Abbeville Cultural and Historical Alliance Center opening today.

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ABBEVILLE — The French language may be as prevalent as English at today’s grand opening of L’Alliance Culturelle et Historique d’Abbeville, or the Abbeville Cultural and Historical Alliance center, a long-anticipated addition to the downtown area.

Coordinator Russell Gaspard said state first lady Alice Foster is scheduled to be on hand at 5:15 p.m. to cut the ribbon at 108 S. State St.

Gaspard said Vermilion Parish has more French-speaking residents per capita than any parish in the state, making it an ideal location for a center designed to celebrate and preserve French-Acadian history, language, culture and the arts.

Four entities have joined to form the alliance — the Acadian Center envisioned for years by former Clerk of Court Gaspard, the Vermilion Historical Society, the Vermilion Parish Arts Council and the Confrerie de L’Omelette Geante, or Fraternity of the Giant Omelette.

Fraternity members and chevaliers (knights) of the round skillet, who cook a 5,000-egg feast here each November at one of Acadia’s most colorful festivals, were busy Thursday attending to last-minute preparations at the center.

“This is going to be a tremendous asset to Abbeville and Vermilion Parish,” omelette grand master Whit Atchetee, said.

The center will help boost tourism and will be a focal point for activities during 1999’s year-long FrancoFete celebration of 300 years of French influence in Louisiana, including the August 1999 Congres Mondial des Acadiens, he said.

Displays have been set up at the center on the expulsion of the Acadians from Nova Scotia in the 1755 and on the history of Vermilion Parish. Area artists also will display their works at the center, parish Arts Council spokesman Ronney Mayard said.

City and parish officials are pursuing a $700,000 state capital outlay grant to house the center on the fourth floor of City Hall. The current, temporary location is being provided through the generosity of the W.P. Edwards family estate, Gaspard said.