

French visitors savor sights, smells of Louisiana

By Zach Carline

Special to The Advocate



Louisiana Lt. Gov. Jay Dardene welcomes Andre Lupo, vice president of the Meylan, France twinning group, during an Oct. 9 stop in Baton Rouge. A 10-person French delegation is visiting the area as part of a cultural exchange program hosted by the Gonzales

The smell of a homemade roux, 100 percent humidity and a Saturday filled with football are all natural occurrences in Louisiana, but for 10 French tourists from Meylan, France, it felt like another world.

The French tourists were in town for 10 days as part of the Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs' sister city program.

During their stay, the French delegation toured Tiger Stadium, tailgated before the LSU versus Florida game, visited a plantation, stopped by a sugar mill, attended a Lafayette festival and toured New Orleans.



Photo provided by Karen Hatcher -- Touring the Louisiana State Museum in Baton Rouge on Oct. 9 are, from left, Nadia Lupo, Karen Hatcher, Daniel Ducrocq, Cathy Huloux, Pat Shexnaider and Edwidge Valla.

The group is heading back to France on Thursday, Oct. 17.

Every two years, the Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs hosts visitors from the region and on the intervening years, Meylan hosts visitors from Gonzales.

The program, which began in the 1980s, has been a major success, fostering cultural awareness between the residents of the two regions, said Karen Hatcher, president of the Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs.

The program created a tremendous exchange of ideas both politically and economically, with a focus on tourism, Hatcher said.

The two cities were chosen to be twin cities because Meylan is detached from the capital of its province similar to the way in which Gonzales is detached from

Baton Rouge, with both towns having similar size and economics.

Some of the visitors return every two years with the program; others have never been to Louisiana before. The experience is one they find much different from home.

Andre Lupo and his family made their second trip to Gonzales last week, their first being eight years ago, and they were looking forward to experiencing all Louisiana has to offer.

The people, climate and cuisine of Louisiana are completely different from the Rhone-Alps region of France, where Meylan is located, Lupo said.

He said Meylan is a town in the mountains with cold weather where the people are more spread out than in Baton Rouge, where the group toured on their first day in Louisiana.

Right now, Meylan is empty on the weekends, he said.

The residents take to the mountains for skiing and collecting mushrooms.

Baton Rouge is the contrary, with thousands of people gathering to cheer the Tigers to victory on Saturdays.

Lupo said that in France they only see football on television occasionally, but typically they have no idea what is happening.

In Meylan, they watch soccer or rugby, and the two sports teams share a stadium, much smaller than Tiger Stadium, he said.

Many in the French delegation were in awe of the size of Tiger Stadium.

“In France, they are smaller; it is amazing that this stadium is only for a university team,” Catherine Huloux said.

Tiger Stadium looks like a place gladiators would fight, she said.

The French visitors sampled the cuisine of Louisiana at various stops on the busy itinerary.

“The food here is completely different, but we like it,” Lupo said.

Unlike Meylan, Louisiana cuisine uses plenty of spices, cream and sauces in its dishes, he said.

Hatcher said that although the group may take part in many touristy activities, the experience allows the visitors to immerse themselves in another culture to learn how other people live.



Arsene Lupo, part of a delegation from Meylan, France, visits the LSU football locker room during an Oct. 9 visit to Baton Rouge.



“You live with a family in their home and you learn the small differences in the way they do things,” Hatcher said.

Hatcher said the program has created lifelong friendships and the realization “that we are really all the same” despite our cultural differences.

Hatcher said the friendships she has made through the exchange stand out as the best part of the experience.

“Our way of doing things is different, but at the root we are all humans,” she said.

“There are good people everywhere.”

Visiting the State Capital are members of the Gonzales Committee on Cultural Affairs and visitors from Meylan, France, first row from left, Karen Hatcher, Georgette Zinet and Edwidge Valla, second row, Nadia Lupo, Cathy Huloux and Pat Schexnaider, third row, Arsene Lupo, Wendy Hazy, Joselyne Mangaretto, Andre Lupo, Eve Mire, Roselyne Bobillon, Teddy Rushing and Barbara Rushing and fourth row, Charles Hatcher, Clement Templet, Daniel Ducrocq and Jean-Claude Bobillon.