A truck moves in the last of three houses being relocated to Bayou Teche in Arnaudville as part of the new Les Deux Mondes project.

Les Deux Mondes project grows in Arnaudville

Last-century homes boast modern amenities for visitors

By William Johnson
wjohnson@dailyworld.com

A project called Les Deux Mondes — two worlds — is slowly coming to life in Arnaudville.

The project will provide guest cottages to visitors and students coming into the area as part of Arnaudville's French immersion program. It is the brain child of Tony Adrian of Leonville and Matt Henrich of Sunset.

A narrow street behind Russell's Food Center was already home to four rundown properties and the pair have brought in three more.

They don't look like much now. Workers last week were still adding roofs to the two of the structures.

But Adrian said they should be ready for occupancy by Jan. 1.

"This was a distressed area for years," said Adrian, who said the four existing houses had become home to squatters and vagrants.

"I'm told there was a lot of drug activity and general rowdiness going on," he said. "People say they were afraid to even come out of their houses."

The squatters had also turned the area that borders Bayou Teche into a trash dump.

"We have already removed four dump truckloads of trash," Adrian said, pointing to piles of trash waiting to be carried away.

He said he and his business partner are working with designers

See MONDES, Page 5A
from Baton Rouge to restore the houses — all of which date from the 1920s or before — and turn them into a showplace of which Arnaudville can be proud.

Adrian said he and Henrich are followers of the philosophy espoused by Eddie Cazayoux, former director of the University of Louisiana's School of Architecture and now head of EnvironMental Design in Lafayette.

"He is all about sustainable architecture," Adrian said. "His philosophy is don't tear it down, fix it up and build on it."

Adrian knows the benefits of that philosophy firsthand. He and his wife, Marie Bossard, live in a Cazayoux-designed house that requires no electrical lines.

That is exactly what he and Henrich plan to do with these houses. "These are all still structurally sound," he said.

The pair will not just restore the buildings but also enhance, installing solar panels so they will draw only minimally on local utilities.

"They will be extremely well insulated and energy efficient," Adrian said.

He added that the pair, who met casually a few years ago at one of the events hosted by Arnaudville's NUNU's Arts and Culture Collective, makes a good fit.

"We are both environmentalists. I have the construction and restoration experience and Matt has some experience as a landlord," Adrian said. "I knew Matt wanted to put his money into something tangible. This is an opportunity for us to invest in the community. I can't think of a better community to invest in."

He said the pair is serious about that investment. It's contracting with local carpenters and buying as many fixtures and building supplies as they can from local sources. One element that attracted the pair to the site was its border along the bayou, now part of a national paddling trail.

Adrian and Henrich have worked out an arrangement with local business owners who can rent kayaks to visitors and bicycles to visiting students so they won't need to use cars.

In addition to working with designers, they are also cooperating with the state's Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to upgrade the bayou area.

They have brought in tons of fill dirt to turn the land between the houses and the bayou into a miniature garden, with traditional plants, trees and bushes with flowers and fruit.

Adrian said that is important, because each house will get a new porch facing the bayou.

"That is the way it used to be done. We are designing these to look like houses used to look in the 1920s and '30s. We want this to remind people of the past," Adrian said.

Although most of the cottages will be available to rent individually, he said, they plan to outfit one of the larger ones with multiple beds — perfect for visiting student groups that take part in the town's French immersion program.

Arnaudville already attracts groups of French language students from throughout the nation. Right now their primary housing option is homestays with locals.

"There are just not enough places for people to stay right now. That kind of defeats the purpose," Adrian said.

Henrich said he would also like to dedicate one of the cottages for use by an artists-in-residence program.

Tony Adrian said Arnaudville remains a small community, with restaurants, a coffee house and more within walking distance.