

Professors return from USSR

Three TAMU professors have just returned from Leningrad, USSR. The group from TAMU included oceanographer Dr. Greta Fryxell, Dr. Paul A. Fryxell of soil and crop sciences, Dr. Stuart Lyda of plant sciences and his wife, JoAnn.

Three of the group went as members of the Botanical Society of America. "The Russians are also active in this field, and as a result I was able to meet and work with their top scientist in the field, exchange scien-

tific literature, and was even asked to go on a Russian cruise next winter in the Indian Ocean," Dr. Fryxell said. "The people we met were so very kind," she said. "The scientists were wonderful. I was able to visit two of

the institutes in Leningrad and met almost all of the Russian diatomists. "Their work in this area is well developed," she said. "Also they're able to research more because they have no teaching load and don't have to spend their time applying for grants.

"In general, we were taken to see the old buildings from the time of the czars, when St. Petersburg was the capital of Russia and its 'window to the world,'" Dr. Fryxell said. "They are tremendously proud of that plus the fact that they survived over 900 days of siege by the German army during the war.

"Public transportation there was efficient and very cheap," she said. "Buses, street cars, and the underground metro were all available for a couple of kopecks. "Of course, we felt under constant supervision. We had to leave our Time magazines at the border. No political literature came in and no antiques went out.

"We were helpless without the interpreters," she said. "Americans would have a difficult time there. We had to stand in line for everything. You just have to be patient. "Consumer products are in short supply but they had dollar stores where tourists could buy goods with American money," Dr. Fryxell said. "And, we ate fine when our hotel restaurant was expecting us. But, our first night we were hungry and tried to buy supper on our own and they just weren't interested in selling us anything.

"You see, business just doesn't operate on a cash-and-carry basis there," she said. "First, you have to buy a slip of paper that allows you to obtain the item that you're after. Then you find someone behind the counter to sell it." Dr. Fryxell recalled one incident on the border when her husband declared a government camera as belonging to "someone else." When he told the officials this, they said, "A lot of things belong to the government, even people, don't you think?"

O'Bannon tells inspectors that city codes are laws

Building codes adopted by city governments carry the weight of law, municipal inspectors were told at TAMU Monday.

Robert O'Bannon said that inspectors, city officials, developers, contractors and the public must abide by the limitations a code stipulates.

"Let's say a contractor wants a building official to negate a part of the code for one of his jobs. Who can do this? The inspector, the mayor, a member of the city council?" O'Bannon said.

"No. It takes an amendment of the law, adoption of an ordinance," he told participants in a one-week Municipal Inspectors Training School at TAMU.

"The inspector who doesn't understand his job and its authority is headed for trouble," O'Bannon said. "If a builder violates the code, he can go to jail. If an inspector allows the code to be violated, he can go to jail."

O'Bannon said that "nobody has sole authority to set aside a mandatory regulation of a code" and in an "era of consumerism, people are discovering they've got rights and are standing up for them.

"The problem is," he said, "that in bringing about amendment changes to codes, city councils never hear more than one side of a case. And the one it hears is from a party that stands to gain the most from the change."

Building permit issuance and mobile homes also were discussed. The inspectors agreed that today's mobile home ought to be regulated.

"Today's mobile home is something different from what it used to be," O'Bannon said. "They are 60 feet long, expandable, two-story and with fireplaces. They are built one place and moved to another."

"There's nothing I can do. I'm just one person."

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And that's the end of its mobility. "Calling it a mobile home is a ludicrous use of the term," he said.

O'Bannon said the National Conference of States of Building Codes and Standards is investigating the matter. Their objective is inspection, regulation and certification through a uniform mobile-home construction act.

"Building permit issuance, in a lot of cities, is strictly a money-making business," he said. "It's al-

most criminal."

The fact is, he said, that when a building permit is issued, the permit issuer is saying, "I am your protector. I issue this permit because what the builder plans to do is good and safe. Furthermore, I guarantee that everything presented to me so far is safe, so far."

"If a city that takes in money for issuing permits shows a profit at it," O'Bannon said, "something is wrong."

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