Sonnier keeps Cajun tradition alive

By Karma Champagne

Sonnier's Cracklings is more than a business for Neuville Sonnier. It is a way to preserve his Cajun culture.

Thirty-three years ago Sonnier started cooking pork cracklings for his family and to sell in his small grocery store. The experience was not a new one for Sonnier. After growing up around Cajun boucheries, he well remembered the smell of fresh cracklings cooking on an open fire.

When he first started making cracklings to sell in his grocery store, they were packaged in brown paper bags for storage on the counter and stored in big pigs' feet jars. The small business quickly grew into a full time family operation that now processes 10,000 to 12,000 pounds of meat and fat into porkskins and cracklings weekly.

Sonnier and his wife, Verna, together with their children, Mark, Keith and Donna take pride in keeping the Cajun tradition alive.

“Our kids grew up around the business so it was normal for them to get involved,” Sonnier said. “We make a good living.”

Sonnier started off his business on a small scale. “We cooked in a small pot holding only 50 pounds. Now we cook as much as 732 pounds in one hour,” he said.

As with any true Cajun boucherie, quality is the key to its success. Sonnier insists on using only the freshest meat that hasn’t been cured.

“We get our meat from Arkansas, packed fresh right off the hog,” he said.

Sonnier’s day begins at 3 a.m. and continues until at (See SONNIER, Page 5)
least 5 p.m. Once the pork slabs arrive on Mondays, preparation begins early in the week. The slabs are cut into small strips by Sonnier’s children as he begins to prepare the two large pots for frying. By Thursday the cooking process is completed and bagging begins in preparation of delivery to stores in South Louisiana.

The fat that is cooked out of the cracklings is kept to be sold as lard for deep fat frying. “We sell about 300 gallons of lard in a week. People like it for frying turkeys and shrimp,” he said.

Sonnier has no plans to end this family tradition. “I plan to keep on going as long as I can,” he said.