Landmark mill closes in Crowley

Riceland Foods' Crowley rice mill closed Sunday after operating in Crowley for 78 years.

Riceland mill ends 78 years of tradition for family, town

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CROWLEY — The former Doré Rice Mill, a landmark for a town and a tradition for a family shut its doors Sunday after 78 years of operation.

In a region known for its rice — at one time there were more than 10 mills in the town — the closing of the Riceland Foods mill, as it is now known, should come as a surprise, but it does not to those in the industry.

“We knew it was coming for the last few years. The business just wasn’t there,” said A.B. “Al” Doré III, who has managed the business for Riceland for the last 10 years.

“It’s a sad thing to go. It is a major facility as far as the city of Crowley is concerned.”

Elliot Doré

There is a slight possibility that new investors may reopen the mill. But that remains only speculation.

Doré and his brother, Elliot Doré, placed the blame for the falling business and the struggling industry on a dwindling supply of domestic crops and exports and an increase in global competition.

The mill first was opened in 1937 by A.B. Doré Sr. It remained open continuously until a fire in 1973 caused it to be completely rebuilt. After 73 years and three generations, its last business day was Friday.

Al Doré said only a skeleton crew remained at the mill, since the others were laid off March 3 when it was announced the mill would no longer accept new orders.

He said he’s known about the mill’s closing since December, when Arkansas-based Riceland Foods announced the business was up for sale.

Al Doré said he has since heard rumors that the business was bought by foreign investors who plan to strip the mill and ship it overseas.

“I’d hate to see it shut down,” he said, but at the same time he said he sees the need for it. Al Doré said he’s seen a steady decline in business for at least the last five years.

Elliot Doré said he’s seen a decline for even longer. He said that was the original reason for selling the business in 1988 to Archer Daniel Midland, who entered into a joint venture with Riceland in 1983 and eventually sold its remaining shares to Riceland in 2003.

“I’m surprised it’s lasted this long,” said Elliot Doré, who after more than 20 years in the business, left in 1996 to become a financial adviser for McMakin Financial in Crowley.

“It’s a sad thing to go,” Elliot Doré said.

“I hope it’s a major facility as far as the city of Crowley is concerned.”

Both Doré brothers said, however, the closing would not have as big of an impact on the city as it once would have had. Al Doré said at the mill’s peak it employed 40 people, but for the last three months it has worked with 31 people until the March 3 lay-offs.

Al Doré said all of the employees were offered jobs with Riceland, but only two employees accepted the position. He said the majority didn’t want to move to Arkansas.

News of the mill’s closing did not surprise Bill Doré, who is a distant relative of Al and Elliot Doré and part-owner of Supreme Rice, one of two remaining mills in Crowley, but it did worry him, he said.

“It wasn’t for loyal growers and outstanding workers, we’d be down the drain ourselves,” Bill Doré said.

He said Riceland’s closing was simply and indication of how bad the milling and agricultural industry has become. He made mention of the fact that at one point there were upwards of 14 mills in Crowley and now the city is down to two.

Bill Doré, like the Doré brothers, mentioned unfair trade barriers, unreasonably high subsidies on rice from abroad and dwindling local crops and acreage as factors in the business.

“The business is just so depressed, God only knows what it would take to put it back on track,” he said.