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list of articles

"Fish where the fish are biting"; Louisiana open for business, hoping to attract N.S. tourists
The Chronicle-Herald - August 3, 2007..... 2

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"Fish where the fish are biting"; Louisiana open for business, hoping to attract N.S. tourists

Deborah Mensah-bonsu

Louisiana is on the road to recovery after the devastation of hurricane Katrina in 2005, and the state is open for business, Louisiana Tourism representatives said Thursday at a luncheon at the Marriott Harbourfront Hotel in Halifax.

Nova Scotia, with its thriving Acadian community, has always had close ties to Louisiana and could benefit from the economic renaissance.

"One of the old sayings in Louisiana is that you fish where the fish are biting," said Gerald Breaux, executive director of the Lafayette Convention and Visitors Commission. "The interest for the culture of Louisiana is not as strong in other places in Canada as it is in Nova Scotia.

"As many people who might be interested in tracing their ancestry who moved to Louisiana, there are that many more of us in Louisiana who want to find out where we came from," Mr. Breaux said.

Tourism is one of Nova Scotia's biggest industries, bringing in \$1.3

billion a year and creating 33,000 jobs, said Julie Oliver, executive director of Le Conseil de developpement economique de la Nouvelle-Ecosse. Tourism makes up seven per cent of the province's workforce population and there are 6,500 tourism-related businesses.

Cultural activities like the arts and music attract tourists to both Louisiana and Nova Scotia, Ms. Oliver said. "I think that's a big thing that can be shared between the two."

The 52nd annual Acadian Festival in Clare kicked off on July 28, and the event is a big draw for Louisiana tourists, especially those with ancestry in Nova Scotia.

"I feel like (Nova Scotia) is a second home," said Kathy Gautreau of the West Baton Rouge Tourist Information and Conference Center. "A lot of the cities in Louisiana have twinned themselves with cities in Nova Scotia."

Louisiana's numbers in tourism took a fall after Katrina but are slowly back on the rise, said Ms. Gautreau.

"It's been the misconception that Louisiana is still underwater," she said. "All the tourist attractions are still there; we're ready."

While Louisiana is vying for visitors, Nova Scotia has jumped into the lucrative reconstruction effort. Trade missions, such as the World Trade Center's General Assembly held in Louisiana in 2006, allowed the province to get involved.

"We had 250,000 people move into the Baton Rouge area," said Ms. Gautreau. "Every bit of land that was nothing is being developed for housing."

Projections for the next three years are that up to \$10 million in revenue will be generated for Nova Scotia companies in construction, said Ms. Oliver.

"There was a need in Louisiana and we filled that need," she said.

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Figure:

Gerald Breaux, executive director of the Lafayette Convention and Visitor Commission, sits in front of a Louisiana tourism display in Halifax on Wednesday. Mr. Breaux and several colleagues are in Halifax to promote the state as a tourism destination for Nova Scotians, especially those of Acadian heritage. (Peter Parsons / Staff)

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