

Cajun Nation

Clubs, chapters help alumni keep in touch

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA AT LAFAYETTE alumni are all over the map. And Alumni Association Executive Director Dan Hare and his staff regularly connect with graduates all across the country.

Hare recalled some of the places he's visited.

"I've been to a crawfish boil on a beach in California, and to a crawfish boil

just down the road from Mt. Vernon, in the Washington, D.C., area. I've been to crawfish boils in Atlanta, Denver, Dallas and Houston."

Hare said crawfish boils, "hosted by loyal volunteers" have become a signature spring event for Ragin' Cajun alumni.

Part of his job is to identify and recruit future volunteer leaders who will carry on Ragin' Cajun traditions and lend support to their alma mater. To do that, he and his staff keep tabs on where alumni reside.

The Association maintains a database of alumni addresses, which is updated daily. It now contains 73,588 records.

That total does not reflect the exact number of living alumni, Hare explained, only those for whom the Association currently has records on file. Nonetheless, the database is an interesting reflection of where students go after they graduate.

Most stay in Louisiana. More than 52,000 addresses, or 70 percent, are within the Bayou State. The second-largest group of Ragin' Cajuns, 10 percent, hang their hats in Texas. The rest live throughout the United States and abroad, with pockets of UL Lafayette alumni in major metropolitan

areas such as Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Los Angeles and Denver.

A Lafayette company is helping the Alumni Association picture those demographics. C.H. Fenstermaker and Associates Inc. specializes in engineering, environmental consulting, surveying and mapping.

It took the database and created a map showing where alumni turn up across the 50 states. Hare uses the visual aid in presentations and finds it especially useful when he is talking with future graduates. "They're getting ready to embark on the next chapter of their lives. It's exciting, but there's also a great deal of uncertainty. It helps them to know – and to see, in a tangible way – that there's a network of support out there for them.


"That's part of what we do within the Alumni Association. Networking, helping new graduates make connections – and keeping strong connections between the alumni and the university."

UL Lafayette alumni may join two types of constituent groups: Ragin' Cajun Clubs, which are geographically based, and Alumni Chapters, which reflect a specific college, major or interest group.

Both clubs and chapters hold social functions. Some include an aspect of service, along with fellowship. Several groups have funded scholarships. The Alumni Band is an active chapter whose members perform at UL Lafayette basketball games, often filling in for the student band between semesters.

The association stays in touch with its members, but just because an alum isn't part of an organized group, that doesn't mean he or she is excluded, said Hare.

"Even if we don't have an established club or chapter in a particular area, we will often create an opportunity for alumni to get together." ■

 www.louisianaalumni.org



UL Lafayette grads gravitate to the southeast. Shown here are the numbers of alumni in Louisiana, plus the top 10 states outside of Louisiana.