Wanda LeBlanc tends to the flowers in the Old Catholic Cemetery.

Day Lily Festival celebrates history of iris production

Bernard Chaillot

ABBEVILLE — Shannon Zaunbrecher, 32, an award-winning 4-H agent with the LSU AgCenter, was elbow deep on April 22 in ham and cheese po'boys — more than 300 of them.

"Junior leaders are delivering them all over the parish today, to raise money for the Short Course competition June 17-20 at LSU in Baton Rouge," she said, pulling off her apron. The Cooperative Extension Service agent said students here are some of the top 4-H competitors in the state each year.

More than 60 students from the eighth through 12th grades will take part in the Short Course contest, an annual competition that tests 4-H program knowledge by students statewide. These students are the future of agriculture in the parish, an area known for rice farming and cattle.

Fellow agent Stuart Gauthier, a horticulturist, was busy preparing for the city's second annual Day Lily Festival. "The first festival last year was such a success that we have to come up with something to top it," he said.

Other annual parish festivals include the Louisiana Cattle Festival in September, the Giant Omelette Celebration the first full weekend in November and the recent Carousel of Arts held each April. Sponsered by the Main Street program, the Greater Abbeville-Vermilion Chamber of Commerce and the Abbeville Garden Club, the Day Lily Festival celebrates the city's long history of iris production by an array of private and commercial growers. Rare hybrids and a popular plant swap are part of the lineup.

Many home and garden-related vendors will set up booths in the historic square shaded by century-old live oaks, their sweeping branches covered with resurrection vine. Varieties of hard-to-find native Louisiana Red irises also may be available.

Gauthier met at noon at The Coffee Tavern downtown with Main Street Manager Charlene Beckett and Chamber and Tourism Commission Director Rebecca Shirley.

Gauthier, 35, said on this day that he was fielding calls about fig trees, camelias and hydrangeas, among many other plants and trees that traditionally do well in the rich coastal soil of Vermilion Parish.