USL Professor Helps Chinese With Agriculture

The land of China may seem far away from Lafayette, Louisiana, but to USL professor of biology Dr. Edmund B. Stueben, the country's uniformity and contrasts are still very real and close to heart. Stueben recently traveled to the People's Republic of China with a delegation of 17 scientists who were invited by the Chinese Society of Plant Protection.

This group of scientists included people who were skilled in farming a wide variety of agricultural crops and in coping with problems affecting those crops. Stueben is knowledgeable of pests harmful to crops and human health, and ways to control them. The delegation included specialists in potato, rice, fruit, cabbage, sorghum, and wheat farming, as well as top soil and dry land specialists.

"The purpose of our trip was to provide the Chinese with as much knowledge as we could about the soil, crops, and ways to control insect problems. And, they picked our brains," he said with a big smile.

While traveling throughout China, the delegation presented papers and participated in seminars at Chinese universities, colleges and institutes.

Professor Stueben was quite impressed with the Chinese in the sense that everybody, including the children, had a job to be completed each day; whether it was to fertilize cabbages or help build new buildings. According to Stueben, the jobs were all related to daily chores that would benefit everyone and not just individuals.

However, he said, "They know nothing about the managerial or maintenance aspects of a job. For example, one evening the elevator was broken in our hotel and we were on one of the top floors. We asked someone about it and they told us that the man who fixed elevators had gone home for the day so it couldn't be fixed until the next day."

Stueben explained that after Mao took over in the 1960's, everything in the country was torn down including family structure, family wealth, universities, anything with structure. "Thus," Stueben stated, "The people are gradually rebuilding."

The sharp contrast of the China countryside strongly stand out in Stueben's mind. He said, "I would look and see a beautiful high-rise apartment complex, and next to it would be a row of the neatest little slums."

"Everything is so uniform in the mainland," he said. "All of the new high-rise apartment buildings look the same everywhere. And, everyone is wearing a Mao coat."

Stueben also commented on the honesty of the Chinese people. "One of the men with our delegation had a very expensive camera which he left at a luncheon," he said. "Later that afternoon when we were riding through the countryside, a car pulled up beside us and handed us the camera. A worker from the hotel apologized that they had been so late in returning it."

Another thing that impressed Stueben was that everyone is sent to a school whether it is an institute, a college or university. He said, "They send the students to school depending upon their level of skills and intelligence."

Overall, the USL professor was very impressed. "They have a good medicare program, adequate food and schooling. I really hope to go back," he said with a glow in his eyes.