Governor Praises CODOFIL Effort

BATON ROUGE — Governor Edwin Edwards said, “It is wrong to let the French language die in Louisiana.”

Speaking in French at a luncheon Thursday for 275 CODOFIL associate teachers of French from France, Quebec, Belgium, Switzerland and Haiti, the governor said if French is left to die the young of Louisiana will be deprived of a major asset in a tough competitive world and the state will lose many of its cherished customs and traditions.

The governor, 47 and fluent bilingual, said he was the last generation to be taught French in the schools. At the age of 10, he said, French was banished from the schools in an effort to teach English.

“It worked so well that it nearly destroyed the French language in Louisiana,” the governor said.

Gov. Edwards said his administration backs fully the efforts of the State Department of Education and the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) to teach French, a language still spoken natively by a third of Louisiana’s close to four million population.

State Education Superintendent Louis Michot said, in French, that Louisiana “is proud of its language renaissance carried on by CODOFIL.” He said the state is striving to train native teachers for French instruction in the elementary grades.

CODOFIL chairman James Domengeaux said the rejuvenation of French in Louisiana is “good for us and good for the whole French-speaking world.”

In 50 to 100 years, Domengeaux said, it could be possible that French will have spread across the United States from its hearth in Louisiana.

This will enrich the nation and create beacons for the 40 countries and regions around the world which use French as their official tongue or as a language of culture or business.

After the luncheon, the associate teachers left Baton Rouge for 35 of the state’s 66 school parishes where they will teach French to over 60,000 youngsters at the elementary level.

The CODOFIL chairman called on Louisiana parents to welcome the associate teachers “not only upon arrival, but all through the year.”

“These young people have left their homes and friends to bring to your children the great gift of language,” he said. “Give them in return the gift of friendship.”