Tunisian Teachers Visit Here

Eight young Tunisians engaged in a French language program in Orleans and Terrebonne parishes visited the Lafayette area over the weekend as guests of James Domengeaux, CODOFIL chairman.

The young teachers are on a tour of several areas in south Louisiana and, although they are Moslems, they are not having problems in an area where they say people are friendly.

In recounting their experiences as young French teachers in elementary and high school classes, the Tunisians were almost gushing in praise of their hosts, teachers and principals.

"We want to thank the families (we live with), the teachers and the principals," one said. "We think of them as our families. They are like our own families. We can't thank them enough."

The teachers are working in Catholic and other private schools in the two parishes. They are paid minimum salaries by their schools and host families furnish room and board. The U.S. Department of State paid for their transportation.

The experience is part of their academic programs in Tunisian universities. In Tunisia they are studying English, but French is their national language. All, however, also speak Arabic, their native language.

The young Tunisians said they encountered problems when they first began teaching in Louisiana, but they have adjusted and otherwise worked out solutions. Primary problem was a more liberal attitude and less discipline in the classroom, they said.

Older pupils tend to think of the Tunisians, most of whom are young women, as one of them, they laughed.

Although all the visiting teachers are Moslems, their host families have adopted their no-pork and no alcohol diet. In some cases, they reported, their hosts have prepared pork and another meat to accommodate the visitors.

Some of the teachers also said some classes were too large for their teaching methods which stress conversational French. One reported having 32 pupils in one class.

Domengeaux said the program "has proved very satisfactory" and plans are to enlarge it to include about 30 teachers next year.