Oh, what foods these morsels be!

By JANE O'Pry
Lifestyle Editor

Yankees have their Punxutawney Phil — the Pennsylvania groundhog that heralds the Spring. Cajuns have Portage Pete. When the Cajun first sees the crawfish, he knows it's Spring.

Or: When the weather is nice enough to get outside and work in the yard, then it's crawfish-boilin' time. Time to do what people in these parts love most — eat crawfish. And it's not just a meal. It's an event!

The Mighty Crawfish! He is an important part of this culture. Why else will there be an expected 100,000 people at the Cajundome tomorrow to sample those tasty tails and other crawfish dishes?

Those 15,000 people who came last year in search of this delectable crustacean have again begun their descent on Lafayette for the Seventh Annual International Tasting and Trade Show. To find out what people here have known for a lifetime — how to cook and eat and market crawfish.

They come to South Louisiana to sample the unforgettable morsels because the word has gotten out about a creature indigenous to these parts.

Yes, indigenous. It was Lafayette's famous Cajun artist, George Rodrigue, who said of his son, Andre, at four years of age, he does not yet know that the whole world does not have boudin, crawfish, gumbo, and Mardi Gras.

Indeed, the word is out. Ninety percent of all the crawfish consumed in the world come from the Crawfish Belt of South Louisiana, according to Louisiana Crawfish Farmers Association (LCFA) statistics.

Crawfish production has become a viable industry, from Sweden at the top of the world to Australia down under. Those faraway places now have crawfish associations to advance the industry, as do the states of North and South Carolina, Maryland and Texas.

Especially Texas. The Lone Star State to the west has a crawfish industry that actually believes it can do with crawfish what Louisiana can do. There has developed a competition between the two associations since Texas Commissioner of Agriculture Jim Hightower raised the danger of Louisiana crawfish lovers when he referred to the "dirty" Louisiana crawfish.

Our own Commissioner of Agriculture Bob Odom, and the LCFA rose to the occasion and challenged the Texas Crawfish Farmers Association LCFA showed off by taking the first-ever trophy for cooking the best-tasting crawfish at a competition last year in Alvin, Texas.

That same trophy is up for grabs again at 2 p.m. today at the Second International Crawfish Boil-Off complete with a Crawfish Gumbo Cook-Off. LCFA president, Perry Lavergne, shared some of the secrets of last year's win with The Advertiser, he said, "because we want everyone to know the best ways to cook crawfish. But if we're going to win again this year, we'll have to think of a new wrinkle."

BOILED CRAWFISH

First, rinse the crawfish at least twice — till they're "squeaky clean." Lavergne said salting is not necessary. Then put four or five inches of water in the crawfish pot. Do not add salt or spices to the water. It tends to toughen the meat, as does over-cooking, according to LCFA's discovery.


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LCCA President Perry Lavergne, right, and Valora Citrano, editor and advertising manager of LCFA's official publication, pose with trophies LCFA won last year and hope try to keep in today's competition.

Enjoying the fruits of their labor on Bayou Tete levee are, from left, Lavergne; Ron Perry, who cooked the 1989 winning crawfish gumbo; Citrano; Kista Lee Sedatol and her mother, Patty Sedatol, who cooked this batch of crawfish.