Mayor traveled to Spain for twinning

BY CHERÉ COEN
Special to The Advocate

NEW IBERIA — Ebrar Reaux went searching for his roots in Nova Scotia, thinking that a name like Reaux would definitely be Cajun.

But the New Iberia native found nothing in the land that gave birth to the Acadian people.

A cousin insisted their family was of Spanish heritage, which Reaux instantly denied. “My first language was French,” Reaux insisted.

Reaux decided to visit Spain to see for himself. Sure enough, Reaux is a descendant of a Spaniard named Don Francisco Ridao who came to New Orleans in 1783 and whose name was “Francofied” when France owned Louisiana.

Reaux’s story is not unique in New Iberia, which was originally a Spanish settlement named Nueva Iberia, founded in 1779 by a group from Málaga, Spain, led by Francisco Bouligny.

In fact, several of the families who arrived were from a smaller Spanish town, Alhaurín de la Torre, which is part of the present Málaga metropolitan area.

When author and historian José Manuel de Molina was researching Alhaurín de la Torre for a book, he discovered documentation of Spanish families heading to New Iberia, Reaux said, and contacted New Iberia Mayor Hilda Curry about a possible city twinning.

“While he was doing research in Spain, he discovered that New Iberia was founded by 16 families from Málaga,” Reaux said, adding that “not all of them stayed.”

Those hardy Spanish pioneers who remained have recognizable names today, names such as Segura, Lopez and Romero. Some names have been altered.

The current surname of Gary, for instance, was once Garrido, Reaux said, and Viator was shortened from Villatoro.

Once de Molina and Curry connected, members of Alhaurín de la Torre — including de Molina — came to New Iberia for a twinning ceremony in 2009.

“They came over and did their part,” Reaux said. “But in order for the twinning to be complete, New Iberia had to go to their city.”

Bayou Teche Museum Director Marcia Patout stands in the new Spanish exhibit Tuesday in New Iberia. The exhibit will be unveiled during El Festival Espanol de Nueva Iberia on Nov. 14.
A genuine flamenco dress is part of the new Spanish exhibit at Bayou Teche Museum on Tuesday in New Iberia. The exhibit will be unveiled during El Festival Espanol de Nueva Iberia on Nov. 14.

In 2011, the mayor, Reaux and other New Iberia residents visited Alhaurin de la Torre, and the ceremony was complete. But no one wanted it to end there, Reaux said.

"The reception we got was simply amazing," he said. "People on the twinning committee said, 'We have to do something to keep this going.' That's basically how the festival got started."

In 2012, the inaugural El Festival Espanol de Nueva Iberia or Spanish Festival of New Iberia took place downtown. Now in its third year, the annual event will be Nov. 14-16 in Bouligny Plaza of New Iberia.

This year's theme is flamenco dancing with a complete flamenco costume, artifacts and photos from the Málaga region of Spain on display at the city's Bayou Teche Museum.

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The exhibit will be officially unveiled at 7 p.m. Nov. 14, just before the gala for El Festival Espanol de Nueva Iberia, a fundraiser for the festival at the Sli- man Theater next door. The gala also will include short performances by flamenco dancers, including Entre Flamenco, of San Antonio.

“They (flamenco dancers) are going to do about 20 minutes to whet appetites for their Saturday performances,” Reaux said.

Saturday’s events include a “Running of the Bulls” 5K and 1-mile walk (costumes encouraged), opening ceremony and re-enactment of the Spanish arrival on Bayou Teche, flamenco dancing, paella and tapas cook-off, children’s tent, genealogy displays, arts and crafts, and live music by Kira Viator and Bayou Beat, and Roddie Romero and the Hub City All-Stars.

The festival concludes Nov. 16 with a Thanksgiving Mass at St. Peter’s Catholic Church, 108 E. St. Peter St., New Iberia.

In addition to the annual event, La Asociacion Espanola de Nueva Iberia organizes student exchanges between Catholic High in New Iberia and IES Capellania, a high school in Alhaurin de la Torre. The first year, four girls from each country participated, Reaux said, and it was an immediate success.

“They became instant friends and they (the Spanish students) came back a second time,” he said. “They were talking about being in each other’s wedding. I can’t think of anything better than that.”

For more information on El Festival Espanol de Nueva Iberia or the association, contact Reaux at (337) 349-7343.