



Instructor Sam Valk helps Steven VanMetro build his own radio during an enrichment class at Oakland Community College. Valk will be teaching a space model building course at OCC's Orchard Ridge Campus in January.

In creative OCC course Saturday's for space shuttles

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

The U.S. Space Shuttle Columbia fascinates most adults. Mesmerized by its takeoffs and landings, they sit glued to their television sets on launching days. Now youngsters can learn more about the shuttle by building small-scale models of Columbia. It happens in an enrichment course offered at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills.

"I WANT the children to use their imagination by adding extra components to the regular kits," said Sam Valk, the Russian-born instructor. "They can add blinkers, noise generators, laser beams, control features," he added. "Each person buys their own kit and modifies it using their fantasies."

For Saturday class times and registration information, call 471-7595 or 471-7596 weekdays.

Valk, 29, of Southfield, also teaches a radio-building class at OCC and a small appliance repair course through the Southfield Adult Education Department.

He said the children's most difficult task is converting their ideas into reality. "A power unit for a shuttle door sounds simple when you know how to do it. We take each idea and discuss it in the group. They (students) are forced to think and create themselves," Valk added.

AN ELECTRICAL engineer by background but a practicing insurance executive, Valk said he has been building models for many years. "When the Russians sent a lunar craft into space 14 years ago was when I built my first space model. I built it for an astronomy class, and it helped

me learn more about space travel," he explained.

A native of the Russian province of Latvia, Valk immigrated to Detroit four years ago with his wife, Emily, to join Emily's brother.

At the age of 18, all young Russian men are required to take a test determining if they should attend college or join the army. Valk received a passing grade, and he went to college for seven years, earning a doctorate in electrical engineering. Upon graduation, he applied for a visa to leave his homeland in hopes of building a successful life.

"Jews are not allowed to be members of the party, and if you're not a party member, you can't go very far," he said.

Living in the Soviet Union, Valk had never heard of insurance. In the first year as owner of his own company, he sold \$2 million in life, health, medical and accident insurance.

"I do a lot of work with the Russian community. Russians come here and don't know anything about insurance. I help teach them the American way of life," he said.

Valk said he's amazed that most of his students are middle-school age and few are older than 17. He also said Russian schools are much more difficult than American curriculum appears.

"Russian youngsters have at least two to three hours of homework every night. Every subject is mandatory."

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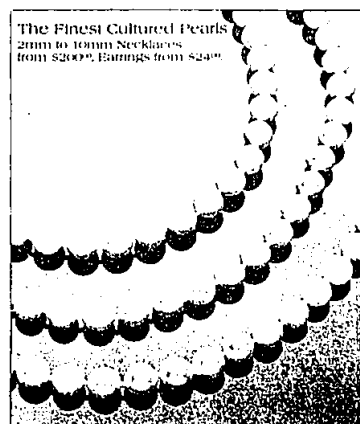
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