

Parlez-vous français?

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MIDTOWN. French is spoken by thousands of people across the city — whether they are Canadian, Haitian, African or European — but for many recent French-speaking immigrants, especially young people, the need to quickly integrate here often results in estrangement from their language.

That could hurt students, according to David Lasserre, a coordinator with the French Language Heritage Program, who set up a booth at yesterday's Bastille celebration on 60th Street with his pupils' paintings "about liberation and freedom."

Since 2005, the nonprofit has used language classes, arts and community outreach to help dozens of young immigrants maintain a link with speaking French.

"Our goal is to make these students bilingual because that helps them integrate faster," Lasserre said. "Research has shown that if you keep your first language then you have less trouble learning a second. It's about cultural tolerance, integra-



David Lasserre, at a Bastille Day celebration observed yesterday, argued the benefits of immigrants' ties to the French language.

tion and dialogue."

Freeman Degboe, 16, a recent immigrant from Togo and program participant, believes, "If you keep your French, many colleges will accept you faster. Businesses need people that can speak French, so you can get a job. And when you speak French, people like you."

Language was a big draw at yesterday's celebration for non-Francophones as well.

Dozens of revelers crammed into the French Institute/Alliance Francaise cultural center to sign up for classes.

"Many American women like French men because of the way they talk," claimed Karim Simmons, 39, of Bay-side, while eating french fries. "And vice versa. I like French women because of the way they speak. That's my favorite thing about France."