Crash course

Program lets seniors size up area's culture

By CHERYL ALBRECHT
Staff Writer

Rose Goodman has an voracious desire for adventure.

The senior citizen from Manhattan's Lower East Side joined almost 50 other seniors from all over the country to converge on USL's campus for a week-long educational seminar called "Elderhostel.

Goodman, a 69-year-old "hostel junkie" who sports four earrings in each earlobe, said her trip to Lafayette to learn about Cajun culture, Southern architecture and the petroleum industry marks her 35th Elderhostel event.

"I'm not coming back," she said. "I love it, but there's too much to do in the United States."

Elderhostel is a national program that sends seniors over the age of 60 to university campuses throughout the nation for a crash course in a region's culture and industry.

USL joined Elderhostel three years ago and currently hosts about 10 such programs a year, using University and outside experts to teach seniors about Cajun cooking, dancing and music as well as the Atchafalaya Basin, indigenous wildlife, hurricanes and the legend of Evangeline.

In April, a special program will revolve around Louisiana's French connection, featuring the Festival International de Louisiane. Cindy Trahan, coordinator of USL's Elderhostel, said the national headquarters is pushing for USL to become a "supersite" to host 20 or more programs a year.

"Everyone asks what Cajun is and what Creole is," Alice Ann Broussard said. Broussard and her husband Meryl knew their ancestors were Cajuns from Lafayette Parish, but they journeyed from their home in Memphis to find out exactly what that meant.

"I stumbled into Crickett's and the place was locked. I pushed the door in and shared the hospitality," Goodman said.

"She had all this money pinned on her. So did the groom," she exclaimed. "I was so surprised. I had never seen that."

Trahan said most of the Elderhostel participants choose an area they'd like to visit or a subject about which they want to know more. The Cajun mystique has been a big drawing card for USL's program.

"These seniors have emphasized to me that you never stop learning," Trahan said.

Learning through experience is one of Goodman's favorite activities. Her wanderlust guided her to Crickett's Restaurant this week where she crashed a wedding party.

(See Seniors, page 5)
“We knew bits and pieces, but we came back to learn about our Acadian heritage,” Meryl Broussard said.

The Broussards have made one Elderhostel trip before, to the Ozarks, but this is George Waley’s fifth Elderhostel experience.

“The thing that attracted me was the petroleum industry,” Waley, from Tucson, Ariz., said. “Plus, I joined some friends of mine.”

Elderhostel participants make new friends as they share the tours and classes of the week. In addition to the classes, USL is showing the seniors Acadian Village, unique Southern architecture, how to eat boiled crawfish and how to dance the Cajun two-step.

“It’s easier than I thought,” Alice Ann Broussard said.

She and her husband said they are eagerly anticipating a chance to eat fresh crawfish and practice their new skill when they go dancing at Randol’s tonight.

“That’s what makes Elderhostel so exciting,” Goodman commented. “You can do something new every time.”

Seniors pay about $235 for a week’s worth of programs, housing, meals and local transportation. For more information about Elderhostel, call Cindy Trahan at 231-6344, or visit her office in the USL Conference Center.