UL professor explores roots of gumbo

To help:

UL Lafayette professor John Lausten wants to know about your family's gumbo. Call (337) 482-5883.

Lausten was taken aback. He had, after all, grown up in south Louisiana.

It was an experience that set his mind thinking about the possibility of writing a book.

Lausten knew the difference between spicy seasoned and painfully hot. And living outside of Louisiana while he pursued his academic studies,

Lausten also knows of other mis

conceptions outsiders have of the state.

"People seem to have a misconceived notion of Cajun culture that it's all the same. It's not," Lausten said.

Another idea for the book: Gumbo, with its varied varieties, might serve as a metaphor for the diversities in south Louisiana culture.

"I wanted to take this one dish and talk about how to trace Louisiana's history and geography," Lausten said.

His book on gumbo is still a work in progress, but Lausten had finished much of the historical research, gleaned mainly from the accounts of travel writers of the 19th and 20th centuries.

"From there, we know gumbo has had a percolate in the 1700s," Lausten said.

There is an intersection of African-American foodways and what are becoming Cajun foodways.

Slaves from West African descent had been coming into Louisiana, bringing with them

See GUMBO on Page 8A

Continued from Page 1A

Gumbo

Gumbo — an African plant used as a crucial ingredient in most gumbo — and African ideas about cooking

The French-speaking Acadian

traders called Gumbo began arriving in south Louisiana in the mid-1700s. They brought their

recipes. The dish included a "gumbo" base, and what is interesting is that we still choose gumbo. When all else
cahas, things in the kitchen are often times," he said.

What's more, Lausten said, regional variations still exist.

Smoked sausage replaces fresh sausage as one travels north of Lafayette. Garde isn't so popular in the Crowley area.

Sweet potatoes are a preferred side dish for many in the Baton Rouge and New Orleans areas, and andouille
becomes less of a treat and many of the expected ingredients no one gets close to Morgan City.

"They have a lot more options," Lausten said. "In the 1900s, I think, there are many things that are served with a gumbo.

Lausten now hopes to talk to some descendants.

"I really need to talk to people about how they make gumbo. How is my family's gumbo," he said.

And Lausten plans to write about the full gumbo experience, the talk of family and history that goes along with good food.

"I want people to understand the importance of that — what's happening is happening in Louisiana, what gumbo does," he said.