

Fish industry hopes for good business

By Kevin McGill
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

Theriot, La. — Docked boats were bedecked with fluttering red, white and blue streamers and rainbows of balloons in a bayou-country, pre-shrimp season tradition known as the "Blessing of the Boats."

On the menu? Heaping trays of barbecued chicken, smoked sausage and potato salad — but no crabs or shrimp.

Blame the BP oil spill. The company has plugged the leak and announced Sunday that cement sealing the busted oil well in the Gulf of Mexico had hardened, clearing the path for the final phase of drilling a relief well.

The future isn't so clear for fishermen and their families seeking blessings for a bountiful harvest and divine protection from the water's dangers. They are wondering if the waters will ever be the same again.

"I've had ice chests of shrimp in my freezer all my life," said Dita Dehart, 70, a lifelong area resident who was working on desserts in a back room of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, which has hosted the blessing on Bayou Dularge for more than 50 years. "I have none now."

Fishermen have suffered

through the ever-changing scenario of on-again, off-again closures and a murky future ever since the Deepwater Horizon rig exploded April 20, killing 11 workers. BP said Sunday it may soon begin drilling the final 100 feet of a relief well.

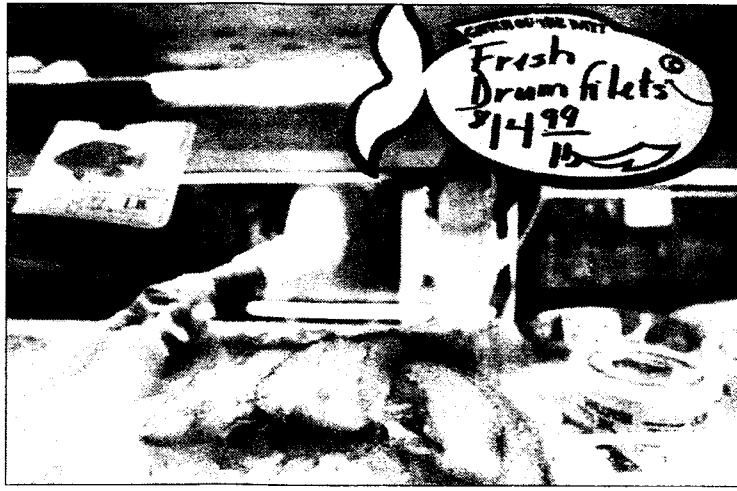
Once the relief well intersects the broken well, more mud and cement will be pumped in for the "bottom kill" meant to seal the well for good.

However, the plugging of the well hasn't ended the uncertainty. Yes, the state technically set next Monday Aug. 16 as the opening for a fall shrimp season along the coast, but some waters will likely remain closed as federal authorities test the safety of the seafood.

"I got a boat that's ready," said Ravin Lacoste, 57. "But we don't know what's going to open up."

"It's open, it's closed, it's open it's closed," said Charles Lovell Jr., before he clambered aboard his shrimp boat to ferry the Rev. Jervis Burns up and down the bayou.

Burns first conducted a service for about 50 fishermen, their families and other parishioners of St. Andrews. The congregation gathered around him on the banks or watched from about a dozen shrimp and oyster boats, sheriff's patrol boats and other vessels that



Patrick Semansky/Associated Press

Fishermen and seafood vendors hope to make a profit despite the oil spill.

sat across a two-lane road from the church — a long, pitch-roofed white metal building nestled between two sprawling oaks, draped with Spanish moss.

Then he climbed aboard Lovell's shrimp boat to lead a water parade, during which he would bless other vessels docked along the bayou and then toss out a wreath memorializing fishermen who have died on the waters.

Scenes like this play out along coastal Louisiana throughout much of the year — fishermen and their families seeking a good har-

vest and divine protection.

"Hurricanes and high waters and all of that. And this year we had the BP oil spill," Burns said as he opened his bayou-side service.

Aside from uncertainty over when and where they'll be able to fish, fishermen are facing lingering doubts about the market, says Mike Dehart, 51. Lacoste's brother-in-law, who runs a shrimp dock just up the road. Demand, and the prices he could get for shrimp, shot up right after the spill, he said, as people rushed to get what they feared would be their last

taste of Gulf seafood. But demand and prices dropped as the spill continued. "It's going to take a couple of years before things get back to normal," he said.

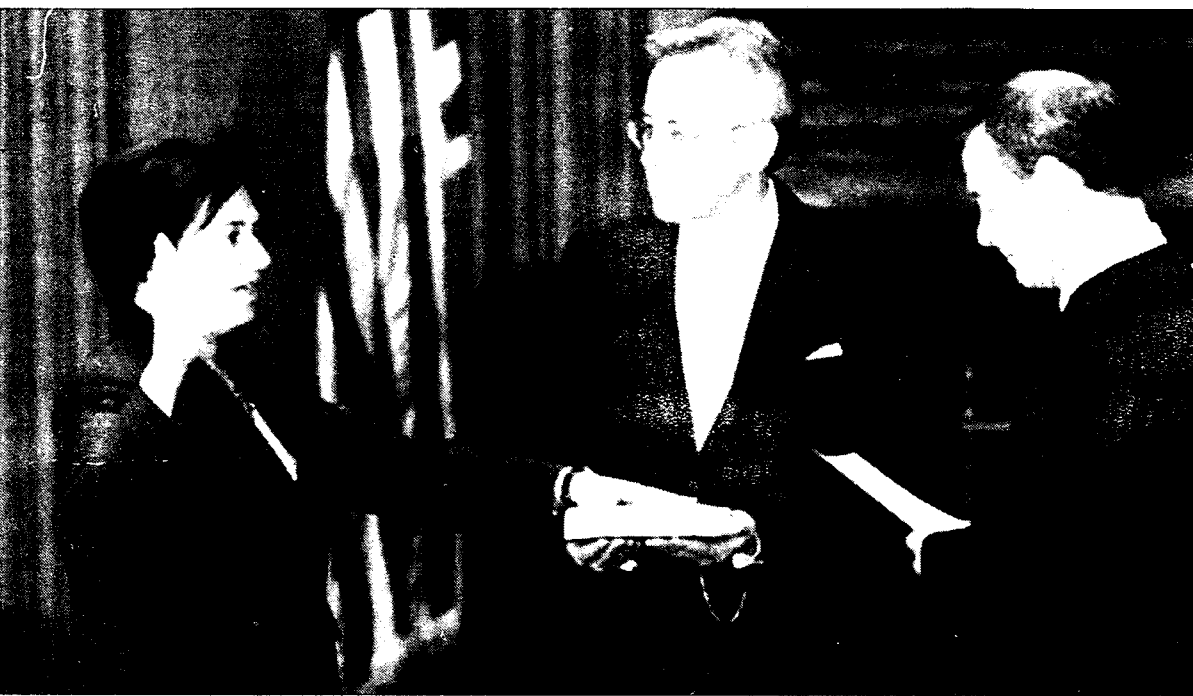
Behind him, heat shimmered off two huge black barbecue smokers. His sister Melissa Lacoste, 53, was helping organize the day's lunch — a fundraiser that would help pay to replace the church's recreation hall, destroyed in Hurricane Gustav two years ago. But they were preparing only 400 plates instead of the usual 700.

The lack of a recreation hall where people could sit comfortably was one reason. And, she said, crabs and shrimp are more popular than chicken, she added (although the 400 plates of chicken later sold out quickly).

"We're afraid with this BP stuff our fishermen's not going to be able to raise the money," Dita Dehart.

The oil spill is only the latest problem to confront St. Andrews. The current St. Andrews building, parishioners say, was built after Hurricane Audrey destroyed an older one in 1957. Gustav's destruction of the recreation hall was followed by the retirement of a priest who hasn't been replaced.

"They've persevered through an awful lot, I'll tell you," said Burns.



Scott Applewhite/Associated Press

Elena Kagan was sworn in as the third female justice on the nine-member Supreme Court Saturday.

Women make up 1/3 of court

By Mark Sherman
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON — At least once a term for 13 years, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg recalled, some lawyer arguing before the Supreme Court would mistake her for Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, or vice versa.

No matter that Brooklyn-born Ginsburg and O'Connor, raised on a ranch in Arizona, look and sound nothing alike.

The confusion arose because, even at the dawn of the 21st century, women on the court were "one- or two-at-a-time curiosities," Ginsburg said.

So she considered it progress that no one made that error after Sonia Sotomayor became a Supreme Court justice last year.

Now with Elena Kagan joining them on the bench for the start of the high court term in October, Ginsburg perceives an even bigger change. Kagan, 50, was sworn in Saturday by Chief Justice John Roberts.

"We are one-third of this court," Ginsburg said during an interview with The Associated Press in her Supreme Court office. No longer a momentous event, the appointment of a woman to the high court has become, Ginsburg said, "expectable."

"I don't think anybody's going to confuse Justice Kagan, Justice Ginsburg or Justice Sotomayor," she said.

But having three women on the court may not change the outcome of any cases. The justices, after all, regularly divide 5-4 along ideological lines in high-profile cases. Sotomayor's votes in her first year were very similar to Justice David Souter's, the man she replaced. Kagan is expected to vote much like Justice John Paul Stevens, who retired in June.

"Having this seat occupied by a woman does not in and of itself

change the way this justice votes," said Vanderbilt University law professor Tracey George.

Academic studies have so far found just one area, sex discrimination lawsuits, in which the presence of a woman on a panel of federal appeals court judges appears to make a difference. A three-judge panel that includes a woman "is significantly more likely to rule in favor of" a person claiming sex discrimination, Christina Boyd, Lee Epstein and Andrew Martin concluded in a 2008 paper.

Adding another woman might not change the outcome of cases, but it could have an effect on how the court goes about its business, George said. She cited social science research that suggests the presence of a woman in a decision-making group influences the behavior of others in the group.

Ginsburg put a similar thought plainly. "We do bring to the table the experience of growing up as girls and women," she said.

The 77-year-old justice picked out one case that the court decided in 2009 to illustrate her point. A 13-year-old girl complained about being strip-searched by officials at her middle school in Arizona in pursuit of prescription-strength ibuprofen.

"The initial reaction of the men was, 'What's so terrible? Boys disrobe,'" she said. "But I think the court really appreciated that there is a difference between the reaction of a 13-year-old girl and 13-year-old boy to that kind of exposure."

Ginsburg didn't explicitly say so, but she appeared to be taking credit for changing some minds. The justices voted 8-1 that the search violated the student's constitutional rights.

She also suggested that women were more likely to add a measure of civility to the court's work. Opinions by the court's women "have no nasty comments whether they're writing for the court or in dissent."

Not so for some of the men. She said Stevens was fond of calling others' opinions "profoundly misguided."

Justice Antonin Scalia, her good friend on the court, is known for his acerbic writings, which Ginsburg conceded might be more attention-grabbing than others'.

Ginsburg is fond of her service with O'Connor, who retired in 2006. In disagreeing on some major issues, they showed that women "come in all sizes and shapes just like men do."

Ginsburg was appointed by Democrat Bill Clinton, while O'Connor became the first woman on the court thanks to Republican Ronald Reagan.

Kagan and Sotomayor were both nominated by President Barack Obama, a Democrat.

"I'd feel better if there was a conservative woman on the court as well, just so there wasn't an opportunity to think they're liberal just because they're women," said Catholic University law professor Amanda Leiter, a one-time clerk for Stevens.

O'Connor played a critical role on the court, never predictably conservative or liberal, often providing the decisive vote in closely divided cases.

The three women justices "may be in dissent more often" because they make up three-fourths of the liberal side of a more conservative court, Leiter said.

Their Democratic ties, though, could make it more likely that the next Republican president will look to nominate a woman, said Notre Dame law professor and former Supreme Court law clerk Richard Garnett.

Ginsburg said Garnett could be right. "I don't think that when there's the next vacancy the president will feel any compulsion to appoint another woman, but also won't resist appointing another woman," she said.

Crowds oppose mosque building

By Travis Loller
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. — Muslims trying to build houses of worship in the nation's heartland, far from the heated fight in New York over plans for a mosque near ground zero, are running into opponents even more hostile and aggressive.

Foes of proposed mosques have deployed dogs to intimidate Muslims holding prayer services and spray painted "Not Welcome" on a construction sign, then later ripped it apart.

The 13-story, \$100 million Islamic center that could soon rise two blocks from the site of the Sept. 11 attacks would dwarf the proposals elsewhere, yet the smaller projects in local communities are stoking a sharper kind of fear and anger than has showed up in New York.

In the Nashville suburb of Murfreesboro, opponents of a new Islamic center say they believe the mosque will be more than a place of prayer.

They are afraid the 15-acre site that was once farmland will be turned into a terrorist training ground for Muslim militants bent on overthrowing the U.S. government.

"They are not a religion. They are a political, militaristic group," said Bob Shelton, a 76-year-old retiree who lives in the area.

Shelton was among several hundred demonstrators recently who wore "Vote for Jesus" T-shirts and carried signs that said: "No Sharia law for USA!" referring to the Islamic code of law.

Others took their opposition further, spray painting the sign announcing the "Future site of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro" and tearing it up.

In Temecula, Calif., opponents brought dogs to protest a proposed 25,000-square-foot mosque that would sit on four acres next to a Baptist church. Opponents worry it will turn the town into haven for Islamic extremists, but mosque leaders say they are peaceful and just need more room to serve members.

"In every religious community, one of the things that has happened over the course of immigration is that people get settled and eventually build something that says, 'We're here! We're not just camping,'" said Diana Eck, a professor of Comparative Religion at the Harvard University. "In part, that's because those communities have put down roots in America and made this their home."

Before the demonstration in Murfreesboro, a fundraiser was held for the new community center. Children behind a folding table sold homemade wooden plaques, door hangers and small serving trays decorated with glitter and messages like, "Peace," "I love being a Muslim" and "Freedom of Religion."

Mosque leader Essam Fathy, who helped plan the new building in Murfreesboro, has lived there for 30 years.

"I didn't think people would try that hard to oppose something that's in the Constitution," he said. "The Islamic center has been here since the early '80s, 12 years in this location. There's nothing different now except it's going to be a little bigger."

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