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Dear AFJ Member:

WELCOME TO NEW ORLEANS AND BATON ROUGE!

Have we ever needed a good time as much? We want the 2009 AFJ Conference to be an antidote to the stress we're all experiencing in the newspaper, freelance and online food businesses. We will experience southern Louisiana's famous joie de vive and hospitality, provide fabulous and substantial culinary stories and things to write about, and feature essential professional development to help us hang on to, if not our jobs, our sanity.

From our base in a small, chic downtown hotel, we will venture out to taste the food of our best chefs and cooking teachers (Emeril Lagasse, Paul Prudhomme, John Besh, Donald Link, Frank Brigtsen, Susan Spicer, John Folse and several more), visit historic homes and two plantations and take you to three new museums.

We will head upriver to Baton Rouge to give you the real scoop on sugar, sugar. And even if you have been here many times, panels on "The New Orleans You Don't Know" will introduce you to real people who can explain the lesser-known hands in the pot that have shaped the cuisine.

For those who can come early and/or stay late, we have suggestions for as many enterprise stories as you care to write. We have optional activities both fun and meaningful, all of which will deepen your knowledge of this fascinating place, its challenges and joys.

Questions? Call Judy Walker at 504-826-3485 or Tommy Simmons at 225-388-0643. We look forward to welcoming you in person in October.

**— Judy Walker, Tommy Simmons, and the 2009  
Association of Food Journalists conference committee**