French-Speaking Ability Stressed by Merchants

By TRENT ANGERS

LAFAYETTE, La. — Doors and windows of hundreds of business establishments in Lafayette and in some nearby towns are dotted with French language signs proclaiming that the people inside speak French, just as their ancestors did decades and centuries ago throughout southwest Louisiana.

The signs were put up by workers for the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODIFIL) in preparation for the coming International Congress of the French-speaking Americas, which opens here Monday for a three-day session.

CODIFIL EFFORT

The sign-placing, the congress and other related activities are being carried out by CODIFIL in an effort "to convince the French-speaking world that Louisiana is serious" in her efforts to preserve and expand the use of French in the homes, schools and businesses of this state, CODIFIL chairman James Domengeaux explained recently.

Benoit said he found a generally favorable attitude toward the teaching and speaking of French. While the speaking of French has been looked down upon by many in the past, there seems to be a changing attitude toward its usage now, he reported.


The head waiter at a local restaurant displaying a French poster said 95 percent of the 150 employees of that firm speak French among themselves and with their customers. It's good business to do so, he said, adding that he encourages the employees to talk the language with customers.

The clerk on duty at a local food mart Friday morning said he couldn't translate the French sign on his front store window, but that he speaks Cajun French fluently. Cajun French speaks a lot in Lafayette.

A young man working at the Hamburger Place and he said he couldn't read the French sign on his place, but that he understands the language when spoken.

A downtown clerk turned up her nose at the prospect that a south Louisiana could once again become a bilingual region. She explained that upon graduation from high school in Lafayette in the 1930s, she tried to get a job here but no one would hire her because she didn't speak French. She was indifferent to the French sign on the front of her building.

A large food store assistant manager whose store wore a French poster said bilingualism makes for good business and good customer relations. Some customers come in unable to speak a word of English, and ask to be helped in French. Bilingual clerks are happy to accommodate. He reported.

The station owner, Pierre Fortier, said he moved here 10 years ago from Ottawa, Canada, where French is spoken often. His place is located at a main intersection in Lafayette. Stepping out to the front of the station, he pointed in all directions, explaining that the old lady in a nearby white house talks French: the people in the bank nearby speak it; city hall employees and telephone company operators, who park near his station, talk in French before and after work, and the people at the bakery would rather talk French than English.

Signs Posted on Firms in Lafayette Area

By TRENT ANGERS

SIGNS REFLECTING Louisiana's efforts to preserve and expand her French language and heritage have been placed in the windows of hundreds of southwest Louisiana business establishments in preparation for the coming International Congress of the French-speaking Americas, which opens in Lafayette Monday for a three-day session.

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