# New B&B east of Amite has art as guest

### **BY PAM BANKSTON**

#OhmyHammond! With a brand-new year upon us, it's time for new things. Now, thanks to Laura and Jeff Atkinson.

our area

After

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Bankston

nue MON AMI," a new bed and breakfast east of Amite.

Officially having their first guest last month, the couple decided to host the work of artist Theresa Beaubouef as their second boarder. With over 30 pieces on display, an opening reception was held for the exhibit. Last Saturday, friends and family of the artist gathered to view her paintings, which channel the beauty of nature, including an array of flowers as subjects.

One particular water-color, "Wild Azaleas," appeared life-like enough that guest Carol Schmidt felt as though she could reach out and touch the painting's branches. Friends of Jeff and Laura, Carol and her husband Jon, were impressed with all they saw at the new bed and breakfast.

And I can see why. After all, Ms. Beaubouef's artwork wasn't the only one displayed on the walls of Bienvenue MON AMI. Following six months of painting, artist Rachel Rodriguez permanently decorated each of the four guest rooms. Naming bedrooms after her family's favorite flowers, Laura commissioned Ms. Rodriguez to assist her in creating Lily, Rose and Hibiscus rooms upstairs. As a special touch, woven into the vines of each wall flower panel, Ms. Rodriguez has hidden her artistic signature.

Another hidden secret at the bed and breakfast is an extra room downstairs. A smaller, but quaint space, this fourth room is intended to be used to house chefs. As-



**DELECTIBLES** — Chef Phil O'Donnell serves hors d'oeuvres from Boot Hill Restaurant for Bienvenue Mon Aim's art opening reception last weekend.

piring to rotate weekend cooks, owner Laura also hopes to collaborate with her chefs and compile a book, filled with recipes served throughout the year.

And these chefs should have a selection of fresh ingredients at their fingertips as Laura has been busy planting an herb bed outside her kitchen door.

Now, when I say bed, I mean that literally. Laura is filling an actual bed frame with soil to create a "garden bed." With plans to grow oregano, parsley, and green onions, the future dishes at Bienvenue MON AMI are sure to be bursting with flavor.

Speaking of flavor, the hors d'oeuvres at the reception were quite savory themselves. Served by Phil O'Donnell, from Boot Hill Restaurant in Amite, bacon-wrapped were shrimp skewers, salmon spread on toast and boudin balls, along with a variety of cheese, fruit and grilled veggies.

According to guest Shawn Holcomb, these are only a few of the unique dishes at Boot ated a brand new menu to start the New Year. And I was not surprised to learn that a variety of oyster dishes are included on the list. After all, Boot Hill Restaurant is located in the town of Amite City, home of the Oyster Festival.

To accompany Boot Hill's catering, beverages were served by Crescent Bar's Bryce Cothern. Among those present to share a toast with Ms. Theresa Beaubouef were many of her colleagues, such as artist Nancy Lowentritt, photographer Johnny Chauvin, and art teacher, artist and first lady of Ponchatoula Kim Zabbia.

Also in attendance was Ms. Beaubouef's college roommate Karen Ritter. There along with her husband, John, Mrs. Ritter shared with me memories of her long-time friend's earlier artwork.

Although Theresa was at school, majoring in the computer science field, Mrs. Ritter recalled her friend trying her hand at art.

In fact, Mrs. Ritter said, Hill. Chef Daniel John- I still treasure one of the son, Shawn said, has cre- beautiful pen and ink



WALL FLOWERS - Artist Rachel Rodriguez shows one of the wall flower panels she painted for the new bed and breakfast east of Amite.



BED AND BREAKFAST — Artist Theresa Beaubouef stands with Jeff and Laura Atkinson, owners of Bienvenue Mon Ami, who hosted a reception for her artwork last weekend.

sketches Theresa drew for me.

Now that the doors to their new B& B are open, Laura and Jeff Atkinson are doing their own sketching for the New Year. They already have plans to host a new artist every six months, along with intentions to book house guests and chefs.

Leaving this artistic party at Bienvenue MON AMI last weekend, I was impressed with the innovative ideas of its owners. Now, I can't help but feel recharged with creative energy. After all, the start of this New Year brings each of us a blank canvas. It's just sitting there, like it is every January, waiting to be painted with an endless possibility of bright and shiny colors. Pamela Cali Bankston, R.N., is the published author

of the Frizzy Frieda **Books and board** member of the Hammond Regional Arts Center.

### **ANYTIME - ANYWHERE**

## 'Tree-mendous' contributions during and after life happens

### **BY SISTER JOEL** GUBLER, O.P.

"Breath of Ecology" When we were children, since we hadn't seen our tree until Christmas



morning (havbeen ing left by Santa the night before), we wouldn't let our parents

Gubler

take it down until well into February.

These days, some trees are up and decorated before Thanksgiving, and down a day or so after Christmas. How sad, since the season continues for 12 days after the 25th.

For years, all of the discarded trees were seen out on curbsides to be picked up by the garbage collectors; now we've become more sensible ecology-wise. Tree recycling and mulching programs are a fast-growing trend in this country, I was very happy to discover.

On announced dates, the trees are placed out front to be collected by certain trucks to be carried off especially for marsh restoration in the Louisiana area. Those that go into the water can also be habitats and food for fish.

Only natural, unflocked trees stripped of ornaments, of course, are acceptable for this undertaking.

These days, some trees are up and decorated before Thanksgiving, and down a day or so after Christmas. How sad, since the season continues for 12 days after the 25th.

If you have a fireplace, however, you might want to chop it up for firewood, and if you have a garden, you can use the needles for mulch.

So these days, your Christmas tree can have a useful afterlife.

From a free life in the forest, to brightening a home, to ecology-smart use ... not bad. 

Sister Joel Gubler, previously of Rosaryville, now lives in Kentucky.

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