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Russian professor Sergei Polozov says despite his move to Oregon later this month, he will always feel a connection with the Appalachian region and its people.

Lasting impression

Russian family reflects on ties developed to region

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NORTON — After about eight months in the Appalachian region, Russian professor Sergei Polozov and his family are readying for a move to Oregon, but Polozov says the impression this area has left on him will be a

lasting one.
Polozov has been teaching ecology and environmental science at MECC since December. The family will be relocating to Portland, Ore. later this month so he can take another teaching position at Concordia College, but he

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says his stay in the Appalachian region has helped him to better understand American life and people and has introduced him to interesting plant and animal species not found in Russia. Although this is his fifth trip to the United States, Polozov said that living here for an extended period has made a greater impact on him.

"I feel that only now, I start to penetrate into everyday American life," he said. "It is very interesting, very enjoyable and every day I discover something new."

Polozov, who took three years of sabbatical from his position at Moscow Pedagogical State University, moved to the area in December 1993 as part of an international exchange between Russia and the United States. Polozov, who met Sharon Fisher from MECC when she travelled to Russia in 1991, was offered a teaching position at the college.

The Polozov family first settled in the Tri-Cities, then moved to Virginia Avenue in Norton after their 11-year-old son, Fedor, known as "Ted" to his American friends, completed the school year. Polozov said he is very impressed with the people he has met during his stay.

"It will be very difficult to find equally hospitable people in other parts of the United States," he said. "I have received support from all possible sides."

"I have a very special feeling and am thankful for the people in Virginia and Tennessee," he continued. "I know that some years later, all the time we will think of them with very warm feelings. We are sincerely thankful."

Polozov also encouraged local residents to be thankful for their beautiful natural surroundings.

He praised the state for its system of state parks, saying they are among the most beautiful he has seen. Also, Virginia's diversity gives his family an opportunity to see certain plant and animal species that are found nowhere else in the world, he said.

People always believe that the most fantastic plants and animals "would be far away in some exotic place. This area is really paradise for wildlife biologists," Polozov said. "It is one of the most interesting areas anywhere in terms of biology and species."

Polozov did field work with his summer classes, taking them to places like High Knob Lake above Norton and Keokee Lake in Lee County. He called the Appalachian region "absolutely a unique place in the whole world" and encouraged residents to help protect it.

"Even if we destroy totally all industry, we can rebuild it," he said. "But if we will destroy 10 acres of natural wood we will never receive the same. Never. It will be transformed forever."

Polozov said he believes volunteers who work to protect the environment embody the "pioneer spirit of America. It is easier to live a comfortable life and not think about these things, but they are very important."

Polozov said coal mining has transformed surrounding lands and he is pleased to see efforts to reclaim areas that were mined and abandoned. Mining is one aspect of Russian life that is similar to that in the United States, he said. Many areas in Russia are rich with coal and have been ex-

tensively mined. "Russia has similar geological conditions and similar problems with reclamation of lands," Polozov said. Land reclamation will be a major part of his work at his new job at Concordia College, he added.

He shares his American experiences with people in Russia through his radio program for small children. He records his observations from experiences here, describing area forests and sights, and mails the cassettes home.

Polozov said he and his wife, Lena, a researcher who has participated in Pacific Ocean expeditions, frequently take their family car trips to natural attractions. Their two-year-old daughter, Masha, has been delighted by the area's hummingbird population, he said. "It is amazing to see how my little daughter looks at hummingbirds as a normal accompaniment of the environment," he said. "You here are so lucky. It is a dream for thousands of people in Russia to see a hummingbird and here people take it for granted. You may pass it every day, but please believe that it is quite special and worthy of being cherished."

Polozov also said that life in Rus-

sia and the United States is full of stereotypes that people in both countries glean from television.

"In Russia, yes, you will find people in line, but the camera crews don't turn around and take their cameras into neighboring museums and show what is happening there," he said. "Absolutely bright, intelligent, talented, nice people may be found in Russia. I want to help Americans open the really beautiful Russia, not the Russia represented by Communist standard images."

Polozov also hopes that once he returns to Russia he will strengthen the links he is establishing while in the United States. He maintains a large correspondence with Americans and hopes to forge more partnerships for professional and cultural exchanges.

Although the Polozov family has made good friends in the area, Sergei Polozov said they are looking forward to their six-day car trip to Oregon. "We will see the sights and find something special about the different states," he said. "We plan to visit the Grand Canyon and I'm sure it will make many wonderful memories for us."

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