Gladys Clark of Lafayette spins cotton

Lafayette woman weaves 'coton jaune' in nation's capital

BY KATE CARLISLE
Washington Bureau
WASHINGTON — Gladys Clark of Lafayette sat at her wooden loom, serenely shuttling thread back and forth while pumping her pedals in an age-old rhythm. Despite the unfamiliar setting, noise, and crowds that hung all around her, she kept weaving "coton jaune," or brown cotton, in original Cajun patterns.

"Lots of people ask lots of questions," she said. "I'm happy to answer them. This is real nice."

Clark, a genuine Acadian weaver, is in Washington for the 19th annual Smithsonian Folk Life Festival, which this year celebrates the culture of Louisiana. She and more than 100 other native Louisianians craftspeople, musicians and cooks have set up shop on the Mall, a broad swath of parkland between the Capitol and the Washington Monument. Clark, keeping cool under a big yellow striped tent, yesterday was weaving placemats on her loom, 44 threads every two inches.

She has been weaving cotton jaune for years into all kinds of things. Her loom is "at least 45 years old," she said, and her spinning wheel, which she uses to roll fluffy cotton into trim, flexible thread, is more than 100 years old.

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