



GWEN AUCCOIN

The documentary "Little Houses" explores the history and folklore connected with grave houses in an Acadia Parish cemetery.

hoping to find out why the houses were built. We never found that answer, but I think the fact that the question remains unanswered makes the film even more compelling."

After the initial filming, "Little Houses" was "put on the back burner for several years because of family commitments," said Jeremy Broussard.

"Then my brother Zach picked up the project and finished it for us."

In 2007, Zach Broussard enlisted the help of UL Lafayette's Cinematic Arts Workshop, working with folklorist Conni Castille and filmmaker Allison Bohl to update the script and shoot additional footage. The Workshop also provided office space and editing facilities.

"It took a long time to complete the film, but we eventually reached all our goals," Zach Broussard said.

In February 2008, the grave houses were added to the National Register of Historic Places. In 2009, the filmmakers created Benefilms, a non-profit organization that distributes "Little Houses." It dedicates 20 percent of DVD sales for the houses' preservation. The film premiered May 1, 2009, at the Rice Theatre in Crowley. To date, Benefilms has raised about \$1,500 for the preservation project.

In April, Jeremy Broussard published *Grave House Legends*, a book that complements the film. Ten percent of the book's profits are dedicated to the preservation effort.

Charles Richard, director of the Cinematic Arts Workshop, said the film is "an ideal example of the kind of project the workshop supports. It's a well-told story with aesthetic merit that is helping to increase cultural awareness."

"Donny, Jeremy and Zach have definitely taken on the role of activist filmmakers with this piece," Richard added.

Leonard Smith, a lifelong resident of Mermentau Cove and president of the Istre Cemetery Board, said the filmmakers inspired him to carry on the grave house tradition. In March of last year, he built a new house over the grave of his

infant granddaughter, Karien Joy Benoit, who died in 1990.

The unpainted cypress house has a metal roof, "a window on each side and a little door with a latch. It kind of looks like a little doll house," Smith said.

"I just felt that I needed to put something over her. And I thought, 'If I make a little house, maybe other people will get interested and build some more.'" ■



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Interior of the Istre grave house

## CINEMATIC CONTRIBUTIONS

**P**art of the UL Lafayette Cinematic Arts Workshop's mission is the "expression of art and ideas through digital media." Its productions include award-winning documentary films, promotional videos and content for educational computer games. The Workshop's main focus is to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration among students and professionals, including off-campus producers and faculty.

Conni Castille, a folklorist and filmmaker, is assistant director of the Workshop. Its latest project, a documentary set for release in June, tells the story of how Breaux Bridge became known as the Crawfish Capital of the World.

Other Cinematic Arts Workshop productions include:

■ **"Pin Pal,"** a promotional video that supports Festival International de Louisiane, the largest outdoor Franco-phone live music event in the United States. Held in downtown Lafayette each April, the festival relies on the sale of artist-designed pins to maintain free admission. The festival has an estimated annual economic impact of more than \$20 million.

■ **"BeauSoleil: Louisiana's Solar Home,"** a promotional video for UL Lafayette's Louisiana BeauSoleil Solar Home project. The energy-efficient, sustainable home won two top awards in the U.S. Department of Energy's 2009 Solar Decathlon, an international competition among 20 universities.

■ **"Congrès Mondial: the Bid for Louisiana,"** a 10-minute documentary created for the Lafayette Visitors and Convention Center, accompanied Louisiana's proposal for the world gathering of Cajun and Acadian descendants.

■ **"Raised on Rice and Gravy: A Film About Plate Lunch Houses In South Louisiana,"** a documentary that serves up the traditions of Cajun and Creole cooking in neighborhood lunch houses.

■ **"I Always Do My Collars First: A Film About Ironing,"** a documentary look at how a mundane chore is valued as a ritual and an expression of cultural identity in the lives of four Cajun women in French Louisiana.