PERMITTING BUREAUCRACY

Louisiana may be losing oil business to other states because of the cumbersome process of getting permits to drill oil wells in this state. "If the permitting process gets more difficult, we would have to look at alternatives," says John Borman, president of Columbia Gas Development in Houston, and a Louisiana native himself.

"I've already told the vice president of exploration to start making other plans. If the process doesn't improve, we'll have to go somewhere else. We have to do our business in places where we can do business."

State Sen. Armand Brinkhaus of Sunset would like to correct the situation with one-stop shopping at the state level. Now, an operator must file a permit request with myriad agencies, creating a bureaucratic nightmare and adding costs, according to many oil producers.

Under the proposed Brinkhaus legislation, the Department of Natural Resources would be responsible for submitting a drilling proposal to the agency. If there is no response within 90 days, the permit would automatically be approved, Brinkhaus says. "The key is the deadline." In a business where time is money, he considers it essential to streamline the process.

Borman says the Louisiana procedure could extend as long as 120 days, compared to about two weeks in Texas. The difference in other states is a more centralized approach, he says. "The [Louisiana] regulatory agencies are doing their job as efficiently as they can, but the process is disjointed.

GET A LOAN, WIN A PRIZE

Premier Bank has had its share of problems lately, but a new push recently got under way to promote loans. The Legendary Loan Sweepstakes features discounted loans for new customers, as well as a shot at such prizes as a car, television, cameras, and more.

"If you walk into a branch and inquire, we will give you a card," says Pam Kimball, Premier's vice president with the Retail Banking Group. "We just want to talk to you and see if we can get your business, particularly the loan business, but any other needs you have." Rate discounts and prize winners are revealed by scratching off the silver covering of game cards.

"Every customer will win some interest-rate discount," says Kimball. The amounts vary from 1/4 percent off the current rate to 1/2 percent off the rate for a $1,000 loan over the life of the loan, The program began April 16 and continues through June 30.

Product giveaways at financial institutions during the 1970s focused on attracting new deposits, but Premier's loan concept is a first for the state. There have been similar campaigns in other parts of the country, but not to this degree, says Kimball. "We've been more focused on new accounts. We launched this new concept to focus on the loan business."

"We wanted to go a little bit further and really hit home the fact that Premier is in the lending business," says Kimball. "The response has been pretty impressive so far."