Fait à la Main keeps culture at home

Once upon a time, the best way to learn about Louisiana was to leave Louisiana. Sure, you could always walk up to some old-timer's door and say "I need to know who you are, what you do and can you teach me?"

Chances are you'll have a new friend for life. But any organized classes on Cajun and Creole culture have usually been in remote places, like Seattle and Vienna, Va.

In fact, the Augusta Heritage Center of Davis & Elkins College in West Virginia is in the midst of its annual Cajun/Creole Week. Campers pay $350 and $280 for room and board to experience seven days of music, dance, cooking and history lessons.

Instructors are masters who might be your next door neighbor: Marc and Ann Savoy (Eunice), Paul Daigle (Church Point), D'Alma Garnier (Lafayette), Carol and Gerald Trahan (Lafayette), Mitch Reed (Lafayette), Mona Wilson (Cade), Larry Miller (Iota) and many others.

Cajun/Creole Week at Augusta is another testament to the respect and fascination others have with our culture. But what's wrong with that picture?

Shouldn't people learn Cajun and Creole culture here instead of the masters being shipped to the mountains thousands of miles away?

Thanks to Louisiana Folk Roots, a nonprofit cultural preservation group based in Breaux Bridge, people no longer have to fly to Minnesota to learn from an accordion legend who lives in Mamou. LFR has completed two, highly-successful Dewey Balfa Cajun and Creole Heritage Weeks at Lake Fausse State Park near St. Martinville.

LFR has already kicked off another of its Fait à la Main (handmade) workshops, a series of music, crafts, language and culture lessons. These classes are designed specifically for local participation in native culture.

In July, chef Pat Mould held Cajun and Creole cooking classes that covered everything from salads and herbs to smoked duck and shrimp tasso pasta. Musicians jammed with Balfa Toujours and the Magnolia Sisters during "Rue des Artistes," the Breaux Bridge Art Guild's monthly event on the streets of downtown Breaux Bridge. The event continues on the third Saturday of each month.

Below is a list of upcoming Fait à la Main events. If you've always wanted to learn the accordion, write French or dance the jitterbug, what are you waiting for?

- Debbie Clifton conducts a class for Cajun and Creole speakers who would like to learn to read and write the language.
- Jodi Hebert and Don Brasseaux focus on the Cajun jitterbug. Prior dance experience is not required.
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For more information on all the LFR activities, call (337) 332-0967 or visit www.lafolkroots.org.

Have fun.

(Listen to Herman Fuselier's radio show at 7:30 p.m. Saturday on KRVS 88.7 FM.)