Purchase
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NEW ORLEANS — Mayor Ray Nagin stood in the room where the Louisiana Purchase was signed 199 years ago Friday and said New Orleans' yearlong bicentennial celebration of the $15 million transfer will be a "tourist draw" for the city.

"The Louisiana Purchase bicentennial is a chance for us to rediscover our roots as a city as well as a chance for growth in our critically important tourism industry," Nagin said during a news conference at the Cabildo in the French Quarter's Jackson Square.

Sandy Shilstone, president and chief executive officer of the New Orleans Tourism and Marketing Corp., echoed the mayor's remarks, saying the bicentennial commemoration will "offer visitors the opportunity to experience our culture while learning about the elements that have shaped that culture."

"New Orleans hotels and other hospitality partners stand ready to welcome the millions of visitors expected during 2003," Shilstone said, adding that she could not put a number on how many visitors the bicentennial celebration itself will lure to the Crescent City.

France sold the 828,000-square-mile Louisiana Territory to the United States on Dec. 20, 1803, instantly doubling the size of the young nation. The territory included New Orleans and parts of what would become 17 states west of the Mississippi River.

Jim Sefcik, director of the Louisiana State Museum, which operates the Cabildo, said New Orleans has "long been regarded as the pivotal point for the reason that the United States wanted to acquire the territory of Louisiana."

"We are proud to serve as one of the key locations for the celebration and look forward to welcoming millions of visitors and locals alike as they explore the history of Louisiana and the United States," he said in the Sala Capitol, the room where U.S. and French representatives signed the original Louisiana Purchase documents.

Sefcik said the Cabildo will host a reenactment of the signing of the Louisiana Purchase documents on Dec. 20, 2003. President Bush, French President Jacques Chirac and King Juan Carlos of Spain have been invited "to commemorate this historic moment in world history," he said.

Nagin, Shilstone and Sefcik said some of the other major events to be held in New Orleans to mark the Louisiana Purchase bicentennial in 2003 includes:
• "A Fusion of Nations, A Fusion of Cultures: Spain, France, the United States and the Louisiana Purchase," an exhibit at the Historic New Orleans

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