

What we think

## Historian painted broader Cajun picture

As National Day of the Acadians approached this week, *The Daily Advertiser* posed a question: Is Cajun still cool?

The response was voluminous and the answer emphatic. Yes. Mais, yeah. Cajun is still unquestionably cool.

The great number of respondents touched on similar aspects of the Cajun character and culture: strong family values, deep and abiding religious faith, a powerful work ethic and a spirit of *joie de vivre*. Pride was expressed, of course, in Cajun music and those who compose and perform it and in the wonder of Cajun cuisine.

In each enthusiastic response, there was affirmation that the Cajun way of life is still lively, robust and intriguing. Cajun is cool.

There are observations, however, that need to be added to those of our readers. They were made by the late Dr. Glenn Conrad, who served as distinguished professor of history and direc-

Why you should care

Cajuns are 'cool' in many ways that are not always considered.

tor of the Center for Louisiana Studies at UL. In a 1999 address during Congrès Mondial Acadien, Conrad observed that the impressive story of the Acadians has seldom been fully and accurately told. People from other parts of the world have learned to love the music and food. Far too many, however, have seen the Acadians only through the eyes of entertainers who sometimes present them as backward, barely literate types.

The unknowing and unacquainted tend to envision Louisiana's Cajuns as barefoot swamp people, paddling pirogues through a murky world of alligators.

Conrad's description of Acadiana's

sionals in all fields.

As Conrad pointed out, progress did not wait until kids from rural Acadiana began struggling with the English language in public schools. The accomplishments date from the earliest arrival of the exiles in Louisiana.

All the qualities that our readers have listed are accurate — and each is cause for deep pride in the Cajun way of life. In addition, Cajuns can make a roux, paddle a pirogue, wrestle an alligator, dance a two-step to the music of accordion and fiddle and do all those other things that are part of a reasonably accurate but incomplete concept held by people in many parts of the nation and world.

When these things, and those uplifting characteristics described by our readers, are combined with the qualities inherent in Conrad's description, a picture emerges of a people who will always be "cool" — and forever unique.

first European settlers and first large landowners should be included when the "cool" aspects of the Cajun culture are discussed.

The early Acadian settlers were, without question, an industrious breed. They carried out Acadiana by hand from the swamps, prairies and coastal marshes. With no history of commerce, they quickly became shrewd traders and graduated to the ranks of successful business people.

From within this remarkable group of people have come statesmen, military heroes, business giants, leaders in arts and entertainment, outstanding educators and nationally-recognized profes-