Acadian Village Trying To Find Ways To Attract More Visitors To Historic Site

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On some days, the Acadian Village parking lot contains just one or two cars—and they belong to workers there.

"How do we attract more tourists?" shrugged Mary Alice Robin, who clerks in the Village's General Store.

The lack of visitors is becoming a growing concern in the Lafayette community. On Sept. 23, representatives of various groups, including the Police Jury, School Board, Convention and Visitors Bureau and City of Lafayette will meet to discuss ways of helping the tourist attraction.

Located on Mouton Road, it consists of several Acadian houses and a church which have been preserved to represent a 19th Century Cajun village. Some of the houses are furnished with native Louisiana relics.

Budget Cuts, Inflation

The facility has been affected by federal cutbacks on grants, such as one the Village received in the past from the Institute of Museum Services. Inflation is cited as another reason for declining revenues.

Larry Smith, Village curator, told The Advertiser there is now a need for $50,000 in federal funding. The goal, he said, will be to find a "permanent way that money can be funneled into the village to keep the place going."

He compared the Village's income, about $66,000 per year for more than 33,000 square feet of exhibit space situated on 12 1/2 acres, to the Lafayette Museum and Planetarium. The Museum and Planetarium has an annual budget of $150,000 for 4,000 square feet of exhibit space on 1.5 acres, he said.

"Without some sort of public support... Smith's voice trailed off.

Junior League Helps

Smith claims that over 2,000 tourists a month visit Acadian Village each month—10 months out of the year. That includes hundreds of school children who take "end of the year" trips there and classes studying Louisiana history.

But activity is practically nil during the winter months—at least until the Christmas season.

In an effort to help Acadian Village get going financially, the Junior League of Lafayette produced a successful "Christmas Comes Alive" program last year.

About 13,000 people flocked to the village during the two-week program to see the houses festively decorated and lighted and to hear choral groups and other musical entertainment.

Community Support

Smith said attendance at the Village increased in January and February also, so he believes the Christmas program "may have spread a little interest."

The Junior League is tentatively slated to sponsor such a program for the next four years as well.

Acadian Village has received support also from a variety of organizations, such as the Spinners and Weaver's Guild, Ave Coop, En Avant, the Lafayette Parish Medical Auxiliary, L'Heure d'Amitie, the Civilian Club and the Knights of Columbus.

A non-profit corporation has also been established, Acadian Heritage Foundation, which is comprised of interested citizens who want to see the Village thrive.

Smith said the problem may be that Acadian Village was too big when it began and current limited resources can't take care of the upkeep. But he is optimistic that working together, citizens and community leaders can come up with ideas to put Acadian Village back in the black.