

Laurenson set to diversify global reach at Woodstock School

Anupma Khanna | Dehradun

Woodstock School, leading international school in Asia, has appointed US-based educator David Laurenson to take the helm of affairs. Set amid breathtaking environs, Woodstock is the first school in Asia to get International Credential by Middle States Association, USA, and has been voted number one international school by education world in September 2007. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, Laurenson shared his life and vision for the school.

Born in New Zealand, Laurenson earned his Bachelor's degree in Mathematics from the University of Auckland in 1966. He moved to Canada in the 1970s and earned a Master's degree in Mathematics from the University of Waterloo in Ontario.

After moving to the United States in the early 1990's, Laurenson earned a doctorate in Teaching and Teacher Education from the University of Arizona. His is a small close-knit family, with a wife and daughter in New York and a brother in New Zealand.

In a career spanning four

decades, Laurenson has held coveted positions as Director of Hunter College Campus Schools, Executive Director, Alabama School of Mathematics and Science and Assistant Principal, University of Toronto Schools.

He leaves a position as Professor of Education at the distinguished Queens College, New York.

So how did Woodstock happen? Laurenson smiles, "No adverts or anything because I wasn't looking for a change. It all happened when I was dining at a friend's place in New York. He learnt the latest while discussing Woodstock with some guests who were former students and suggested that I take interest in the school. And that's how it happened!"

But relocating to India from the US first reaction? "I was not fazed by the idea of a new country because I have travelled a lot and I enjoy it. And my experience has been wonderful!" Life for him is an exploration and top-spot on his Discover India list are Kashmir with its fascinating 'mystique', Rishikesh and Chandigarh. He also wants to enjoy the serendipity of the calm backwaters of Kerala.



Laurenson is overjoyed with getting congratulatory letters from people spread across the globe including many he hadn't heard from in the last 30 years! "Woodstock gives that something to its students that makes it unforgettable," he says. He makes special mention of the one from a lady who taught at Woodstock way back in 1965, whom he has not seen since 1978!

What is it, then, that sets Woodstock apart? According to Laurenson, "The school

has truly encompassed the notion of global education."

Elaborating, he marvels at how the teachers have included significant pieces from really diverse countries and cultures in the curriculum.

"Staff here are keenly interested in all that is happening around unlike most teachers abroad whose interest is limited to their subject." He elaborates that imbued with the greatest dedication; they work for holistic development of every child studying here.

And what finds a space in

his memoirs so far? The warm and friendly gentleman, has been particularly impressed with Independence Day celebrations at Woodstock.

"There is a lot of national pride here. Back in the US, Independence Day means fireworks and an evening barbecue with friends. But definitely not such a fervent and grand ceremony like I saw at Woodstock!" A mini Dilli-Haat, flag hoisting by the longest serving Indian student, everyone clad in vibrantly hued national costumes and even singing the national anthem. "I was blown away!" he chimes. Also the Wildlife week, which he describes as "an experience anybody would die for!"

What lies on the road ahead? His eyes gleams with passion as he shares his vision for the school. He looked forward to bring his expertise and experience in curriculum development, strategic planning, staff relations, technology, management and leadership to the school. He hopes to bolster Woodstock's global flavour. Primary among them is an enhancement of the international exposure through the

student exchange programmes. This involves increasing exchanges with non-English speaking countries since currently most efforts are aimed at English speaking nations. Also, fortifying the languages department by teaching diverse languages including European like Polish and Czech. He muses, "If only I had a crystal ball to foresee which languages would assume significance in the years to come!" And the introduction of intellectually stimulating extra-curricular activities including games like Chess.

"The school has the potential to attract high IQ students," Laurenson says as he toys with the idea of popularising Woodstock's unique and highly equipped Outdoor Education Centre and develop a sort of laboratory school to attract highly gifted students.

He also hopes to reinvigorate Woodstock's ties with the community by providing reading education to young children. Laurenson is excited about his appointment and says, "I come to India as one who loves new ventures, and I believe that Woodstock and I will be a great match."