

Observe

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Leading Class Trips Close To Home And Far Afield

By Bill G10vin

At Rutgers University in New Brunswick, students have gathered after school for a slide show and discussion on "Natural Resources of Alaska," a class taught by Roger Locandro of Delaware Township.

Half the students were with the professor in Alaska this past summer, and the other half are taking his course this semester.

The special guest at the meeting is Tom Brudnicki, a former student of Professor Locandro who now works in Alaska. He is in New Jersey showing off his fiancée to relatives. As the slides run, Professor Locandro asks the students an occasional playful question. Afterward, Mr. Brudnicki talks about some of his experiences working in the Aleutian Islands, and his fiancée discusses growing up in Anchorage. Throughout the evening, Professor Locandro is content to sit back and subtly steer the events.

When it comes to teachers who do all they can to make learning fun and interesting, Professor Locandro is the genuine article. Since 1962, when he began his Rutgers career as a Hunterdon County Extension agent, he has sponsored similar events. Through the years, he has moved hundreds of students toward careers in natural resources management.

Mr. Brudnicki is typical of the students who credit the professor with changing their lives: "I originally went to Newfoundland with Professor Locandro. After that, I knew what I wanted to do and the kind of place I wanted to live," he said.

Professor Locandro is a native New Jerseyan who proudly wears his Rutgers baseball cap wherever he travels. From 1970 to 1990, he traveled extensively to Europe,



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Rutgers professor Roger Locandro is at home in the outdoors, whether on his farm in Delaware Township or in Alaska or Newfoundland, where he leads his students on class trips.

Africa, and throughout the United States as advisor to the Rutgers Glee Club. His Sicilian father and Dutch mother met when they were both taking a train from New Brunswick to Manhattan to attend beautician school. Their son, who fell in love with marine science during summers at Seaside Heights, fondly recalls crabbing at Barnegat Bay, driving a Model A Ford along the beach, and roaming through the coastal area near the Phipps Estate (now Island Beach State Park).

After graduating from New Brunswick High School in 1954, he went to the local university to earn a bachelor's degree in 1960

in agriculture and education. He became a high school teacher, then returned to Rutgers to earn his master's and doctor degrees in ecology from the Graduate School-New Brunswick.

"I taught high school, became the Hunterdon County agent, was invited to teach and be assistant dean of Cook College in 1966," says Professor Locandro. "At the time, there were 450 students. By

the time I left the administration as dean of students in 1988, Cook had 3,100 students, a number of new buildings, and a rising reputation as a great school."

In 1978, Professor Locandro was promoted to extension specialist/professor of natural resources and agriculture at Cook College. Through stints as dean of stu-

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Professor Roger Locandro and his students, from left, Geoff Weismer, Shannon MarUak and Chris Smith cook dinner after a round of presentations at the professor's home last week. Mr. Weismer plans to go on the professor's summer Alaska trip, and Mr. Smith is to go to Newfoundland.

techniques they've traditionally used to make ends meet," professor Locandro said.

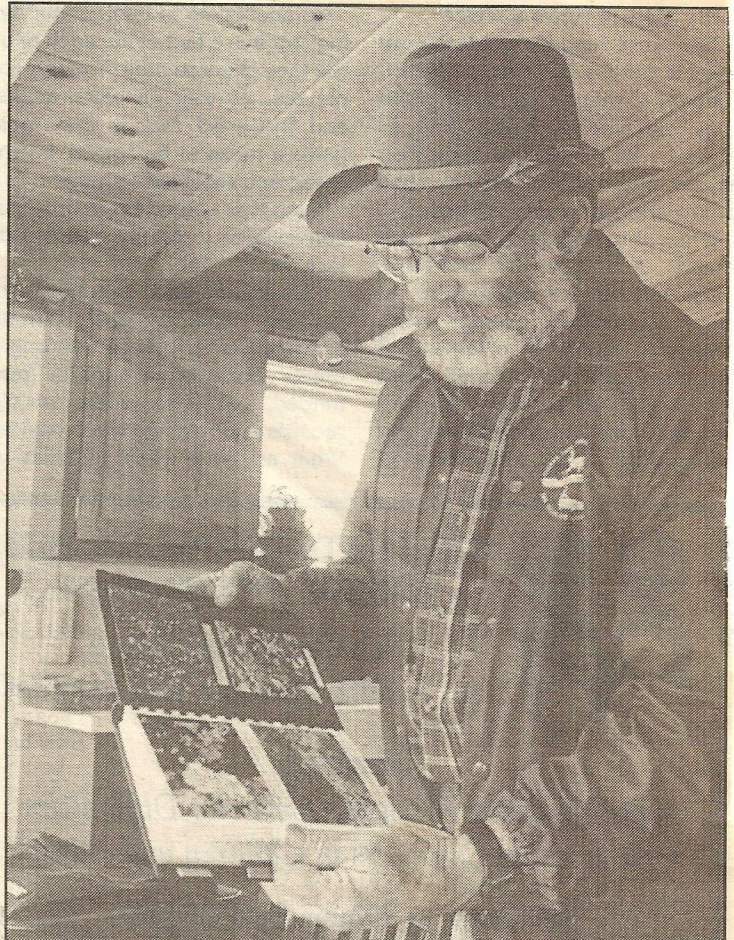
In 1989, the idea to take students to Alaska was sparked when Professor Locandro took his parents there as a 50th wedding gift. It was one of the few places in the world he hadn't visited, and he was moved by its beauty and seemingly limitless natural resources. He was also surprised at how many native New Jerseyans he found transplanted there who could help him. But it wasn't going to be that easy. On an expedition to learn more about Alaskan fishing, he was almost killed when his boat was run over by a larger boat on automatic pilot. He fell into the icy Prince William Sound and narrowly avoided being caught in the

director of the U.S. Forest Service in the Cordova ranger district in Alaska. "You not only have to command respect, but you have to be dynamic, flexible, and above all, likable. The first year I got involved, I wondered what I had got myself into. Then I saw the conviction and dedication Roger brings to the course. That's why I continue to go out of my way for these kids."

The students who Professor Locandro leads for the field trips are also well-fed, even though they do most of their cooking. At Cook College, he has developed and teaches two minicourses on meats, fish and plants.

When Professor Locandro cooks, it's always a special event. In Alaska, he caught his own silver salmon and used it to make sashimi, gravlox, and salmon linguine. In Newfoundland, he always guarantees students all the lobster they can eat the first night they arrive. They have also sampled shark, dolphin, and roast seal. And no matter where he dines, his own tube of anchovy paste is never far behind.

Professor Locandro is currently excited that one of his former students, Raterno Michieka, who is vice chancellor at Jomokenyata University in Nairobi, has encouraged him to come visit. "Raterno comes from a tribal family. He came here as a freshman and earned a doctorate," said Profes-



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Professor Roger Locandro leafs through a student's journal, which he requires they keep on their travels with him so that they put in their own words what they learn and so that they can become mentors for future classes.

boat's fishing nets and propeller. He was rescued 20 minutes later, suffering from hypothermia.

The accident didn't deter him. He soon put together a network of U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and National Park Service professionals who would be willing to work with the class. In 1991, Rutgers students visited Alaska for the first time.

"With all the logistics and personalities involved, I don't know of an individual other than Roger who could pull off a trip of this magnitude," said Bob Behrends,

sor Locandro.

"He had a strong desire to return to Kenya and share his education with his people, a very noble trait." Professor Locandro

doesn't have to say it; one can see it in his eyes. Raterno's home-field advantage will make him the perfect mentor to the students of his next field class -- in Kenya.