

Russian course stands test of time, still attracts learners

By RON MORGAN
Daily News Staff Writer

The Tussey Mountain High School Russian class is mixing classroom language instruction with research of the Broad Top coal mining region to create a "living history" experience.

Tussey's Russian language class, now in its 11th year, continues to attract a number of students interested in combining Russian language instruction with other academic courses, including business, science, politics and international relations.

The Tussey Russian curriculum is a full-credit course for nine through twelfth graders with eighth grade students able to sign up for a half-year course.

Currently, there are 110 students signed up for Russian-related studies at Tussey Mountain.

To help create a more realistic learning experience, 16 Tussey Russian class students are involved in some helpful research and oral history projects relying on several local cultural resources, explained Russian language instructor Linda Miller.

Because a portion of the Broad Top coal mining region's population traces its roots back to Russia and Eastern Europe (many of the families live in the Wood area), the students are engaged in research of the Russian culture and the residents' ties with coal mining.

"The research and in-the-field studies help make the Russian language course more realistic and exciting for the students," explained Tussey Russian instructor Linda Miller. "What these young people are learning from visits to Wood could not be acquired in the classroom."

Recent visits to the St. Michael the Archangel Orthodox Church in Wood and nearby cemetery, along with information being collected from the Broad Top Area Coal Miners Historical Society at Robertsdale, will serve as the basis for the students' "living history" project, Miller told *The Daily News*.

As an example, 16 Tussey Russian class students recently visited the St. Michael the Archangel Orthodox Church Cemetery at Wood where they traced inscriptions from the tombstones of Wood area coal miners and their families who worked in the mining district during the first half of the 20th century.

Information translated from the tombstones by the Russian students

will be assembled for use by the Broad Top Area Coal Miners Historical Society and Everett genealogical researcher Carolyn Carroll who also volunteers her time as coal miners museum librarian.

To date, the Tussey students have assembled eight inscriptions. The project is proving to be not only interesting but a learning experience, the students and their instructor all agree.

Miller explained that in the translation work, students are discovering some differences between the old Russian alphabet and the modern-day alphabet. Many of the Russian immigrants arriving on the Broad Top coal field prior to the 1918 Revolution in Russia were accustomed to using old Russian alphabet letters. Because most of the immigrants were unaware of the alphabet changes, after the 1918 Revolution, the new Broad Toppers relied on the old Russian alphabet for tombstone inscriptions and other communications.

Looking to the near future, the Tussey students are considering oral and written history research by visiting Broad Top area families with Russian ties. The students will be working closely with the coal miners museum as they perform research into the history of coal mining in the Broad Top region.

The "Russian Family Histories" project will look at historical events that changed local Russian family histories, while comparing their own life-altering historical events with those of someone from another generation.

In the planning stages for over a year, the Tussey Russian class is also raising funds for a week-long trip to Russia this coming summer. Nine students are currently signed up for the trip which will include visits to Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia.

The purpose of the Russian trek is to expand the students' knowledge of the Russian language, as well as visits to several cultural sites in Russia, noted Miller.

Tussey's Russian class activities have drawn considerable praise from higher learning institutions like Juniata College. So popular is the Russian class at Tussey that two students from neighboring Forbes Road High School are taking the Tussey course via the Internet (video-conferencing with instruction originating at Tussey Mountain).



Tussey Mountain High School Russian class students sing a song for visiting Russian professors during a recent tour of the school. The large group of students performed with popular folk singers, Dan & Galla, right.

The Tussey students' recent field activities have proven to be very popular with the students.

Paul Hershberger, Six Mile Run, said the field trip activities were a major factor in encouraging students to continue their study of the language because the research tied the Russian classroom study with "real life" history found on the Broad Top.

"The project provides a cultural experience that cannot be obtained in the classroom," observed Hershberger.

Sharon Cunningham, Saxton, was quick to agree.

The field work has a lot of meaning to her because grandmother, Edna Poleck, still resides in Wood. She pointed out that her grandfather, the late Mike Poleck, was a Broad Top area coal miner.

"I'm really excited about the project," remarked Cunningham. "It's really a great experience."

The Wood parish of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Diocese of the U.S.A. was organized in 1917, about 17 years after the first immigrants from the Galician and Carpathian Mountain regions of Eastern Europe settled in the former coal mining village of Wood.

Russian professors give high marks to Tussey Mountain's language class

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The Tussey Mountain High School Russian language class received high marks from two visiting Russian professors associated with Juniata College's Language in Motion program.

Dr. Nikolai Sergeev and Dr. Victor Pavlov, both vice presidents of Volgograd State Pedagogical University, visited classes and talked with faculty members at Juniata College and Tussey's Russian class, instructed by Linda Miller.

"Juniata College has a long history of involvement with international programs and strongly encourages students to study in another country through one of its over 20 exchanges and study abroad programs," explained JoAnn deArmas Wallace, dean of International Programs at Juniata College.

Wallace told *The Daily News* that during the current school year at Juniata College 90 students studied abroad and 80 international students

from 32 countries are attending Juniata College.

Juniata College has been sharing exchange students with Volgograd State Pedagogical University since 1906. The university is located in Volgograd, Russia.

Courses in the Russian language, literature and history are offered at Juniata College, noted Wallace. "Students can combine the study of Russian with academic study in other areas such as business, science, politics and international relations and can complement that study with a year in Russia."

Taking part in the Tussey Mountain High School Russian class tour was Russian exchange student, Evgenie Krayushkin, who plans to join other Juniata College students in assisting Miller with Russian classes at Tussey.

During the late October visit to Tussey Mountain High School, the two Russian professors had nothing but praise for the "energy and dedication of the students and the fine

teaching the students are receiving," remarked Wallace.

As a result of the visit, Pavlov and Sergeev returned to Russia promising to arrange a partnership for Tussey with a secondary school near the university in Volgograd.

Wallace went on to explain that Juniata College's new "Language in Motion" program "works with area high school teachers to use international students and students who have returned from a year abroad as resources in language classrooms."

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Photos by Ron Morgan

A group of Tussey Mountain High School Russian class students trace information off a tombstone in the St. Michael Greek Orthodox Church Cemetery at Wood as part of an ongoing class project. From left are, standing, Kendal Miller, Broad Top City, Ashley Mosbey, Saxton and Shawna McDonald, Coalmont; kneeling are Dustin Peffer, New Grenada, a student from Forbes Road High School who is taking the Tussey Russian language course, and Brandi Clites, Marklesburg.

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