A strong breeze rolls off of Bayou Teche and through Magnolia Park in St. Martinville. It's a sunny Sunday afternoon, perfect weather for La Grande Boucheur des Cajuns.

The pink cheeks of children are painted with butterflies, rainbows and clouds. The adults wear sunglasses and grip plastic cups and beer cans. Most of them are decked out in Mardi Gras beads, some the size of walnuts.

Under one of the oaks, there's a large circular trampoline frame wrapped with wire. Next to it are four caged roosters. They scratch at the leaves under their feet and peck at the ground. Behind the gathering crowd, a band sets up on a flatbed trailer.

A heavy man in green shorts, a matching T-shirt and a worn Adidas sun visor parts the crowd. He cradles a rooster with his right arm and strokes the bird's feathers with his free hand. Behind him a smaller man holds another rooster, stroking it the same way. He's dressed in denim, a leather hat and cowboy boots. The roosters have small gloves, a red pair and a yellow pair, strapped to their spurs with rubber bands.

Inside the ring, the man in denim scratches out two lines in the grass with the heel of his boot. Both men face one another. They extend the birds at arm's length — close enough that the birds could kiss — and then quickly bring them back to their chests. They do this several times, letting each bird get a good look at its opponent.

They place the roosters on the ground behind the lines and let them loose. The roosters flare their hackles (the neck feathers), spread their wings and go at each other, striking with their beaks and their miniature boxing gloves.

Donnie Landry has brought his wife and two young children out to the park to enjoy the festivities. He isn't a cockfighter. He's a 37-year-old diesel mechanic, a slender man with blond hair and a thin goatee, wearing a pair of shades and a baseball cap. He hoists his 1-year-old son onto his shoulder to see the action.

"You see 'em?" he asks. The child nods his head.

Landry says to no one in particular, "That bird's got a lot of heart."

What does that mean, for a chicken to have heart?

Landry says, "They stand their ground. They won't give up. If they go down, they come back up. As long as they're alive, they'll keep fighting."

Cockfighters call it gameness. It's a gamecock's ability to remain standing and fight, even until the bitter end. A cock that shows gameness and dies first in a fight can still be declared the winner.

"It's just like boxing," Landry says. "To see which one is the strongest, like racing or kickboxing. You don't want to be in it, but you love to see the action."

From the flatbed trailer, Lemmy Kravitz sings over the P.A. system, "Are You Gonna Go My Way."

A bald man yells, "C'mon, Red! C'mon, Big Boy!"

A young man yells, "Put him in the gumbo!"

Another man yells, "C'mon, Red! Show him your heart!"

After three fights with three rounds apiece, the crowd moves on to the rest of the day's events — the butchering of a pig, a greased pig chase and the Squeal Like a Pig contest. The bass player on the flatbed trailer plays the bass line of Black Sabbath's "N.I.B."

Landry isn't aware of the farm bill recently passed by the U.S. Congress. If President George W. Bush signs the bill into law, it will increase subsidy programs and spending for conservation programs, while restricting how much money a farmer can receive. Part of the bill will make transporting fighting roosters across state lines a felony.

"You know how long this has been going on?" Landry says. "This is one of the first forms of entertainment they ever had."

Continued on Page 24
The law firm of Perrin, Landry, deLaunay, Dartez & Ouellet held a pre-Mardi Gras social at the new home of Scott and Rachel Dartez on Silverthorne Drive in Maurice. Attendees included the principals of the firm and their wives: Warren and Mary Perrin, Don and Rebecca Landry, Gerald and Michelle deLaunay, Scott and Rachel Dartez and Jean and Rebecca Ouellet.

Special guests included the office staff: Brenda Bourque, Jamie Rees, Corree Perrin, Sharon Whaley, Darylin Barousse, Kathy Thibodaux, Sharon Newman, Shelley Reed and Dawn Johnson. Also attending were Andy Perrin and Jeb Johnson.

The gathering recognized the law firm’s contributions to the celebration of Mardi Gras in Louisiana, including Donald D. Landry, encom for the Krewe of Oberon and member of the Board of Directors of the Krewe of Gabriel and of the Krewe of Bonaparte. Gerald DeLaunay, member of the New Orleans Krewe of Bacchus for the last 12 years. Warren A. Perrin, who reigned as King Xanadu 2000; and Rebecca Landry, captain of the ball of the Krewe of Xanadu.

A jazz-inspired evening was held by IBERIA BANK to benefit the Episcopal School of Acadiana, with the world-renowned Judy Carmichael Jazz Trio performing in the ESA Chapel for an enthusiastic audience. Dinner with Carmichael and her trio followed the performance at the home of Laura and Daryl Byrd.

Guests were treated to a fabulous feast prepared by MaMa’s Kitchen of New Roads. The party dined on Oysters Orleans, Bleu Cheese and Slab Guava over Toast Rounds, Turtle Soup au Sherry and Lobster Bisque. The elaborate menu also included Butter-Basted Oysters, Mini-Frenched Lamb Chops, New Orleans Style Barbeque Shrimp and Oven-Roasted Duckling, served with a Portabella, Oyster, Mushroom, Cognac and Orange Demiglace. A divine assortment of desserts — including fresh strawberries dipped in white chocolate, strawberry cream cheese crepes with Chantilly Cream and beignets served with café au lait — finished the meal.

Enjoying the evening were Mr. and Mrs. Bob Anderson, Teeta and Richard Chappuis, Joyce Bonin, Martha Brown, Colleen and John Chappuis, Dr. Patricia Cran, Dr. Ronald Daigle Jr., Joanie Hill, Joel Gooch, Jane and Greg Guidry, Denbo and Barbara Montgomery, Gina and Keith Short, Jeannie and Pete Rush, Andrea and James Pate, Judy and Robbie Mahtook, Jewell and Rob Lowe and Kathy Ashworth and Larry Sides.

The Kiwanis Club of Acadiana really bowled everyone over at the first-ever Division 7 Bowling Tournament, held at Lafayette Lanes in honor of the official visit of Jacob “Dr. Jay” and Fran Valletungo. Valletungo is governor of the Louisiana Mississippi West Tennessee District of Kiwanis International.

Kiwanians of Acadiana members Sean Landry, Scott Moss, David Gleason and Mike Latiolais captured the team high series trophy. Landry led the individual honors with the highest individual series score and Gleason took home the highest single game honors.

The Kiwanis Club of Broussard/Youngsville, led by President Judy Scheps, “out-cheered, out-high-fived and out-back-patted” all other teams to take home the Best Team Spirit Award. Team members included Brady Mouton, Jan Latiolais, Jennifer Carriere and Don Paul.

But Division 7 Lt. Gov. Marti Harrell, host of the event, saw it that just about everyone was a winner. The Kiwanis Club of Eunice was tapped as the Best Looking Team, with members Robert Turk, Steve Moosa, Randal Vige and President Chad Fontenot sporting their new club T-shirts. Taking the honors for bringing the “most competitive spirit” to the tourney was the Kiwanis Club of Crowley’s team, including Miles Frank, Ira Thomas, Steve Self and President Mark Broussard.

Past Lt. Gov. Melanie Martin (who captured the “crying towel” for bowling the lowest individual series score) and Lt. Gov. Elect Dwight Manuel bowled with Gov. and Mrs. Vallerungo on their team.

Several members of the Kiwanis Club of Acadiana came out to cheer on their team and meet the governor, including Jill LeBlanc, Greg Broussard, Rick Latiolais, C.B, Talley, Janice Mose, Marla and Kyle Moore and Don Stanfield.

“A great time was had by all,” says Harrell. “In fact, the teams from Crowley, Eunice and Broussard/Youngsville have already called for a rematch!”

A dinner party in the Whittington Drive home of Mr. and Mrs. William Doucet helped launch the Carnival season for the court of King Triton XXIII, Lenwood Meaux of Kaplan.

Attending as honored guests were His Majesty and his wife, Ann Claire Meaux, as well as Klebe Meaux and Steven Cistoio, also of Kaplan, and Mr. and Mrs. David Lewis of Bay City, Texas.

Want The Shadow to highlight your next celebration? Call 237-3560, ext. 114, or e-mail theshadow@timesofacadiana.com.

10. Gina Calogero (left) and Dr. Patricia Cran visit at the Byrd social.
11. Judy and Robbie Mahtook at the Byrd home for the dinner honoring Judy Carmichael.
12. Winners are the members of the Kiwanis Club of Acadiana’s bowling team, posing with the visiting district governor (from left): Scott Moss, Sean Landry, Gov. Jay Valletungo, Mike Latiolais and David Gleason.
13. Visiting with Gov. Jay Valletungo (center) are members of the Kiwanis Club of Eunice team (from left): Robert Turk, Chad Fontenot, Randal Vige and Steve Moosa.
15. Ann Claire Meaux (left) and His Majesty, King Triton XXIII, Lenwood Meaux, are welcomed by hosts Susan Doucet.
16. Enjoying the Carnival social are (from left) Bill Doucet, Susan Doucet, Ann Claire Meaux and Lenwood Meaux.
17. Ready for a Carnival feast are (from left) Ann Claire Meaux, Steven Cistoio, Lenwood Meaux, Tricia Lewis, David Lewis and Klebe Meaux.
At La Grande Boucherie des Cajuns in St. Martinville, spectators watch two roosters spar.
Nolan Dugas says of the pending federal legislation, "They're not going to stop us."

Cockfighting is as old as Methuselah. Page Smith and Charles Daniel write in *The Chicken Book* that cockfighting is "the oldest sport known to man."

"The modern game of cockfighting is believed to be descended from the Indian red jungle fowl. From ancient India the species spread to Persia and China. It was introduced into Greece around the sixth century A.D. The ancient Greeks fought and used cockfighting for religious purposes. Young men were required to attend the fights to learn about courage and fortitude."

In 186 A.D., St. Augustine wrote about a cockfight in *De Oratore*. He wondered why the birds fought with one another and why humans were so fascinated with the spectacle. He was struggling with the existence of evil in a world ruled by a loving God. He concluded that without evil, there would be no good in the world, that the ugly confirms the beauty in our lives.

In England, under the reign of King Henry VIII, cockfighting flourished. It was primarily a rich man's sport. The high entry fees usually kept the common man from entering the cocks, but it was the poor who cared for the birds. In 1834, Parliament declared cockfighting illegal. Smith and Daniel write, "In the long run it made little difference. The world did not seem to improve very much and cockfighting went on rather as before. In England, as elsewhere, it was to prove ineradicable."

Cockfighting is still common in France, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Belgium, Spain, Haiti, Italy, and Southeast Asia, where the sport holds religious and cultural overtones. Today, the Philippines is considered the cockfighting capital of the world. Sunset, north of Lafayette, is considered the cockfighting capital of the nation.

In the United States, cockfighting was widespread throughout the South by the early 1700s. There was a new justification of the sport that the British hadn't considered — its democracy. Smith and Daniel write, "The wealthy sportsman who wished to participate did so on the terms of the common man, the small hardscrabble farmer, the rancher of modest means, the cowboy or hired hand, the drifter, the mechanic."

It's rumored that President George Washington, Andrew Jackson, and Thomas Jefferson raised game fowl and that President Abraham Lincoln's nickname of "Honest Abe" came from his fairness as a referee of cockfights.

In the United States, cockfighting is legal only in Louisiana, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. Despite the sport being an illegal activity virtually everywhere, Daniel and Page note that cockfighting is "almost everywhere forbidden and almost everywhere practiced."

On Feb. 13, the U.S. Senate passed a farm bill that in part prohibits the transportation of fighting roosters across state lines. The House passed its version of the bill last year. Federal law already prohibits the shipping of animals for fighting purposes, but birds can still be shipped to Louisiana, Oklahoma, and New Mexico, where cockfighting is still legal; and cockfighters in the legal states can ship their birds out of their state to other parts of the world. If the farm bill is signed into law, it will make it a felony to transport fighting fowl across state lines, even to the states where it's still legal.

State Cockfighting Laws

*Cockfighting is legal only in Louisiana, New Mexico and Oklahoma.*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Felony or Misdemeanor</th>
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<th>Being a Spectator at a Cockfight</th>
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Cockfighting is illegal in the District of Columbia. It is a felony to hold a cockfight or possess a fighting rooster, but it is a misdemeanor to be a spectator at a cockfight. Cockfighters are still legal in the U.S. Territories of American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

Source: Humane Society of the United States

Nolan Dugas is a cockfighter who isn't worried about the pending federal legislation.

"They're not going to stop us," he says. "They've been trying for years and years."

Cockfighting is in Dugas' blood. His father fought roosters and he's been doing it for as long as he can remember.

At age 65, he's a grandfather, with three grown children and three grandchildren. He worked for Evangeline Maid Bred for 18 years before retiring. Then he worked another 20 years for Community Coffee Company before retiring a second time. These days, he only works for his chickens.
Dugas is a man of few words, with a penetrating stare and a thick Cajun accent. Dressed in a black hat and flannel shirt, he yells to be heard over the 25 cocks crowing like it's dawn in his backyard. The roosters are separated in individual cages. They strut around in circles, each one acting as if it is the rightful ruler of the yard.

Dugas spends about $300 a month keeping the birds healthy. He has to make sure that their cages are mended and that the birds are well fed. He feeds them vitamins, deworming medication and "the best food on the market" - a diet of corn, wheat, barley and oats. He says, "A rooster will only give you in the pit what you give him at home."

The money he spends isn't an investment, though. It's just an expenditure of his hobby. He's lucky if he breaks even in the long run and doesn't mind losing the money. The enjoyment he gets out of raising, training and fighting the roosters is compensation for the financial loss.

He knows that there are those object to his hobby, but "I don't have nothing to hide. Maybe they just think it's cruel." He says cockfighting is like fishing or hunting and it's "no crueler than killing a cow with a shovel."

Like other cockfighters, Dugas enjoys "testing" his roosters with other game fowl breeders. He likes to go on Sunday afternoons. On a Friday or Saturday night there could be as many as 300 to 400 people packed into one cockpit. Dugas tries to ignore the nights like that.

He says, "It's too much."

On the first Sunday afternoon of Lent, it already feels like spring. Inside the M&M Cockpit, a gray metal building outside of Rayne, a couple dozen men - white, black and Hispanic - stand around sipping beer and soft drinks at the bar just inside the front door.

"We're all color-blind out here," Dugas says. "We come to fight our roosters."

There are four large cockpits in Louisiana - the Sunset Recreation Club, the Hickory Recreation Club in Pearl River, the Bayou Club in Vinton and Piney Woods in Vivian. It's not uncommon for some 700 people to be present for a fight at the larger pits. There are about a dozen more medium-sized pits and at least 60 community cockpits throughout Louisiana. The M&M is one of the smaller community pits.

The front and back doors are open and a breeze slips through and stirs the air under the fluorescent lights. Hand-lettered signs on the walls are reminders that any bird found drugged with stimulants or poison on its spurs will be disqualified without exception.

Other signs state that no one under 21 years of age is allowed to purchase alcohol. A few boys hover around the men, being seen and not heard. They're waiting to help ready the birds for the fight.

The cockpit is in the larger room through a doorway in the bar. It's an octagon platform walled in with wire from its base to the ceiling. Inside the pit are two smaller cages with ropes attached to the top, extending to pulleys on the ceiling. Instead of pitting the roosters against one another with handlers, the birds are dropped inside the smaller cages. A rope from the side of the pit lifts the two cages into the air and the birds are left facing one another. A photography darkroom timer is strapped to the wire wall of the pit. There are two small sinks with faucets at both ends of the pit. Six levels of painted gray plywood bleachers circle the cockpit.

Derbies are usually larger weekend events. In a four-cock derby, a cockfighter pays an entry fee to fight four of his cocks. He could pay anywhere from $100 to $600 in entry fees to enter them. It's winner take-all and if there's a tie, the pot is split in half between the two winning cockfighters.

Dugas has brought only one rooster with him this afternoon. The only fighting it has done is in Dugas' backyard. It's part of conditioning the cock for the pit. During these practice bouts, the bird's spurs are covered with the tiny gloves that resemble boxing gloves. The birds spar without inflicting severe damage to one another.

Asked if he thinks his bird will win, Dugas says, "If I didn't think he would win, I wouldn't have fed him like I did for the last year and a half."

Dugas removes his rooster from a wooden box and weighs it on a scale. A man with a baseball cap and a t-shirt tucked into his blue jeans looks to see how much the bird weighs. On his shirt is an image of Osama bin Laden with crosshairs on his forehead. He reads, "You can run but you can't hide!" The man's brought four roosters with him and one of his birds weighs within a couple of ounces of Dugas'.

The men agree to pit the two birds against one another for 20 minutes and to outfit them with gaffs, 1 1/4 inches long. The gaff is a small pick with a pointed end. After the natural spur has been filed down, gaffs are placed over the spurs of the roosters' legs. Opponents of cockfighting say that stripping the weapons to the cocks' legs is cruel. Cockfighters say it's crueler not to use them. Natural spurs vary in length and hardness and could give a cock with better spurs the upper hand in a fight. They say the weapons are equalizers, assisting that each gamecock stands a fighting chance in the pit.

There's also the short and long knife, small knives that are slightly curved and sharp on one side. The short knife is any knife less than 1 1/16 inches and the long knife is any knife longer than that. Only one knife is attached to a gamecock's left leg. Knife fights are commonplace with Hispanic cockfighters. Within recent years, though, the knife has gained popularity in Louisiana. The weapons are more deadly than the gaffs and the fights are quicker. Dugas fights his cocks with gaffs only. He says, "I can't see feeding a rooster for two years to watch a fight that fast."

One cockfighter, who asked to remain nameless, said that the "lucky lick of the knife" was corrupting the sport, placing less emphasis on gameness and more on betting.

The roosters are dropped into the smaller cages through a hatch door. A judge enters the ring and sets the timer. When the cages are lifted, the timer starts counting down the 20 minutes and the birds are left in the pit to fight.

Dugas had $200 riding on the fight. His opponent matched the money, collecting bets from some of the spectators to make a pool. There's more betting in the stands. Bets are made verbally and anyone can take you up on the odds of the fight.

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Cockfighters say any step to legislate the use of animals is simply another step in outlawing the use of animals for all purposes.

Two of Nolan Dugas' roosters spar in his backyard as he looks on.

Continued from Page 25

it. A handshake isn't needed. Your word is as good as signing your name to a bank loan.

Once the fight starts, Dugas watches his bird intently never saying a word. His opponent is at the side of the pit coaching his bird. In the beginning it looks as if Dugas' rooster has the upper hand. He manages to fly over his opponent and bowl him several times with his gaffs. Occasionally the birds fight with their beaks, pecking at one another's head. Then comes the decisive blow. A quick kick blinds Dugas' rooster. A couple of minutes later the judge calls the fight off. The birds are bloody and a light haze of feathers floats in the air. The whole fight lasts less than nine minutes.

Two young boys take Dugas' rooster and wash the blood from its head and feathers. A man offers to buy the cock from Dugas, but he simply gives it away. The cock might not be able to fight, but he's still good for breeding.

Dugas isn't sure about losing the 200 bucks. He says it's all part of the game. You win some and you lose some. What's important is that you keep trying.

On the website LouisianaAgainstCockfighting.org, there's a song titled "Chante Pas. Petit Rouge!" ("Don't Crow, Little Red!"). The song is sung in both French and English. It's the story of a Louisiana boy's efforts to save his pet rooster from being entered into a cockfight. One of the verses is:

Today is your day at the bloody cockfight,
Parrain and Papa, they'd bet on you tonight.
They gonna cuss, they gonna shoot
When the little red rooster doesn't come out.

James Riopelle is one of the authors of the tune. He's protested against cockfighting on three different occasions in Sunset. He says the song was written in hopes of fostering healthy relationships between children and animals.

"Cockfighting is just a bad thing for people," Riopelle says. "Children learn cruelty and see older people engaging in this. It's a very dehumanizing influence. The cockfighters aren't necessarily bad people, they're just involved with cruelty to animals and that's bad enough for us to want to stop it."

Pricketney A. Wood is president of the Coalition of Louisiana Animal Advocates. Since 1981, the group has been working with humane societies in Louisiana to pass legislation to end animal cruelty. In 1982, Louisiana's animal cruelty law was modified to exempt fowl from the law, stating that chickens are not animals. In 1999, the group tried unsuccessfully to pass legislation to ban the use of the gaffs and knives in cockfights.

In an e-mail, Wood says that cockfighting "only serves to satisfy those instincts in man which are ignoble and sinister, and cruelly destroys innocent, sentient creatures in the process." Asked, aside from the apparent physical harm of the cocks, why cockfighting needs to be banned, Wood reiterates, "Base and cruel practices are deleterious and corrosive to the soul of those who revel in them. It doesn't speak well of one's character when one is intentionally cruel to any living creature. And it is injurious to the development of a child's character and psychological adjustment to participate in and not be discouraged from committing acts of cruelty."

Cockfighters rarely deny that their sport is cruel, but they're also quick to point out that nature is cruel and that a cockfight is merely an act of nature in a controlled form. Talk to a cockfighter long enough and he's likely to mention Wayne Pacelle in a rather unfavorable light. One cockfighter stated that Pacelle was behind "the vegan agenda." There is a perception among cockfighters that animal rights advocates won't be satisfied until they have outlawed every possible use of animals — including rodeos and circuses, hunting and fishing, even God forbid, boiling crawfish. Cockfighters say any step to legislate the use of animals is simply another step in outlawing the use of animals for all purposes.

Pacelle is aware of how he's perceived by cockfighters and says that he's being cast in a negative light in an attempt to kill the message he brings.

"This isn't about me," he says. "This is about the policy issue being debated. It doesn't matter if I have three heads. Cockfighting is still wrong."

Pacelle is the senior vice president for communications and government affairs for the Humane Society of the United States, located in Washington, D.C. HSUS has been opposed to
cockfighting since the organization's inception in 1954, but increased its political pressure in 1998 to ban cockfighting nationwide. It began with a ballot initiative in Arizona and Missouri that led to the outlawing of the sport in both states. HSUS is currently pushing for the ban of cockfighting in Oklahoma, where the state supreme court recently ruled that a circulated petition met the requirements to bring the issue to a ballot initiative. HSUS is opposed to any form of instigated animal fights and, Pacelle says, supports "felony level penalties for people who perpetrate these acts of cruelty." Pacelle says that there is an entire culture of lawlessness and criminal activity that is associated with cockfighting.

"Even if you remove all that criminal activity," he says, "you are still left with an indefensible form of animal cruelty where people are pitting animals against one another to hack the other creature to death for the amusement of handlers and spectators. It's a pretty good indication that it's unacceptable activity when 94 percent of the states and the Congress deem it illegal activity."

But what about the argument that even if the sport is cruel, some still deem it as a part of their culture? "We have made a collective judgement in society that (cockfighting) violates our basic standards of decency towards animals and should be outlawed," he says. "You can attach a cultural significance to almost any form of animal abuse — whether it's cockfighting, dogfighting or bullfighting. Our concern for the well-being of the animals trumps the argument that this is somehow culturally indispensable."

Pacelle concedes that if the farm bill is signed into law it won't eradicate cockfighting, but it will cause "major damage to the industry." He says the HSUS is prepared to work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Postal Service and other federal agencies to make sure that the law is observed and enforced.

"Louisiana will be the final holdout," he says, "until we can work with Louisianans to ban it in the United States in its entirety. We're very confident that if this were ever put to a vote by Louisianans it would be outlawed in a heartbeat."

Jim Demourelle's insurance for his company, Evangeline Psychiatric Care in Ville Platte, had lapsed when it burned to the ground. The fire, which started in three different places, was ruled an arson. He says nothing was salvageable, "not even a pencil." His wife joked that no one could accuse him of burning down his business for the insurance money since there was none. He believes that animal rights activists set the fire, but he has no way of proving it.

Demourelle served in the Navy for 21 years. He says some people are retired Navy but he's Navy retired. In 1960 he went to his first cockfight in the Philippines.

"They told us cockfights were off limits," he says, "so that's where we all directly went." He remembers "how valiant the bird was. Watching a cockfight is like watching a ballet. It's beauty in motion."

Demourelle acknowledges that cockfighting is brutal "just like boxing and football are brutal," but "we're talking about a chicken... A lot of the things we do are acceptable to (cockfighters) but they're not acceptable to everybody." He says the Humane Society of the United States is harassing people who are raising animals and, in many cases, are pet owners. "I don't want to be engineered," he says.

"It's a common sentiment when talking to either side of the issue. Those against cockfighting focus on the cruelty of the sport, first and foremost, and add that it does not foster valuable traits in human beings. Cockfighters are quick to point out that there are several cruel sports main participants in — boxing, hockey, football, rugby — and what's at issue is not allowing someone else tell you what you can't do with your own property.

Demourelle says that he can't make his roosters fight. "It's their nature," he says. "It's what they want to do. Do I capitalize on it and have a good time with it? Yes. That's human nature. I don't see that as so strange."

He denies that criminal activity is pervasive at cockfights. He says, "There's more crime at an LSU football game in a day than at a cockpit all year long."

Emanuel Massa says that cockfighting has a $1.3 billion annual impact on Louisiana. It comes from a number of factors, like buying equipment for farms, hiring people to work the farms, feeding the chickens, putting gas in the cars to go to the cockfight and the visiting cockfighters who stay in motels, eat at restaurants and buy souvenirs.

Massa is president of the Louisiana Gamefowl Breeders Association, an organization with nearly 6,000 members. He says that if the farm bill is signed into law, it will negatively impact Louisiana's economy. Fewer

Continued on Page 28
Cockfighting sparks controversy as Congress eyes legislation

By JOAN MCKINNEY
Advocate Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Baton Rouge sociologist Jon Donlon describes the scene in tones of awe and amusement: The cockfighters and the animal-rights activists had come face to face at a fighting pit near Sunset and were hurling Bible verses at each other. In Donlon's opinion, the cockfighters won.

The incident happened "four or five years ago," Donlon said, and for a researcher "it was very intriguing because of the cultural setting.

"It was kind of ironic," Donlon said. "The cockfighters were supposed to be the immoral people," he said, but, by several traditional measures, the cockfighters saw themselves as the morality standard-bearers. "One of the protesters, a young woman, had no bra and was wearing a T-shirt and cut-off shorts," Donlon said. "All the cockfighters were discussing was how her parents could allow her to go out dressed like that."

Pending legislation in the U.S. Senate would ban the exporting or interstate transport of fighting fowl. Cockfighting is controversial because opponents believe it is cruel to the birds. In a cockfight, game-cocks fight, sometimes to the death, often wearing metal spurs on their legs. Individuals attending the fight bet among themselves as to which bird will win.

In the United States, cockfighting is legal only in Louisiana, New Mexico and Oklahoma. It is banned in all other states. Yet searches of the Internet turn up hundreds of references to fighters and breeders all over the country.

It's not easy for an outsider to discover who these people are and what they are like. Attempts to contact numerous Louisiana cockfighters by e-mail, through

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- Enthusiasts say cockfighting is about culture and sport, not money, Page 15A

"A bus of outside protesters arrived. They got out of the bus and marched around protesting and shouting about cruelty. ... The animal-rights people were taking snippets from the Bible about gentleness and appreciation for life. But the cockfighters are so much more literate about the Bible.

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See COCKFIGHTERS, Page 14A
Two gencofers spoor in an Oklahoma pit.

A confiscated, scythe-bladed blade that is attached to a rooster's leg to slice its opponents and commonly used in cockfighting is displayed by the Illinois Agriculture Department in Springfield in October 2001. Cockfighting is illegal except in Louisiana, New Mexico, and Texas in Oklahoma.

I had the mixed feelings about it. 

But God, he made that animal the way he did. 

You can't train a rooster to do anything... you can just make it healthy.

- Vanessa Morehead, Sulphur Springs, Oklahoma

A standard defense?

Slaughterhouses also use knives to cut the chicken's head to get rid of excess blood, making the cockfighting knife not only a banned item, but also one that some experts believe goes against the law. But even some opponents of cockfighting agree that it is not just animal cruelty, but also a form of animal rights abuse.

A moral dilemma?

However, in several telephone interviews, some opponents of cockfighting do not see it as just an animal rights issue. They argue that by taking a rooster's life, they are actually harming the animal and its ability to function. They believe that by allowing cockfighting to continue, they are essentially contributing to the problem of animal abuse.

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A moral resolution?

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Astonished.

Standing in the middle of a crowded room, I was astonished at the reaction to my question. The audience was silent, taking in the moments of shock and disbelief. But then, one by one, they began to speak. A man in the front row explained that he had always thought of cockfighting as a simple game of chance. But when he saw the cockfighting knife up close, he realized the true nature of the crime.

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A moral resolution?
Money: Cockfighting say they're big business

In some small communities the fight season is what Christmas is to bookstores, where they make their big income for the year.

— Jon Donlon, sociologist and consultant

Audio and Photos by Tawny Severing

Louisiana and Mississippi, Dec. 1999

A small egg is the seed of all the power that lies in the cockfighting business. It is the birthplace of all the excitement, all the drama, all the passion that drives millions of dollars of business. It is the starting point of a long journey that leads to the cockpit, where two birds of equal size and strength battle to the death for the title of champion.

The egg is fertilized by the cockfighting industry, which is the result of a long history of tradition and culture. Cockfighting has been a part of the culture in Louisiana for over 200 years. It began as a form of entertainment and quickly became a sport. Today, cockfighting is a multi-million dollar industry that attracts thousands of people to events held around the state.

But the egg is not just a symbol of the business; it is also a representation of the values that drive the business. Cockfighting is a symbol of the American Dream, of the idea that anyone can become a champion as long as they are willing to work hard and put in the time and effort.

The egg is the first step in the process, but it is not the only step. The business of cockfighting is a complex one, involving not just the birds themselves, but also the trainers, the promoters, the spectators, and the laws.

The trainers are the ones who take the birds and train them to become champions. They spend hours every day teaching the birds how to fight, how to strike, how to dodge. They are the ones who choose the birds, who pick the ones that have the right skills and the right temperament.

The promoters are the ones who put on the events. They are responsible for finding the locations, booking the performers, and selling the tickets. They are the ones who make sure the events are successful.

The spectators are the ones who come to watch the events. They are the ones who pay the admission fees, who buy the food and drinks, who cheer on their favorite birds. They are the ones who keep the business going.

And the laws are the ones that govern the business. They are the ones that determine what is legal and what is not, what is allowed and what is not. They are the ones that ensure the safety of the birds, the trainers, and the spectators.

But the egg is not the only symbol of the business. There are many others. The cock is the symbol of the business, the symbol of the American Dream. The rooster is the symbol of the business, the symbol of the tradition.

And the cock is not just a symbol of the business. It is also a symbol of the values that drive the business. Cockfighting is a symbol of the idea that anyone can become a champion as long as they are willing to work hard and put in the time and effort.

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‘Part of a local culture’: Proponents say money not the objective

By JOAN McGINNIE
Advocate Washington bureau

A cockfight need not end in death nor is money the primary motivation for those who fight the birds.

“It is spiritual and prestige. I think, primarily,” said Jon Donlon, who said he regularly attended cockfights from 1988 to about 1994 and occasionally since then.

“Secondarily, it is the wagering.” In general, there are no cash prizes at cockfights, Donlon said. Exchange of money comes from the side bets by individuals.

The cockpit itself may be a free-standing structure but often is attached to a lounge, dance hall or restaurant. It may be “almost a Rotary Club sort of thing,” Donlon said.

“Businessmen coming together in a community to establish a facility that is just a part of a local culture.”

The pit owner or operator charges fees to enter birds and sells food at fights. Entry fees can range from $2.50 to $10.

“Seldom could someone make a profit off fees, but your pit may be increasing the number of people through your bar or lounge or restaurant,” Donlon said.

“The incentive is not primarily financial,” Donlon said.

The betting varies, fight to fight, pit to pit, based on whatever the terms of the fight are at that pit.

Occasionally, events in which owners of animals that have won a series of fights may get a share of the entry fees, Donlon said. This is not ordinary, he said.

Before cockfights, the birds are kept in boxes or carrying devices. The containers have narrow openings because if the birds see each other they will batter themselves trying to get to the other to fight, Donlon said.

At the pit, the handlers weigh the birds. Cocks can fight “bare spurred,” that is, without a weapon strapped on, or with a knife or harpoon-like object attached to their feet. The knives or objects equalize the competition because natural spurs can vary in length.

After the knives are strapped on, the knives are cleaned to ensure no poison or chemical is present on the metal.

At this point, the handlers may have their birds look at each other in order to get them riled up, Donlon said.

The handlers then place the birds on a line in the pit.

Sometimes the birds are placed under a basket. At a signal, the birds are released or the baskets lifted and the cocks start to fight.

The birds normally fight for a timed period, and not necessarily to the death. After a timed fight, judges determine which bird won.

A timed fight may have breaks during which handlers may clean the birds’ eyes, or otherwise tend to the birds similar to the way a corner man tends a prizefighter between rounds.

Donlon studied sociology and anthropology at the University of Illinois. He and wife own Donlon and Donlon in Baton Rouge, a private consulting firm that specializes in what Jon Donlon calls “controversial leisure” and risk-taking entertainment.
They’ve still got cockfighting in every state. They just hide it from the law.”

(Legal) fights end

Roosters face off in a cockfight at the 2007 Grande Boucherie des Cajun in St. Martinville. A new law that begins today outlaws all cockfighting in Louisiana, making it the last state to ban the sport.

Louisiana finally outlaws sport, last to ban it

The Associated Press

Baton Rouge — Gory and bucolic all at once, cockfights have drawn crowds to small-time pits and full-blown arenas in towns around Louisiana for generations. By next week, they’ll be against the law — everywhere.

Today, Louisiana becomes the last state to outlaw the rooster fights, a move cockfighting enthusiasts say marks the end of a rich rural tradition.

Maybe so, but supporters and opponents agree that the blood sport won’t be wiped out entirely. Like bootlegging, cockfights will continue on the sly in remote areas, and getting caught could mean fines or even prison.

“They’re still going to fight, they’re still going to fight for years to come,” said Elizabeth Barra, who with husband Dale ran a cockfighting pit in St. Martin Parish for 14 years. “They’ve still got cockfighting in every state. They just hide it from the law.”

The fights between specially trained roosters are held in large arenas or in backyards. The birds are fitted with sharp metal blades or curved spikes on their legs, and instinctively attack each other. The match can last over an hour, with one or both animals dead or maimed.

In banning the fights, Louisiana relented after years of pressure from the Humane Society of the United States and

See photos of past cockfighting events @theadvertiser.com

New laws

Nearly 500 Louisiana laws take effect. Among them:

- Trying to intimidate people with a hangman’s noose is a crime.
- Employers must let workers bring guns onto parking lots.
- No one can ride in the bed of a pickup on an interstate.
- Aug. 29 will become a “day of remembrance” of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. It will not be a state holiday.

Read about more laws at thetheadvertiser.com.

See FIGHTS on Page 5A
Poonookie and his wife Kerry live in a small wooden frame house in Coteau. Poonookie is a handsome 28-year-old Cajun who works for a mobile home repair company when he’s not raising his game roosters. Kerry is an attractive blonde, a former hairdresser who works for Fruit of the Loom in St. Martinville inspecting underwear before she can’t support herself these days in a beauty parlor. They met at a cockfight.

Besides winning fights, a cockfighter’s dream is probably marrying a woman who likes cockfighting. But the recreation is another world of entertainment and is illegal in all but four states: Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Louisiana. It’s also an almost full-time hobby. Poonookie is up at 6 a.m. each morning to feed his chickens and spends an average of two hours each afternoon conditioning the roosters he’ll fight in the upcoming derbies. And then, the sport is not one women typically take to.

Kerry is an exception. Her father raised cocks. He even passed his rooster farm on to Poonookie when he retired from the sport.

“Kerry raises chickens. He’s not exactly sure how many he and his partner have altogether. He doesn’t keep track. The farm is a few miles drive from Poonookie’s house. It’s small—about the size of a very large garden—but conspicuous from the road by the prominent rows of corrugated tin tepees that house the roosters. The birds are all attached to the tepees by the cords. If the game roosters were free to roam the yard, they’d kill each other.

At Poonookie’s house on Saturday morning, a couple of friends drop by. Poonookie’s daughter is watching cartoons and the guys are shooting bull about last night’s fight.

“What did you do Friday?”

“Won one, lost three.”

“Not enough weight on a rooster.”

The guys decide to spar two roosters using gaffs. Gaffs are sharp, aluminum steel spurs shaped like hooks and attached to a rooster’s natural spurs, or claws. It’s a precision instrument, made, balanced and shaped so a gamecock can use it as a natural spur. A rooster’s natural spur can cut and kill too, but it’s much duller and the fight lasts much longer, sometimes hours.

“The reason for fighting with spurs is when two cocks meet in the wild, neither is any good after fighting with natural spurs,” says Jimmy Bertrand, a 50-year-old cockfighter from New Iberia, on another occasion. “It takes so long. With the gaff it’s cleaner, quicker, kills, and a lot less damage done than to fowl in the wild.”

Since the fight this morning at Poonookie’s will be just for fun—meaning no betting or competition—neither will use his primo Bertrand’s 50-year-old cockfighter from New Iberia, on another occasion. “It takes so long. With the gaff it’s cleaner, quicker, kills, and a lot less damage done than to fowl in the wild.”

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Jimmy Bagge, whose co-owned brooster yard in New Iberia has about 200 gamecocks, states that cockfighting. However, slasher fights are controversial even among cockfighters.

“It’s faster gambling,” says Poonookie. “You don’t go to the drums because contests are left to finish a long fight. The rules are different. It’s a 10-minute time limit for the fight but no fighting is allowed. But with a knife, he can be cut and never fight again. To have knife fights you have to have a lot of roosters because you lose a lot, if you plan on fighting a lot of derbies.”

Jimmy Bagge, whose co-owned brooster yard in New Iberia has about 200 gamecocks, is against knife fighting. “If slasher fights were the only way I’d fight, I’d quit, because it’s a gauntlet and it takes all the breeding and conditioning out.

Whoever has the most luck is the one who wins. The gamblers really like it because it’s more money. Whoever makes the first contact, just about, the fight is over. In a gaff fight, you look at the owner and so forth and you have a pretty good idea who should win. In a knife fight it doesn’t work that way.”

A lunch another friend drops by with a rooster and Poonookie is ready for a fight. He goes into his cockhouse located next door to his own house and selects a rooster. A cockhouse is where roosters are conditioned for weeks then rest for days. He’s working out-of-town too much.

Inside the cockhouse both cockfighters, or piters as they’re referred to in cockfighting jargon, strap gaffs on their roosters’ claws with molekin and string. The spur points have to be set just right. It’s an art, like many other aspects of cockfighting.

For a pit, there’s an old converted wooden garage with a dirt floor in Poonookie’s back yard. Poonookie’s friend “Chuchie” takes a rake hanging from the garage wall and draws a line in the dirt with the handle. Chuchie’s the referee. The rest of the friends line up on one side of the garage as spectators. And in the chilling 50-degree weather the fight begins.

A fight starts by “building up” the roosters, which means getting them mad. The pitters do that by holding their roosters beak to beak and letting the birds sniff each other out.

Within seconds after the fight starts the roosters are tangled in each other’s sharp spurs and are pulled apart by the pitters. Cockfighting is similar to boxing, with rounds and best-of-three periods.

“Eighteen, nineteen, twenty, pit!” shouts Chuchie after a 20-second rest period, and the fight resumes. Poonookie’s rooster gives a hard hit. “That’s what we want here!” exclaims Poonookie to his rooster. As a football coach on the sidelines. The opponent’s