



Advocate staff photo by BILL FEIG

From left, Lee, Stan, Craig and Leslie Routh produce the Routh Collection Greeting Card line of Christmas cards from a 400-square-foot studio in Denham Springs. The Rouths estimate 250,000 of the cards will be sold during this Christmas season.

# Cards with Cajun accent

## Rouths produce popular line of Louisiana-themed Christmas cards

BY JOHN BOYD  
Advocate staff writer

Craig Routh's line of Christmas cards is never hard to spot on a store shelf.

Clydesdales clopping through a snow bank? No, that's not them.

School children building snowmen? Uh-uh.

A red-nosed gator (Roux-dolph?) guiding Santa's sleigh through Tiger Stadium?

Yeah, that would be the one.

"We wanted to focus on what's unique about Louisiana," said Routh, founder of the Routh Collection Greeting Card Co.

So customers will find no North Pole toy shops on Craig and father Stan Routh's Christmas cards.

Hunting cabins — that they've got.

Polar bears having a Coke and a smile? No, but crawfish and 'coons roasting s'mores over a campfire. You bet.

In a state where flying alligators are about as likely as snow actually falling on Christmas, the Routh Collection has become a best-seller.

"Throughout the entire state it is the No. 1 selling card," said Denise Calagno, who oversees Louisiana's eight Barnes & Noble book stores. "In fact, if I sell 200 Christmas cards, theirs are always numbers one through five."

Gayle McCall, owner of Gayle's Hallmark Shop in Central, said her store sells out of the cards every year.

"I forgot to order them one year," McCall said. "I really heard it from my customers."

Routh's family has produced the Louisiana-centric Christmas cards since 1994.

Stan, a former architect and an artist known for his paintings of historical buildings, was a strong influence on his son's art.

The two share similar painting styles. Their subjects are often the only thing that set their works apart. Stan prefers painting detailed buildings. Craig prefers elaborate swamp scenes and holiday critters.

Stan's wife, Lee Routh, takes care of packaging. Craig's wife, Leslie Routh, handles the orders, maintains the Web site (<http://www.LouisianaGreetings.com>) and comes up with new recipes

for the back of each card.

Everyone pitches in ideas for new cards.

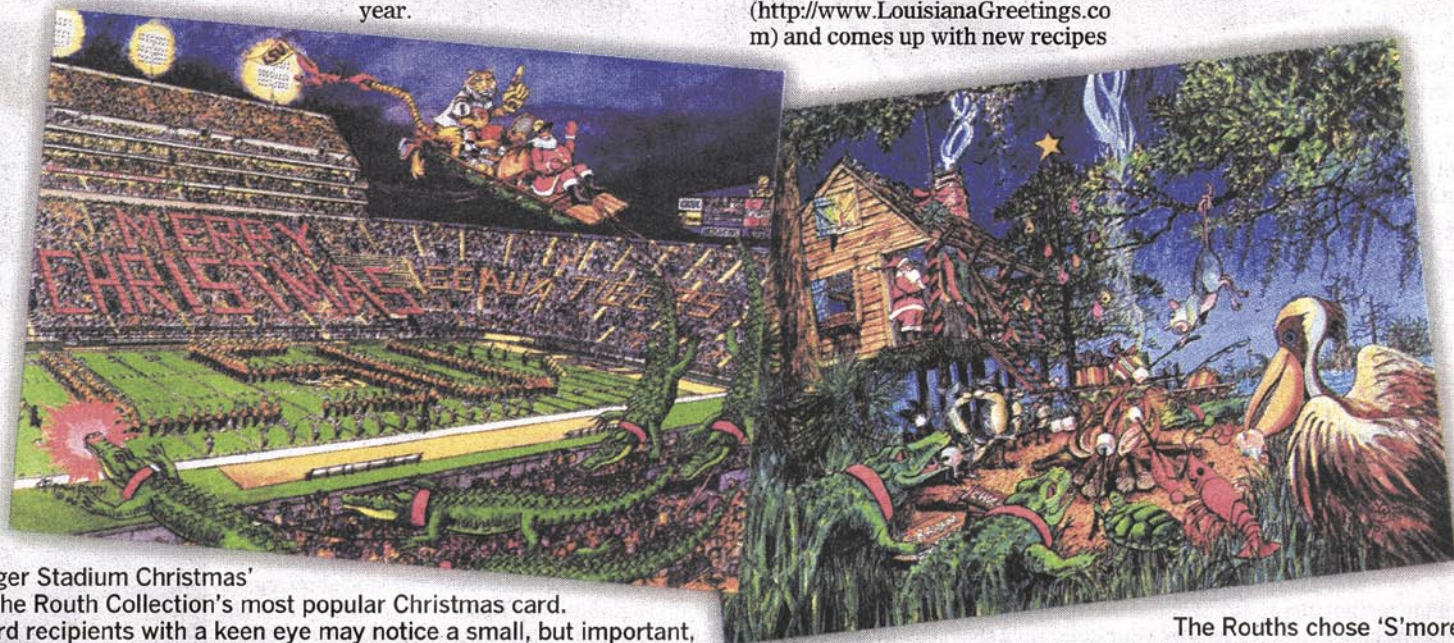
"Everybody has a finger in it," Stan Routh said. "It's like a gumbo."

The Rouths will sell about 250,000 Christmas cards this season. They also produce stationery for Mardi Gras, LSU football season, birthdays and other special events.

Only the printing of the cards is done off-site. The rest of the operation is run from a 400-square-foot studio attached to Craig's Denham Springs home.

A majority of the holiday cards will be bought by customers in

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'Tiger Stadium Christmas' is the Routh Collection's most popular Christmas card. Card recipients with a keen eye may notice a small, but important, background detail: The scoreboard shows LSU leading Alabama 77-0 at halftime.

The Rouths chose 'S'mores for Santa,' a new design for 2007, to send to the 130 or so friends, family members and clients on their Christmas card list.



Photo provided by CRAIG and STAN ROUTH

Two angels overlook the Crescent City in 'Angels Over New Orleans, Caroling by Candlelight in Jackson Square.' The model for the angel at right is Craig Routh's son, Brandon; the angel at left, Brandon's girlfriend.



Photo provided by STAN ROUTH

Rustic cabins, as seen in 'Santa's Workshop,' are a common theme in the Routh Collection's holiday cards. Stan Routh says the cabin symbolizes the individuality of the people of Louisiana.

## CARDS

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Louisiana, though the line has grown popular with some out-of-staters, as well.

A Washington-based insurance company sent Routh cards to customers last year as a way of celebrating a year without a major hurricane.

Louisiana-based engineering services company Ford, Bacon & Davis sends the cards to customers throughout the southeast.

David Gaffney, the company's vice president of business development, said Craig and Stan's designs are well-re-

ceived even in other states, but it's Leslie's recipes that get the most positive reviews.

Many of the recipes are old family recipes. Others, Leslie said, are from meals she enjoyed in restaurants then re-created in her own kitchen.

Each is uniquely Louisianian, Leslie said.

"Believe it or not, some of the retail customers look at the back of the box first and buy based on (the recipe) rather than the design on the front," said Bob Keifer, an independent sales representative who has been selling the Routh's cards to stores for more than a decade.

The Rouths, for their part, have chosen to send out the



Photo provided by CRAIG ROUTH

Santa stops by Tiger Stadium for a bowl of gumbo before heading out for his Christmas Eve deliveries in 'Tailgatin'.

## The Routh Collection

For a list of stores which sell the Routh Collection Christmas cards or to order online, check the Web site at <http://www.LouisianaGreetings.com>.

design featuring the s'mores-eating swamp critters to their friends and family this year.

The card is one of four new designs this year. The Rouths will send the design to about 130 people on the family's Christmas card list.

About Dec. 14, when the final orders have been sent, the Rouths will finally take a break.

The week of Christmas may be the only week of the year that isn't Christmas inside the Routh studio.

A clipboard labeled "card ideas" dangles from a doorway inside the studio.

"We have already started thinking about ideas for next year," Craig said.

## Red Beans and Rice with Sausage

1 lb dried red kidney beans  
10 cups unsalted broth from ham or poultry bones  
1 lb. smoked pork sausage  
2 large onions, chopped  
1 bell pepper, chopped  
2 large garlic cloves, minced  
2 T oil  
6 cups cooked rice  
1 T Creole Seasoning Salt  
Black pepper  
Salt

Soak beans overnight in a large bowl of water. Drain beans. In a large pot add beans, garlic and broth. Bring to a boil and cook on medium heat for 2 hours or until beans are tender. Meanwhile, cut the sausage into bite sized pieces and cook in another pot on medium heat until browned. Remove the sausage and add the oil, onions and bell pepper to the pot. Cook over medium heat until vegetables are tender. When the beans are tender add the cooked vegetables and sausage. Season to taste with salt, pepper and creole seasoning. Continue to cook on low heat for 1 hour. Serve over cooked rice. Makes approximately 8 servings

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'Tailgatin' - Original Artwork by Craig Routh

"The University name and logo featured on this product is a registered trademark of that university"

Denham Springs, Louisiana  
[www.louisianagreetings.com](http://www.louisianagreetings.com)  
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Photo provided by CRAIG and STAN ROUTH

Every Routh Collection holiday card comes with a Louisiana-inspired recipe on the back. Leslie Routh said most of the recipes are family favorites, but others come from meals she has tried elsewhere and then tinkered with back home.