St. Martin First Parish to Form CODOFIL Unit

200 Attend Session in Breaux Bridge

(Special to The Times-Picayune)

BREAUX BRIDGE, La. - St. Martin Parish has become the first of 64 parishes to organize a chapter of The Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL).

More than 200 persons — 90 per cent of which spoke both English and French — attended the Breaux Bridge meeting at which Harris Periou was elected chapter president. Periou, a life-long resident of Breaux Bridge, has been a CODOFIL consultant.

Speaking of the movement to preserve the French language and culture in the state, Periou said, "It is not a lost cause; by far. It is the most popular cause today."

The movement is "the pilot program of the world" in preserving and extending the French language in North America. "The eyes of the world will be upon us," James Domengeaux, chairman of the statewide CODOFIL agency, told the audience, "it is proper for St. Martin to be the first parish to form a CODOFIL chapter because this is the center of French language and custom. Despite adversaries you people have had the courage to preserve the language and culture."

The parish organization is going to be "the liaison between your people and your school board and your public officials," he explained.

Domengeaux voiced optimism in the success of the movement "largely because of the extent of the French still spoken in the state." But he cautioned, "Without the cooperation and interest of the educators of Louisiana the game will be over in 10 years," the language will be lost.

The CODOFIL program is designed to accomplish what other governments spend millions of dollars doing, he noted. "This is a major educational innovation. We still have the basis on which to build a competent second language."

Educators in the old days contributed to the deterioration of French, he said. Thirty years ago teachers would punish pupils for speaking French on the school grounds.

Domengeaux pleaded with educators to aid in the rebuilding of the language. He said he is convinced that the program cannot succeed unless elementary school teachers teach French to pupils — beginning in the first grade.

After Domengeaux's speech, officers were elected for the new parish CODOFIL chapter. They are Harris Periou, president; Miss Jeanne Castille, executive vice-president and secretary; Mrs. Alice G. McCaslin, vice-president for Ward One; Mrs. Sanford Daigle, vice-president for Ward Two; Mrs. James Guirard, vice-president for Ward Three; Breaux Bridge Major Fred Mills, vice-president for Ward Four; Mrs. Claude Carrier, vice-president for Ward Five; Ervin Bailey, vice-president for Ward Six; and Mrs. Pauline Eastin, treasurer.

Another speaker at the meeting was a high-ranking official of the government of France, Morvan Duhamel, chief executive officer of the French president's Economic and Social Council, said he was surprised to see the extensive use and quality of French spoken in Louisiana. He said he sees a great desire on the part of the local people to re-learn the language.

In an interview before the meeting, Duhamel said he hoped his government would do as much as Louisiana "to protect and encourage linguistic minorities" in France.

Aslo speaking at the meeting was Leo LeBlanc, representative of the Quebec government. LeBlanc, permanently stationed in Lafayette by his French-speaking government, said his position was created because of the wide-spread interest in and usage of French in Louisiana. CODOFIL's creation was largely responsible for his being sent, LeBlanc said.