Louisiana marks 175th birthday

By JOHN LaPLANTE
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A few thousand people celebrated Louisiana’s 175th birthday Thursday by consuming a 3,000-pound replica of the Bayou State and listening to speeches pleading for harmony during the state’s current political and economic troubles.

Politicians, schoolchildren and other spectators from as far away as France gathered on the steps of the State Capitol to mark Louisiana’s entry into the Union on April 30, 1812.

Later, in the Capitol’s Memorial Hall, they shared a 15-by-15-foot cake shaped like the state and decorated with foot-long strawberries, dollhouse-sized antebellum homes and other representations of Louisiana life.

Gov. Edwin Edwards told the crowd that Louisiana’s citizens have been through a lot since statehood began — floods and hurricanes, a civil war, boll weevils and, most recently, the near collapse of the state’s oil and gas economy.

“We are survivors,” the governor said.

He agreed with previous speakers that “It is time for us to put aside regional and other barriers that divide us” and instead concentrate on “what binds us.”

Former Republican Gov. David Treen, a longtime political foe of Edwards, had told the crowd that he has a special wish for Louisiana at its celebrates its 175th anniversary.

“My wish for today would be that every public official in this state and every citizen of this state would put aside recriminations, vindictiveness, desires to perhaps seek revenge” and instead “to recognize that in Louisiana today we need the best of all of us,” Treen said.

Secretary of State Jim Brown, who organized the celebration, said the upbeat festivities will “send a message to all the nation that we’re going to be on top . . . before you know it.”

He said it’s fitting that the state’s 175th birthday arrived near the opening stride.
of the nearly completed Archives building on Essen Lane. Dedication for the spacious, long-awaited “keeper of Louisiana history” is set for August.

State Archivist Donald LeMieux greeted 25 members of France-Louisiane, a group founded in France to promote that country’s cultural and historical ties with Louisiana.

U.S. Rep. Bob Livingston, R-Metairie, also showed up, asking the crowd to “say happy birthday to me, too.” He turned 44 Thursday.

Attracting more attention than the speeches was the 3,000-pound map-cake — made with 900 pounds of cake mix, 800 pounds of icing and 225 dozen eggs — that was crafted by Tim and Debbie Landry of Baum’s Fine Pastries.

The numerals “175” were spread across the north Louisiana portion of the pastry, and various native fruits, a pelican, a Mardi Gras mask, a 3-foot-tall replica of the State Capitol and other items decorated the rest of the cake.

Louisiana’s First Lady, Elaine Edwards, cut the first piece of cake from the northwest corner. Within two hours the cake had disappeared except for some crumbs.