LITERARY BUT HARDLY SNOBBY
This year's Deep South Writers Conference takes writing to the people.

A re movies literature? Jerry McGuire, co-director of the Deep South Writers Conference which will be held this week, thinks they can be. He's invited screenwriter Steven Baranick, who wrote the 1994 crime thriller *The Last Seduction*, starring Linda Fiorentino as one of the movies' most memorable femmes fatales, to screen the film and talk about it.

And did you think writers are people who sit in gloomy attics staring at blank sheets of paper? Not at this conference. The 38th annual event will feature a Saturday night poetry crawl. It will begin with a reading from novelist Jodi Picoult and USL writer-in-residence Ernest Gaines. After that, everyone will join a car caravan that will stop at various locations around Lafayette, including Mangé Market, Caffé Cottage and the newly relocated Artists Alliance downtown, for food, partying and, of course, more readings.

It's all part of making writing more accessible to the general public. McGuire is USL's director of creative writing, an assistant professor of English and an active poet himself. He sees the conference as an opportunity not just to talk about the craft of writing but to build ties between the university's English department, professional writers across the South, and members of the general public who love quality writing. The conference runs Sept. 24-27.

What McGuire doesn't want is "just some elitist forum for professional writers, which leaves out too many people." Instead, the focus is on the ties between what writers do and the community. In other words, the links between writers and the people McGuire wryly calls civilians.

He and fellow USL writing professor Luis Alberto Urrea also have expanded the event to include more forms of writing. There will be the usual writing workshops and panel discussions with professionals including Picoult, poet William Pitt Root and nature writer David Gessner.

The theme this year will be literary and artistic approaches to nature. For McGuire, who wants to see the conference has an increasing impact on the community, an outdoors theme is appropriate. "This can't just be something we do to gratify ourselves," McGuire says. "We have to stay in touch with what writing means in the culture. For me, that means its intersection with other arts."

Another way McGuire has stretched the conference is by sponsoring a collaboration between poets and photographers. They created an exhibit, which opened for Festivals Acadiaus, at USL's Dean's Gallery in Fletcher Hall and at Images Art Gallery downtown. "These are visual images and verbal images working together—something that people who aren't writing specialists can react to," McGuire says.

The conference draws 400-500 participants from all over the country. While participants may pre-register, it's not necessary. The registration fee is $50 and includes lectures, panel discussions and special events.

You don't need to be a professional writer to attend. McGuire stressed, just someone who loves good writing.

For more information on Deep South Writers Conference events, call 482-5478 or visit www.usl.edu/Departments/English.