Stepping lively
Leading the way in the “Older Americans” march down University Avenue yesterday were, from left, Rose Rodwick, Rose Thibodeaux and Ed Abdella. May has been set aside nationwide as "Older Americans Month" and yesterday Lafayette’s mayor issued a local proclamation. The local theme, as the banner states, is “On the Move.”

Senior citizens: Older and better

By LISA SYLVESTER
Staff Writer

"Where's that policeman? They think we're slow 'cause we're old. We're ready to go."

Seventy-five-year-old Rhena Menard playfully asserted her impatience to take to the streets with her picket sign which read, “Senior Power makes me proud to be a senior citizen. Yea!”

Minutes later she joined about 50 of her peers in a march to usher in "Older Americans Month" Wednesday morning. Sporting banners, signs and flags, they stepped lively down University Avenue to City Hall to hear the mayor’s proclamation.

Two City Police officers on motorcycles escorted the group as it departed from First Presbyterian Church on Johnston Street, about four blocks from the municipal building.

The marchers’ quick pace was proof they are not slow.

Organized by the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), Lafayette’s Council on Aging and the Lafayette Senior Center (Green House), the demonstration was not staged to draw attention to controversial issues involving the elderly.

“It’s just to make people aware of older Americans. That they are still energetic, capable and intelligent,” explained RSVP director Linda Boudreaux.

As Menard put it, “My message is ‘never give up.’ Age doesn’t make any difference. The older you are, the better you get.” When asked her age, she first responded, wide-eyed, “They call me sweet sixteen.” In fact, the ballpark age of the participating was about 70 years, with a minimum age of 60, said Boudreaux.

“Seniors have more fun,” was on the sign Sadie Edwards, 70, had in hand.

Rhena Menard, ‘Sweet 16’

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Everyone should volunteer. We really have the work to do, in nursing homes, private homes and hospitals,” said Edwards, an RSVP volunteer.

Another active volunteer with RSVP’s program, Marie Azare, 72, added, “The minute you stop, you’re just going to flop.”

Azare offers her time visiting residents of local nursing homes.

Ed Abdella, 73, and Rose Rodwick, 76, lead the marchers, toting a banner bearing the local older Americans’ theme for this month, “We’re on the Move.”

“We senior citizens can help other people in life, especially young people, with all of our experience,” said Rodwick.

Speakers at the proclamation ceremony were Dr. Jerome Romagosa, Mary Ducharme and Celona Hardy.

Romagosa, a retired Lafayette physician, was honored by President Reagan earlier this week for his work as director of Hospice of Acadiana.

“It was my privilege to go to Washington, not because of what I did, but because of all of you,” he said.

Ducharme, a retired USL health and physical education professor, remarked, “You are the people who portray what I’ve taught for many, many years.

"Retirement does not give you the privilege of sitting. It does give you the privilege of choosing when, where and how you want to do things,” she added.

"Involved means to draw a person into something, or to include, or to require,” said Hardy. “I feel this definition applies to a lot of senior citizens.

“We the older Americans are involved. We also have voting strength ... so don’t count us out,” she added.

Wednesday’s ceremony included presentations of several certificates to local and state politicians, corporations, agencies, and others involved in supporting the senior citizens’ cause.

Mr. and Mrs. Claude Hebert, who turned 89 and 90 this year, accepted the mayor’s proclamation on behalf of the area’s older citizens.

“We’re not getting old,” joked Claude Hebert. “We’ve just been here a long time.”