

Post Doctoral Fellow Finds New Home in Kodiak

Monday, 16 December 2013

{audio}/images/stories/mp3/131216.abhijit_chatterjee_fish_food_scientist.mp3{/audio}

Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Abhijit Chatterjee never thought he'd call Alaska home. But his academic interests laid out a path that ultimately led him to Kodiak where he is currently a post doctoral fellow at the Kodiak Seafood and Marine Science Center.

Chatterjee grew up in Kolkata, India, where he earned his bachelors in chemistry and then later pursued a bachelors and masters in food technology and biochemical engineering. In 2007 he embarked on a huge adventure, and decided to move well beyond the borders of India to pursue a PhD in civil and environmental engineering at university of Alaska in Fairbanks.

"I shouldn't say that I wanted to come exactly here because Kolkata (Calcutta) is a pretty tropical place and in summer time temperature goes above +40 Celsius, and in Alaska it's -40 Celcius."

But during his master's thesis, Chatterjee was working on a water treatment project that involved removing metals using a bacterial absorption process called bioabsorbtion. He said he was always interested in pursuing a PhD in the United States and found the program at Fairbanks fit his interests most.

"Here in UAF we have a similar project where, that's actually my PhD, that's instead of using expensive absorbent we tried to use some inexpensive natural absorbent to remove the metals from the water, and that project was advertised at the time. And I thought, well, that's kind of similar to what I have done and that's why I applied to that project. That's how I got here to Alaska."

Chatterjee then heard about research being done in Kodiak, and decided to make the move to Alaska's biggest island after he earned his doctorate.

"In fishmeal we use a lot of different commercial antioxidant, and one particularly is the ethoxyquin. Now what we're trying to do here is instead of using that ethoxyquin, we're thinking that if we could replace it with a natural antioxidant. So that's basically the tag line of our project."

He said ethoxyquin works well, but it might have some health consequences. In general, he said his goal is to use more natural products than artificial ones, which is what he his trying to do with natural antioxidants for fishmeal here in Kodiak.

Chatterjee said he has enjoyed his time in Kodiak so far, which is a little less than two months total. He said Kodiak is definitely warmer

than Fairbanks, and he's happy about that.

"I was not much of an outdoor (person) when I got here. But being here for so many years, it's like Alaska taught me how to love nature and other outdoor (things) like hiking, camping, fishing, and skiing. I was not familiar with these words when I was in Kolkata. So that's one great thing to be close to nature. I really liked it. And I like the people here."

Chatterjee said after the project here in Kodiak he might apply for another advanced research project, but he also wants to pursue academia and isn't sure where that might take him. He said he'd be happy staying here in Alaska, but also wouldn't be opposed to working in a different state, or even a different country.