The Council for the Development of French in Louisiana has introduced a new custom license plate to encourage Francophone identity and to help raise funds for the French immersion program in public schools.

“It started a few years ago at a fund-raising committee meeting,” said CODOFIL Director David Cheramie. “We looked at producing specialty plates, like the universities have, and Carencro High has, and wanted to come up with one for our French heritage — for people who either spoke French or wanted to be a part of the movement.

“Richard Guidry, who passed away last year, designed the plate and did a beautiful job.” The design features a Louisiana iris — la glaie bleue — an egret, a marsh landscape and the words “Chez nous autres” across the bottom of the plate. The crowning feature is “Louisiane” across the top, replacing the normal “Louisiana.”

“Chez nous autres’ means ‘our home’ in Cajun,” Cheramie said. “We’re really happy with the ‘e’ in Louisiane. We had to fight for that ‘e’.”

Cheramie credited Sen. Eric LeFleur has been influential in getting the license plates passed. The plates will be available at the Department of Motor Vehicles offices throughout Louisiana in July. They may also be ordered now through the Office of Motor Vehicles by calling 225-925-6371 or by visiting any DMV office.

The initial cost of the plate with a number assigned by the Department of Motor Vehicles is at least $61.50. The annual renewal fee is $50 with some $25 of each fee being donated to French immersion.

“We need to get more (teaching) materials in French,” Cheramie said.

“A lot of the kids in the immersion movement now are using English textbooks and translating into French as they go. We can get math textbooks from Canada, but you can’t get American history textbooks in French.”

Cheramie has been encouraged by early returns on the project.

“The OMV says they’ve had a very good response,” Cheramie said.

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