



Dan Dulaney/Daily Nebraskan

Zivert assists student Glen Maddux, a freshman from Kearney.

## Spirited Russian teaches 'language of peasants'

By Beth Thompson

Daily Nebraskan Staff Reporter

Valentina Ziverts, a Latvian-born Russian teacher at UNL, said she doesn't know why her students like her so much. "Maybe my shoes?" she says, joking.

But some students know exactly why their Russian teacher means so much to them.

Sophomore Christine Evans says "she's just the greatest thing. The university should feel privileged" to have Ziverts as a teacher.

Junior Diane Adcock uses words like "feisty," "spirited" and "never boring" to describe Ziverts.

Does Ziverts know her students like her so much? "They'd better, or I not like them," she says with a smile.

In return, Ziverts, who has taught at UNL since 1978, fully enjoys her students, partly because of "their enthusiasm to learn," she said. For instance, instead of teaching Russian grammar and vocabulary one day, Ziverts described to her class how Christmas is celebrated

in Europe and Russia. "And the students love it."

While Ziverts is busy teaching American students the difficult Cyrillic alphabet (a cross between Slavic and Greek alphabets), she learns something from them.

"American students don't know English grammar," she said.

Even with this difficult barrier, Ziverts' students want to learn the Russian language. And Ziverts loves to teach the "language of peasants."

"Maybe I am prejudiced," but "I love the Russian language," even compared to French, the elegant language of royalty, and Italian, the language of music.

And with the ability to speak Russian, Ziverts said, a student can understand any Slavic language. Ziverts, with a Slavic languages major from the University of Prague, fluently speaks Russian, German, Polish and Latvian, not to mention her well-polished English.

Ziverts' strong Russian accent is something she rarely notices. With an office

on the 11th floor of Oldfather Hall, a floor full of different nationalities, Ziverts says she "feels at home."

Old age also is something Ziverts has yet to experience. If old age means sitting in a rocking chair in the corner, "then I am very young," she said.

"I feel young. I feel able to participate in any activity," she continued.

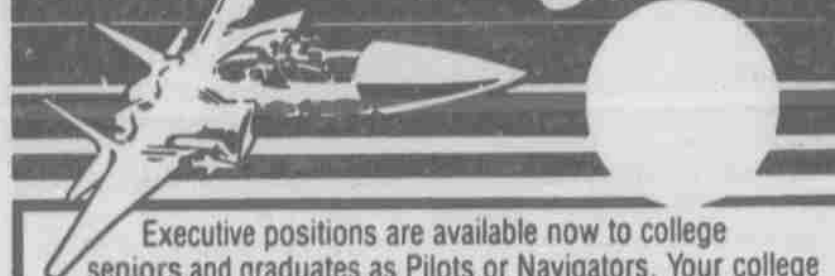
When people ask Ziverts how old she is, she likes to play a little joke. She tells them she is 96, and they exclaim, "Oh my God, you look so young!"

In her X amount of years, Ziverts said she has experienced a lot. During World War II, "I lived with the Germans. I lived with the Russians. I went through hell," Ziverts said.

Her family wanted "to run as far as possible from the communist regime." So in 1951, they came to Lincoln, because "we had hopes."

"I am a fighter, I am," Ziverts concluded. That's what Valentina means in Greek — strong.

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