

'Roosky and Hutch' on TV at Creighton

Satellite picks up worldwide programs

By Rick Warner

OMAHA (AP) — At Creighton University, students tired of "Dynasty," "Dallas," and Dan Rather can switch to "Mutual of Moscow," "Good Morning Siberia," and "Roosky and Hutch."

Those are the fanciful names given to real Russian programs shown on the university's groundbreaking satellite television network.

Any day of the year, around the clock, students at this private Jesuit school can turn on their television sets and tune in programs from the Soviet Union, Mexico City or French-speaking Canada.

THE NETWORK is the brainchild of the Rev. Lee Lubbers, a sculpture professor who has turned into a guru of global television.

"We are bringing the world to Nebraska," he said. "We want students to realize that this is a great big planet we live on."

Lubbers, 57, bought his first two satellite antennae at an Omaha trade show in 1981 and installed them on the roof of his sculpture studio. Since then, he's added more than 15 satellite dishes and expanded the campus-wide network to 21 channels.

"Before I got into this thing, I didn't know the first thing about satellites," said Lubbers, who runs the operation on a shoestring budget of private donations and grants. "Now you can blindfold me anywhere in the world and I can show you the North Star."

Lubbers' Russian connection began in 1982 when he read that the Soviet Union's four Molniya satellites passed directly over Omaha.

One cold November day, he climbed to the top of an old storage shed on campus and tried to pick up a signal from one of the elliptically orbiting satellites

by hand-cranking a primitive antenna. Within minutes, he found what was he was looking for.

"It was really quite thrilling to find something so far away," said Lubbers, who now uses an Apple computer to track the Russian satellites. "It's almost like making contact with another planet."

WHILE French-Canadian and Mexican television are interesting to watch, nothing fascinates Creighton viewers as much as the programs on the Russian network that broadcasts to the remote eastern half of the Soviet Union.

Regular offerings include an early morning exercise show featuring a mannequin-like couple, a foreign-language instructional program, an outdoors show a la "Wild Kingdom," and newscasts laden with close-up shots of buildings and tractors.

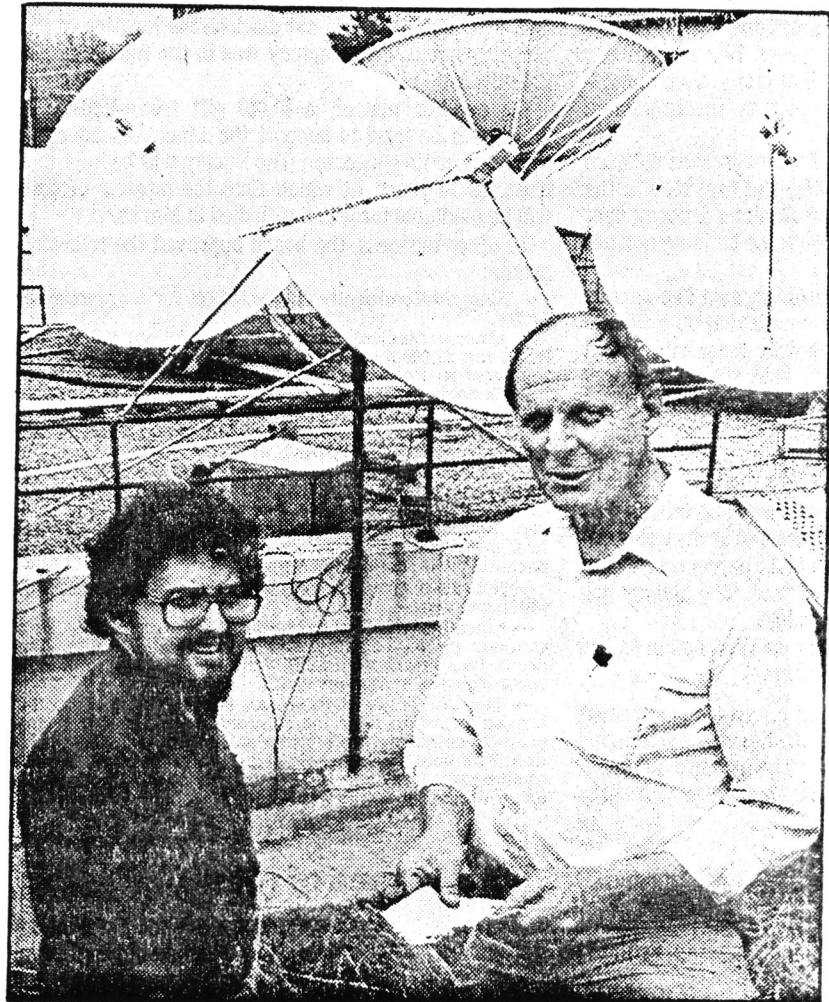
While lacking American-style situation comedies, variety shows and dramatic series, the Russian network does offer a wide range of classical music, children's shows and science programs.

Lubbers said the most striking aspect of Soviet television is its often unsuccessful attempt to ape Western style.

"They try hard to loosen up, but sometimes they're so rigid it's pathetic," he said. "When you see a Russian clown or a stand-up comic, it's enough to make you cry."

Lubbers isn't crazy about Russian cartoons either ("drawn by people who don't know how to draw, but do bizarre imitations"), but he said the Soviets excel in some areas.

"They had a great series on radio-astronomy and some of their nature and musical programs are wonderful," he said.



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Lubbers (right) and Ric Marchio run telecommunications office.

SINCE STARTING the satellite network at Creighton, Lubbers has spread the word about international television through an organization known as SCOLA (Satellite Communications for Learning Worldwide).

The organization, which has nearly 700 members, is designed to help colleges and high schools use satellite television in their classrooms.

Some language specialists regard satellite television as an invaluable learning tool.

"It gives you a lot of para-verbal information like gestures and inflections

that you can't learn in a book," said Robert Thompson, director of the language lab at the University of Wisconsin at La Crosse and an active SCOLA member.

Lubbers, who holds advanced degrees in Latin, Greek, philosophy, theology and aesthetics, thinks high technology can enhance a liberal arts education.

"I know people who've taken four years of Spanish and then go to Mexico and can't order a bean," he said. "You can't learn in a vacuum. Watching a country's television gives you a feel for its culture and its people."