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Smaller college works hard

By LESLEY GRIFFIN Staff Writer

Looking at the traffic on Pendelton and Pickett streets, and squashed between the greater buildings of Barnwell and Sloan, Hamilton College is probably one of the smallest colleges on campus. But it houses USC's anthropology department and South Carolina's only forensic anthropology.

Ted Rathbun, 47, an anthropology professor at USC for 20 years, has taught many about the customs of prehistoric civilizations. He is also called upon by private citizens, coroners, forensic departments and sheriffs' offices in the state to help identify modern, as well as prehistoric, victims. He has close ties to various law enforcement agencies and, through his work with these agencies, possesses some forensic anthropology specimens for teaching and research purposes.

Rathbun said each police case that led to identification was gratifying because it not only provided the police with a solution to a problem, but also frequently brought resolutions in the family members of the deceased.

"Each case is unique," he said. "There is really no such thing as a routine forensic identification. One of the most gratifying cases was when I was able to assist two daughters whose mother had been missing for 11 years. The resolution of the case finally brought three pieces of mind that they had not been abandoned," he added.

Though Rathbun has no dealings with the South Carolina Board of Bodies Commission, he occasionally works with the South Carolina Coroners Commission if there has been a disturbance of an historic cemetery.

"Since that is against the law, not all cases are homicides," he said. "Grave disturbances, coronary disturbances are, again, forensic questions." In "Essentials of Forensic Anthropology," T.D. Stewart defines forensic anthropology as "the branch of physical anthropology which deals with the identification of non-living remains: bone, muscle, hair, or skin, as opposed to the identification of human remains: bone, muscle, hair, or skin, as opposed to the identification of human remains.

Rathbun added to the definition.

"It is when we apply the theory and method in our sciences to questions of the law," he said. "A forensic question is when there is a legal question involved."

In Rathbun's forensic anthropology classes, students learn to determine such things as sex, age and time from "骨骼ized remains." As in how he teaches his classes, Rathbun said during his time at USC he had accumulated comparative collections of bones from a variety of species, which ranged from surface fresh and cool skins to specifically prepared specimens.

This summer though, Rathbun will probably not be adding to this collection, nor will he be leaving Washington, D.C., or Mexico like last year. He will stay right here on campus.

"This summer is one of those hiatus summers," he said. "I'll be here to teach forensic reproduction." Also this summer, one of Rathbun's colleagues, an anthropologist and anthropologist Dr. Juan Cerven, unable to travel in Peru this year because of the unsettled political situation, will be heading for Lada- drad with her anthropological collection.

"I don't know what I'll do then," she said. "Maybe I'll help with the corpus of human remains." Debbie Ramsey, an archaeology junior and member of both Rathbun and Giro, did not see the study of bones and old fossil sites as anything morbid. She said a lot of the study was based on exposing people thinking to scenarios.

"It is great for people with a vivid imagination," she said.

Rathbun originally trained in paleoanthropology had found her Anthropology 101 course so intriguing that she later changed her major to anthropology. In her current job, Rathbun said, there would be the possibility of a graduate program with a forensic focus.