Impassioned by history

Trahan named new curator of museum

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ST. MARTINVILLE — Brenda Comeaux Trahan was in her element Friday, talking in French to visitors from New Brunswick, Canada, at the Acadian Memorial, the portal to Cajun history.

The visitors came to the memorial like many others, to connect visually with a part of their heritage — a heritage that Trahan shares. She was appointed this week as the memorial’s curator and director.

“I think people are really fascinated with the Acadian culture,” Trahan said. “We live our music. We live our family traditions.”

The tourists from New Brunswick came to see the wall of names and the mural by Robert Dafford that represents the Acadians who were exiled from Nova Scotia by the British in the 1700s.

Between 1764 and 1783, shiploads of desperate Acadians sailed to New Orleans, settling in south Louisiana with aid from Spain, they were the brave pioneers who founded La Nouvelle-Cadie, or New Acadia, where they served as forebears of Cajun culture.

“We came to connect with our past and get a history lesson at the same time,” said Pierre Girouard of New Brunswick. “You see familiar names; you get curious. People here have the same mannerisms. There’s a lot of similarities between us.”

And this is what Trahan hopes to expand upon as curator of the museum.

“My goal is to maintain and enhance what is already here,” Trahan said. “If we can continue to spread the word about the memorial, maybe more people would want to know their heritage.”

Trahan has been interested in her own Acadian history and serves as secretary and publicity chairman for the Comeaux Family Association.

“I was here for the unveiling of the wall, which was very, very emotional for me,” Trahan said. “When I found the boat (in the list of names) the Comeaux family came to America in, it was as if I could feel their pain.”

The Acadians were exiled because they would not pledge their allegiance to the British.

“They lost their homes and all their possessions,” Trahan said. “They came here with their hopes and prayers to have a good life.”

Trahan holds a master’s degree in interpersonal/organizational communication from UL Lafayette. She’s taught as an adjunct instructor in the university’s communication department and in 1993 received the department’s outstanding graduate teaching award.

Jolene Adam, the museum’s first curator who had served since 1996, resigned earlier this year to pursue a career in graphic design.