandson, 16-year-old Brandin Menard. "I try to play the songs that are the foundation of the French music. But outside of the living time capsule of the deep south, the commercial op
fertesy of the potential of the French language needs to be preserved."

"There's a feeling every weekend somewhere in Acadiana, as long as there's a good time, there's a band playing. Cajun music is a cornerstone of American culture, whether it's in the bayous or the streets of New Orleans."

"From Manhattan to San Francisco, what the majority of people don't realize is that the culture they were celebrating at Mardi Gras, in fact, was being celebrated by Acadians in the French language and culture."

"In the 1930s, the rapidly ligh
tening Cajun population had been forced to leave their homes in search of work. The students were not allowed to speak the French they knew from home. Those who did were punished and ostracized."

"The Cajuns began building roads like the main
town villages to some
other and the rest of the state. They were a group of people who were forced to leave their homes due to a severe flood. This group of people was known as the Cajuns."

"And the Cajuns have been here for generations, passing down their language and culture to the next generation."

WHAT DEFINES A CAJUN?
After 500 years, Acadians in many ways resemble their Cajun roots. Their culture is not just by the music, though much of it is. It's also a way of life, a way of cooking, a way of speaking. Their language is still spoken today, though it's not as widely used as it once was. In Louisiana, there are still communities where Cajun is the only language spoken."

GOOD TIMES, GOOD EATS
There's no better way to experience Cajun culture than to taste the food. Cajun cuisine is known for its rich flavors, from spicy crawfish etouffee to gumbo. There are also traditional dishes like jambalaya and red beans and rice. Cajun bakeries and restaurants serve up delicious pastries and desserts."

FIGHTING WORDS
In Louisiana, a soft-spoken term of endearment can often turn into a verbal fight. "Fighting words" are used to express anger or frustration. It's a unique aspect of Cajun culture that is often misunderstood by outsiders."