L'Heritage Francais
Merite d'Etre Garder

DELCAMBRE, La. (AP) — On the
deck of the shrimp trawler
John-Paul at dockside in this
South Louisiana fishing village,
A. J. Sonnier was eloquent in a
300-year-old French dialect as
he berated the luck that brought
him engine trouble.

"Il l'a juste fait reparer (I just
had it repaired)," he complained
to a shop owner in the
same tongue — it's the language
of commerce here.

'French Better'
"My French is better than my
English," said Sonnier, stocky
and weather-creased at 56.

"When you speak here, you
speak French," he added,
gesturing to the net-draped trawlers
along the winding bayou that
leads to the Gulf of Mexico.

But ashore, English dominates
among the young. The French
are parents is fading under
pressure of mobility, Eng-
lish-language media and mis-
guided education policies.

"I've got two daughters," Son-
nier said, shaking his head.
"One, she doesn't speak French.
The other one, she won't speak
it."

Sonnier and the rest of Del-
cambre's citizens are a study in
miniature of the decline of a
language and heritage be-
queathed to this region by 18th
Century arrival of an exiled
people — the Acadians.

Urban Center
Across Delcambre's bayou, a
two-lane road through the heart
of Acadiana stretches into a 20-
minute drive ending in La-
yette, the urban center of a
movement to preserve French
and ultimately create a national
center for business and educa-
tion keyed to the language.

If preservation efforts fail,
those involved predict the death
of what is now a "native for-
"je de vivre" — joy of
living.

"The preservation movement
has come to life because of the
belief in the necessity of doing
what must be done to save the
French language," said Domen-
geaux, a former congressman,
native French-speaker and
chairman of a newly created
state agency, the Council for the
Development of French in Loui-
siana.

Languages Key
Another figure in the move-
ment, Dean Thomas Arceenaeus
of the University of Southwestern
Louisiana, agrees that lan-
guage is the key but also notes
the lasting psychological
power of its French
background. "Our Acadian people are now
proud of their ethnic back-
ground," said Arceenaeus, whose
speech hearkens to his French
background. "I think we had to do

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