Rayne Frog Festival a hit

By MARY SWANN
Acadian Writer
RAYNE - "Ils sont partis!"
Emcee Frances Bihm shouted the familiar horse-racing phrase meaning "They're off!" to signal the beginning of frog races and jumping contests at the 17th annual Frog Festival over the weekend.

Frogs and frog lovers of all ages, including local media personalities, competed in the amphibian-related events at the festival.

Even 5-year-old Debbie Henry joined in the competition, with her frog, "Dippy," placing second in one of the children's frog racing divisions.

Elizabeth Helo, 12, placed third with "Fred" in the children's finals. The frogs require "no training before the race," she told The Advertiser. "I just let (Fred) rest in the air condition for the last few days," she added. "They won't eat while in captivity, and you can't exercise them at all because they need to save their energy for the race."

The rules of the contest were simple: No giving Tobasco to the frogs to make them jump faster, and no feeding rice or soybeans to the competition to make them go slower!" said Bihm. Frogs had to be four inches or more to qualify for the events, and no "little green frogs" were allowed, because sponsors said they were too easy to step on and would only make a mess.

Spring frogs, bullfrogs and toads filled the stage. Hopping around were "Pee Wei Herman," "Cajun Jumping Jack," and even "Bat Frog," made an appearance.

"He finally left Gotham City for a trip to Rayne," said Bihm, advertising director of the Rayne Acadian-Tribune and contest hostess of the past 16 years.

Crowley Post-Signalsports editor Robbie Gates placed first in the Media division of frog racing. His entry, "Milo," was allegedly named for his boss, Milt Nickels, publisher of the Post-Signal. Also participating in the media races were Marty Melancon of KMDL with "Muddy Waters" and Penny Bennett from KADN entered "Bug."

Observers shrieked as several frustrated frogs hopped right off the stage and into the crowd. Maybe they had too much Tobasco?

Whatever caused them to jump, the day's winning distances included eight feet, by Russell Richard's "Mr. Pedro" in the adult division and six feet by Summer Manuel's "Mr. Marlene" in the children's competition.

Trophies, which were almost as big as some of their winners, were awarded for first, second and third place in all categories of racing and jumping.

The contests were co-sponsored by the Jaycees and The Rayne Acadian-Tribune, published by Myra Fayt Craig.

The festival began on a solemn note Sunday with the annual festival Mass. Father Ben Drapeau, who was also the grand marshal of the festival's parades, concelebrated the Mass with Father Michael Russo.

In addition to the frog racing, eating and jumping contests, the festival's grand parade rolled along N. Adams Street and the Boulevard Sunday afternoon.

Rayne Lions Club members tape measure a leap by a local bullfrog during the 17th Annual Frog Festival this weekend. Some of the bullfrogs leaped passed the 8-foot mark.

Two youngsters have a comfortable seat during Sunday morning's Frog Festival Mass.

The Mass was held at the festival grounds, with about 200 people attending. The Revs. Ben Drapeau and Mike Russo officiated.

Rodney Trahan holds up two bullfrogs following frog jumping contest. Trahan said the frogs weren't immediately doomed to a cooking pot -- they still have a few more good jumps left in them.

The Lions Club has hosted 43 frog jumping contests at area festivals. The next will be during the Rice Festival.

Most of the frogs entered were bullfrogs. In the Frog Derby contests, some 18 teen-age girl contestants each dressed up a frog in costume. The costumes were judged, as well as the girls.