"I saw this as an opportunity to expand my teaching"

By Hunter Marrow

He's been living in Ontario for about three years, but Treasure Valley Community College instructor Sam Castonguay and his wife and three kids are in it for the long haul.

They bought a home in the community about two years, because, "the intent is to stay forever," Castonguay recently said in his classroom at TVCC's Ontario campus.

The Earth Systems Sciences instructor is in his third year with the community college, where he teaches courses on geology, astronomy, oceanography and meteorology, though his specialty in college was geology.

"You really just can't divide the geosphere and hydrosphere," Castonguay said on the courses he teaches.

Born in San Bernardino, California, and raised in a little town called Faith, South Dakota, living in a small town isn't only a norm for the college instructor, but actually preferred. His hometown, Faith, for example, had a population of a little more than 400 people during the 2010 U.S. Census. Growing up on a horse and cattle ranch there, Castonguay would eventually find his passion for science, after being influenced by his science teacher, who was the same person from grades 7 through 12.

Castonguay went on to graduate from the University of Oregon for both his undergraduate and graduate work, where he got his first taste of teaching experience at Lane Community College as a teaching assistant and science tutor, while also serving as Outreach officer within the university's Geology Club.

He eventually moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, to work as an adjunct professor for two years at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

Then, the TVCC instructing position came up on the radar of the Castonguay family.

It wasn't the only one, however; Castonguay interviewed with colleges across the Southwest. But the pull to TVCC was too strong for the young instructor.

Castonguay's wife, Laurie, grew up in Roseburg and their three kids were born in Oregon, Castonguay said, so the family had ties to the region.

Also, "I saw this as an opportunity to expand my teaching," he explained.

Instead of focusing simply on geology, TVCC gave Castonguay the chance to teach courses that he had already been integrating into his lessons.

"With only one 'geology' (actually integrated science) position within the science department, it was really scaling back to a small-collaborative (college-wide) environment," Castonguay wrote in a bio to TVCC. "Here, I knew that I could grow professionally toward a community's interests and needs, rather than a 'stemp' of a curriculum required by 4-year institutions."

Inside and outside the academic setting, Castonguay and his family have taken on the mantra of "Think Globally. Act Locally." The idea is to act not with money or personal gain, but rather for a better human relationship with the earth for future generations.

This has translated to he and his family "taking root" in Ontario by purchasing a home, and Castonguay and his family have rooted themselves in Ontario by charging forward and participating in community organizations.

For example, Castonguay is a board member of Friends of the Owyhee, a group designed to help care for and protect the Owyhee Watershed throughout Oregon, Idaho and Nevada. In addition, he serves as a board member of EUVALCREE, a community organization dedicated to community equity and inclusiveness.