How To Boost Employment For Southwest Louisiana

We could, with such a program attract students and retired people from other parts of the country and even the world. Out-of-state students like tourists, also want to spend a few years in a place which is “different”. And French-speaking students from Canada and Europe, who could find Louisiana different Acadiana a good antidote to homesickness.

Ice On Parle Français

Everybody in Acadiana can do something to emphasize the region’s unique flavor. We can make a contribution in our choice of home design, in the names we give to our streets and shops, and - for those who can by speaking French proudly.

Businesses related to the tourist industry - hotels, motels, restaurants - are in an excellent position to emphasize the French flavor. And public officials could do a lot to help individuals and businesses in this task. Emphasizing Acadiana’s heritage puts the region on the world map.

And this leads to the second proposal: If Acadiana is known as a place where workers can speak French, then Acadiana can expect to be a recruiting place for corporations and governmental agencies with overseas needs. American business corporations are operating in many French-speaking parts of the world. The armed forces and civilian agencies are deeply involved in programs in such French-speaking areas as Europe, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and French Africa. The armed forces use area people as interpreters in some of these countries. Already the government has recruited some area workers for the Agency for International Development and similar programs. Jobs abroad range from the executive working in the Common Market office of an American corporation to the construction worker in the dockyards of South Vietnam.

Good For Employment

Job opportunities like these can have a long-term benefit as these people return to Louisiana with new knowledge and human relations skills. But overseas employment can also help to relieve seasonal surpluses of semi-skilled labor in this region. A man who may be only semi-skilled in Acadiana is a skilled leader in an underdeveloped country. He takes with him a knowledge of things which we too often take for granted: sanitation, mechanical abilities, and adequate literacy compared with the people amongst whom he will be working. That is why the Peace Corps has used non-graduates along with more-educated personnel.

For many of these jobs a speaking knowledge of French is quite sufficient. Others require an ability to read and write in French, though it does not have to be so-called Parisian French - any more than Americans in general do not speak English like the Queen — nor need to. In addition, workers going overseas need to know something about the conditions they will meet: economic, racial, legal and social. Training programs in Acadiana institutions of higher education, financed by such programs as the Higher Education Act but geared to the needs of adult workers, can provide this knowledge.

Above all, both for employment overseas and for the maximum development of tourism in the region, Acadiana needs a program of upgrading the French-language abilities of the region. It is impossible to give the tourist bilingual menus if you can only write the English side. Acadiana does not have to be ”Parisian”. But it does need to read and write an expanded vocabulary. If the Montrealters can do it, so can Acadiana. The development of Acadiana’s unique potential is a fitting project for community action groups, schools, churches — all of us.

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Acadiana has half a million people who can speak colloquial French. This fact, and the French cultural heritage of the region, could be used to increase employment opportunities for the people of Acadiana at least two ways. First, the French language abilities of Acadiana workers could be used to secure supplementary employment opportunities overseas. Tourists and students like to see something “different” when they leave home. They do not want to see the same old hamburger heavens. They want modern conveniences and high standards of accommodation, but they also want atmosphere and an exotic flavor. Montreal, Canada, to capture the tourist market, decided some years ago to emphasize its French heritage. Names, signs, menus, entertainment - all have been given a French-Canadian flavor. The result: Montreal is now a top center of world tourism and next year plays host to an official universal world fair.

The Flavor’s Missing

In Louisiana, however, the French flavor has been played down and is disappearing. Little attempt is made in Acadiana to reflect the region’s unique history and attractions. The result: we attract hunters but the tourists do not. We could hold them, if we were to give the region an air of being different and exciting: open-air restaurants, boutiques, bilingual entertainment, French names and the sound of a different language in shops and hotels.