

STATE COLLEGE

AUGUST 2006 \$2

Doing the Right Thing

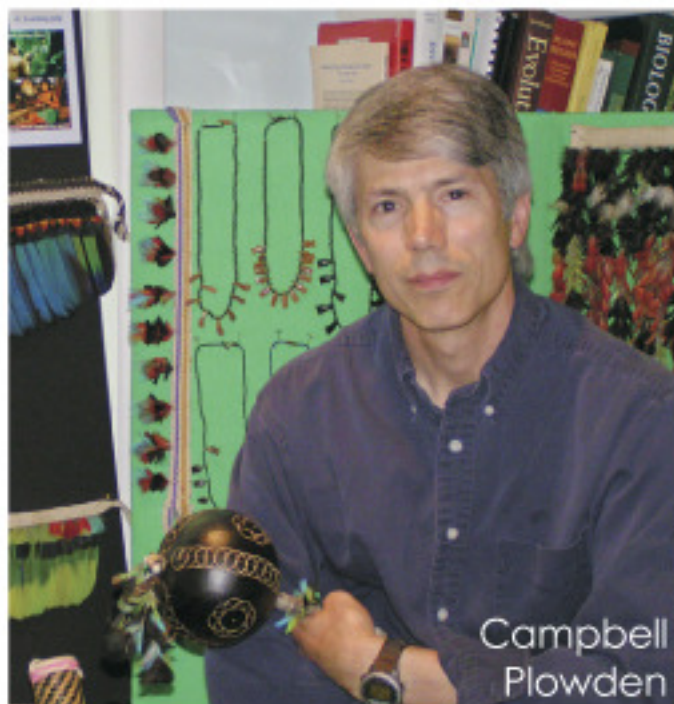
*There are talkers and there are doers.**Campbell Plowden is the latter*

"I hope you like dogs and cats," Campbell Plowden asks me before entering his house, the backdrop for our interview. The simplicity of his home is calming. We sit parallel to one another and face his naturally beautiful backyard. It all fits the environment I expected—earthy and peaceful.

His resume, or more accurately, curriculum vitae, reads like an activist's "to do" list with academia and publishing mixed in for good measure. Greenpeace International, Amazon Watch and the Humane Society of the United States are just a few of the better-known names on the six pages that encapsulate his life. There are many curious duties underscored as well—supervisor of teak logging in Burma; documenting the wild bird trade in Peru, Argentina and Brazil; and special investigator tracking the illegal sale of Sumatran tiger parts in Indonesia. Plowden sees the smallness of the world and the interconnectedness of all people. That vision is the driving force behind the Center for Amazon Community Ecology, a non-profit private organization he established last year in State College.

Plowden lived for two years with the Tembe Indians in the eastern Brazilian Amazon, while conducting research on the ecology, management and marketing of non-timber forest products. The goal, he says, was to identify potential products that the community could use to help fund local development with minimal pressure on the forest. Aside from the research, he and his wife and their two children, Marissa and Luke, seven and two respectively at the time, became very involved in the community. And last July, he and his now teenage daughter Marissa traveled to Peru for a month to conduct more ecological studies and develop more strategies for the native people's sustainable products.

"Save the rainforest, save the Amazon" is a very simple slogan but without an easy answer," he explains, alluding to the challenges that industrialization bring to the people of the Amazon and the region's precious natural resources. "My idea is to look for



people to watch

more people from a variety of academic backgrounds to be involved to support the basic structure of the Center for Amazon Community Ecology. Pennsylvania is blessed—we have amazing resources, but our lifestyle has little or no awareness of that at all."

A trip to Santarem, Brazil, in 2004 inspired him to really look at ways to strengthen the standard of self-sufficiency in Amazon communities. One man, for example, had produced a fairly basic oil to sell but had figured out a way to make more money on it. "The oil was not special," says Plowden. "What *was* different is that he came up with a blend—a little brown bottle and a nice name to sell to the Europeans." After packaging and marketing, explains Plowden, the oil could sell for \$40, while the same oil from other producers may only sell for a few dollars. Plowden hopes that his organization can expand the market for sustainable handicrafts in State College and throughout the U.S.

He pulls out a treasure trove of handicrafts made by the Amazon people, a stash of some 30 necklaces and bracelets and ceremonial wear. There are different patterns—birds, trees, turtles among them and he patiently explains the meaning and natural source of each one. A random item warrants a thousand-word explanation—a cultural snapshot of a little-known yet vital world. —Tiffany Mak