St. Martin People Urged To Aid French Movement

BREAUX BRIDGE — St. Martin Parish last night became 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 lifelong resident of Breaux Bridge, has been a CODOFIL consultant.

“Not Lost Cause”

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,” he said. “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.

Domengeaux repeatedly pleaded for grass roots support: “Unless the people are behind the movement it cannot succeed under any circumstances.”

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

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.

“If the (CODOFIL) program bears fruit, in 25 years we will have a true bi-liguialism,” Domengeaux predicted.

“This French renaissance is doing more to rejuvenate tourism than any other factor in years,” he said. “But if we lose the language, we’ll lose the customs and traditions” and therefore fewer tourists will be attracted to Acadiana, he reasoned.

Officers elected last night to serve with Periou, president of the parish chapter, are 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 Mayor Fred Mills, vice-president for Ward Four; Mrs. Claude Carriere, vice-president for Ward Five; Ervin Bailey, vice-president for Ward Six; and Mrs. Pauline Eastin, treasurer.