

New director says job offers 'nice combination'

By JOHN STANG
Staff Writer

Dr. **Robert Aiduk** was looking for something a little different and a little closer to his wife's family.

The former director of a Missouri mental health center found what he was looking for at Southern Virginia Mental Health Institute.

Aiduk, 54, took over as SVMHI's director of psychological services, education and training on May 1. He replaces Dr. Frank J. MacHovec, who resigned to become director of quality assurance at the Virginia Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

Aiduk spent the past six years as director of the Burrell Center, a state-contracted community mental health center in Springfield, Mo.

"I wanted a chance to work in a different system and I wanted the chance to be closer to our family," **Aiduk** said.

The family of his wife, Barbara, lives in Delaware and Pennsylvania, which is an easy flight from Danville. **Aiduk**, whose office is sprinkled with airplane photos, and his wife own a Piper Archer airplane and spend a lot of time flying. Nikolas, their son of less than a year, also occupies much of their time.

Aiduk was attracted to SVMHI because of its reputation.

"It's an up-to-date modern hospital with high standards of treatment," he said. "This hospital is one of the better hospitals in this

part of the country."

Aiduk liked the fact that SVMHI's staff is a mixture of mental health disciplines rather than being concentrated on one specific profession such as psychiatry. Also, he cited SVMHI's involvement with community programs.

"It's not isolated from the community. The hospital is organized to relate with different parts of the community. ... It's very easy for a state hospital to become isolated from a community," **Aiduk** said.

State mental health programs differ from state to state, noted **Aiduk**, who has worked in several different mental health capacities in Missouri and Colorado.

"That doesn't necessarily mean one system is better than the other. They're just different," he said. "I've seen no place where the system is excellent."

When comparing Virginia and Missouri's system, he said that Virginia has a more visible interest in legal mental health issues. These issues include confidentiality, forensic evaluations, insanity defenses in criminal cases, and problems stemming from AIDS cases. He is not sure why the legal interest is more apparent in Virginia.

Aiduk is a native of Kansas City, Kan., and grew up in that area on both sides of the Kansas-Missouri border.

He received a bachelor's degree in



Dr. Robert Aiduk

philosophy at Benedictine College. Reading some psychology books in college attracted him to the field. **Aiduk** later went on to obtain his master's degree and doctorate in psychology at the University of Cincinnati.

Before he went back to Missouri, **Aiduk** spent several years in the Denver area where he was a psychologist at the Fort Logan and Arapaho mental health centers.

The Fort Logan Mental Health Center was one of the forerunners of the mushrooming community mental health movement.

"He was clearly the best candidate (out of three serious candidates). He has excellent credentials," said Dr. Connie Fletcher, SVMHI's executive director.

Besides overseeing four staff psychologists and the institute's training programs, **Aiduk** is also in charge of one 24-bed wing at the 96-bed hospital.

"Here, it's a nice combination of hands-on work and administration," he said.