Shrimp facility plans announced

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NEW IBERIA — A $450,000 shrimp processing facility is under construction near Delcambre in Iberia Parish.

At a press conference Wednesday morning at the Greater Iberia Chamber of Commerce headquarters, Sims Brothers Seafood Inc. of Gulf Shores, Ala., announced plans to operate a shrimp processing facility just outside of Delcambre on the Delcambre Canal.

"We plan to start up operations June 1," said Mike Sims, co-owner of the facility. "We'll be employing between 30 and 35 people on a regular basis during the nine months of the year that we are in operation, and in the peak season we should have as many as 80 employees on site."

The foundation for the plant was poured last Thursday. Construction crews plan to begin erecting the steel frame of the 16,000-square-foot facility this Thursday.

"The market looks excellent," Sims said. "The seafood prospectus, I think, is real good with our health situation today. Everybody is beginning to look at fish, shrimp and things of that sort."

"I'd hope we'd process at least six million pounds of shrimp in our first year," Sims stated. "The maximum output as far as our freezing facilities are concerned would be 50,000 pounds a day."

The Delcambre area was selected from several others for a number of reasons, said Sims. Among them is the accessibility for shrimp boats by using the Delcambre Canal.

Wayne Sims, Mike Sims' brother and one of the co-owners, has several shrimp boats in Galveston, Texas, only 2½ hours by water from the plant. Also, Sims stated, Delcambre's central location to the bountiful shrimp stores of Louisiana and Texas aided greatly in their decision.

The majority of Louisiana's shrimp harvest is sent to other states for processing, "but here we can take a local product, process it, and then ship it out," said Sims.

Roy Holleman, the chamber president and Iberia Industrial Development Foundation chairman, agreed.

"I think we're now starting to show that Louisiana is getting serious about taking our natural resources that in the past we've been shipping out of state to get processed," he said. "With companies like Sims Brothers and others that we're currently working with, hopefully we'll begin to turn that around."

It was just last month that American Seafood, one of the state's largest crawfish processing facilities, began operating in Iberia Parish.

According to the Louisiana Department of Commerce and Industry, Iberia Parish ranked third in the state in economic development in 1997.

Like American Seafood, Sims Brothers will be freeze drying its product. The shrimp that are processed will be packaged in two varieties — peeled meat stored in five-pound cartons, and headless tail-and-shell shrimp also packaged in five-pound boxes.

"Probably the majority of people employed at the plant will be female," stated Sims. "The atmosphere in the plant doesn't necessitate a lot of manual strength: It's mostly mechanized."

Applications for employment at the facility will be accepted at the Iberia Parish Courthouse from May 9 through May 20.