

FIRST LADY TO BE AMBASSADOR FOR UL

Although Gail Savoie's husband has a new job, she doesn't expect her own public role to be much different.

She predicts that it will be similar to her role as the wife of the former commissioner of higher education. "I don't think there is going to be any real change."

Savoie said she always felt like an ambassador for Louisiana when she and Dr. Joseph Savoie would attend social functions with political leaders, board members and other commissioners of higher education from around the nation. Acting as a representative of the state in general, and south Louisiana specifically, comes naturally to her because Lafayette has been her home since she attended the University of Southwestern Louisiana in the 1970s.

In a recent interview, she recalled tailgating at Cajun Field before the Ragin' Cajuns' game against Arkansas State in mid-October. "I was sitting there, having a conversation, when I looked around and realized I was surrounded by Arkansas State fans. They were in the midst of all these Ragin' Cajuns and they were having a ball. The hospitality here is just so incredible. I don't know of another place like it."

Savoie grew up in Sulphur, La., but chose not to attend nearby McNeese State University in Lake Charles, La. "McNeese is a wonderful college but it was close to home and I just wanted a new experience.

"I remember my first time walking on this campus at orientation. I could not believe that people would actually look at you in the face, smile and say 'Hi,' and they didn't know who the heck you were. I had never experienced that and it was just great. I knew I had found home. I didn't want to be anywhere else and, to this day, you can walk on this campus and still have that same feeling of acceptance."

Savoie joined Delta Delta Delta sorority as a USL student. "To this day, I still keep up with my tri-Delt sisters. In fact, there is a group of us that gets together at least once a year. We call ourselves the 'Delta Roses.'" She was also a UL cheer-



Gail Heinbach Savoie

leader and remains an avid fan of Ragin' Cajun athletics.

Gail and Joseph Savoie married after she graduated from UL Lafayette with a degree in education.

Savoie said she had always wanted to teach. Her first teaching job was at St. Ignatius, a small Catholic school in Grand Coteau, La. "I was the fifth grade teacher and I taught there for about three years," she said. Savoie also taught at St. Antoine Elementary School in Lafayette. She spent the last 10 years of her career as a third grade teacher at Woodvale Elementary, which is near the Savoies' home.

"The cool thing about it was that I taught a lot of my college friends' children. And I can't begin to tell you how many kids I've taught who lived up and down the street where we live. That has been a real joy for me to watch these kids grow up."

The Savoies have a son, Adam, and a daughter, Blaire. Adam is a sophomore in high school.

Blaire married Aaron Saulnier in April; they live in Baton Rouge.

When Adam was in sixth grade, he took art lessons. But it was his mom who became an artist.

Savoie describes how that happened: "He was playing around with paints and I thought, 'I can play around with paint.' So I just starting messing around and it became a joy."

She primarily paints Louisiana primitives, using acrylics in bright colors. She has sold her paintings in Lafayette and Baton Rouge.

Savoie produced a fleur de lis painting for her husband's new office in Martin Hall. It was reproduced on small canvases that were gifts to special guests who attended an Inauguration Day luncheon held in October.

Savoie said she is looking forward to serving as first lady of UL Lafayette.

"I really and truly feel honored and blessed to now be an ambassador for the university. To have a part in working to support UL Lafayette is exciting to me because the university gave me so much." ■