French Teacher Begins First Day Of Instructions

LAFAYETTE, La. (AP)—Brigitte LeSaint has been awaiting this day for months.
After a week of preparation and observation, today she'll be standing in front of a classroom full of bright-eyed youngsters at the Alice Boucher Elementary School.

“I teach only in French,” she says haltingly. “But I think I understand their English—a little.”

The transfer was worked out last spring when a delegation led by the chairman of the Council of the Development of French in Louisiana, James Domengeaux, visited Paris and pleaded with President Georges Pompidou to loan them a contingent of French teachers.

“There had been no certified teacher of French in this area for 40 or 50 years,” Domengeaux said, “so there will be no displacement of Louisiana teachers. “We had to save our language.”

So the French government, in conjunction with CODOFIL and the state of Louisiana, agreed to allow certified male French teachers to spend two years in Cajun schools as a means of fulfilling their military obligations.

Certified Frenchwomen were also recruited to spend a year teaching French to Louisianans.

“I thought I would spend only one year here,” explains Miss LeSaint slowly, “but I think now I would have to spend two years here. To do the experience right, it is better.”

Of course, not all of that experience is academic.

Also Learning
“We’re also learning to speak French,” says Joe McSpadden, with whose family Miss LeSaint is living. “And we’re teaching her English, although I must say that she’s picking up the English very rapidly—much more rapidly than we’re picking up the French.”

“We’re just one, big, happy multi-lingual family,” he adds.

As of today, Miss LeSaint will be in charge of a classroom, teaching a group of first-through-third graders the intricacies of math, social living, art, physical education and music.

“The kids in this area aren’t native French speakers,” adds McSpadden, “so I guess they’ll be communicating mostly by gesture.”