Major Moves Underway Here To Retain Flavor Of Acadiana

By BOB ANGERS JR.

"Let's keep this area delightfully and refreshingly different!" That advice from Acadians came from an Acadian descendant Friday. When he finished his talk before a joint meeting of the French Heritage Organization and the education committee of the Chamber of Commerce he won spontaneous applause.

Before the day was over, the Acadians who chaired the FHO, Allen Babineaux, was able to report some major moves underway to retain the unique Acadian flavor of Southwest Louisiana. Among these are:

1. A plan to move the historic Vermilionville Inn, donated by the Horace Rieley family, to the Evangeline Thruway where it would be restored and preserved as a major tourist attraction;
2. The Chamber of Commerce is not only going along with the plan but would possibly move its offices to the same area in a building of Acadian construction;
3. A statue of the first Acadian settler in Lafayette Parish may be erected in the vicinity of the new tourist center if it becomes a reality;
4. An imaginative and far-reaching project recommended by E.L. Chatelain that would convert up to 50 acres of land into a sort of "Acadian Park" of monuments, exhibits, folklore, arts and crafts, and other memorabilia of Acadiana;
5. A report from architect Dave Perkins that the plan for developing downtown Lafayette with special emphasis on the community's French heritage was receiving favorable acceptance;
6. Evidence that business firms like Elks Concrete Products and others were beginning to print bi-lingual calendars and other literature;
7. An announcement from Ed LeBlanc that the Acadian Country of Louisiana would get some promotional assistance at the National Life of Georgia convention in Montreal in May; and
8. A review from the Lafayette chamber indicating that relations with Quebec were flowing and that an exchange of trade missions was being considered.

Babineaux told of other signs around Lafayette that the "Acadiana Unlimited" campaign was getting contagious. Acadian banners are being flown in some quarters and street markers and billboards contain French words. A successful state department of education seminar on a bi-lingual culture was held at the French House last weekend and a French institute for teachers will be held at USL this summer.

There is interest in some quarters of Lafayette in promoting a French-Spanish trade mart with Quebec as the first tenant. The Friday morning meeting heard recommendations on an intensive course in conversational French for business executives, and that plans are afoot for a French sign to go up at the airport welcoming visitors to Acadiana. LeBlanc expressed his willingness to help provide an Acadiana style for a convention of between 25 and 50 journalists from Asia who will visit Lafayette in March.

"Something is going on here. Let's keep it!" Babineaux suggested Friday. He sees Acadiana becoming one of the major metropolitan areas of the world.

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