

AU professor, family safe; set to return from Sri Lanka

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An Alfred University professor and his family, on vacation in Sri Lanka when the tsunami waves inundated the country, are safe and due home this weekend. Dr. Vasantha Amarakoon, professor of ceramic engineering in Alfred University's School of Engineering and director of the New York State Center for Advanced Ceramic Technology (CACT) at Alfred University; his wife, Savithri and their daughter Shanika traveled to Sri Lanka to visit family. Dr. Amarakoon was also scheduled to present a research paper at a university in his native land. Dr. Licio Pennisi, assistant director of CACT, became concerned about Amarakoons' whereabouts after learning tsunami waves had caused much devastation on the island. Pennisi called Amarakoons' home in Alfred, and spoke to their son, Shaminda, who had heard from a family friend that his father, mother and sister were okay. The following day, Shaminda was able to reach his family directly to learn that they are still planning to return to the United States this coming weekend. This past weekend, Pennisi received an e-mail message from Dr. Amarakoon who wrote that although the family was doing well, the situation in Sri Lanka was "pretty bad - the worst disaster ever experienced." Dr. Amarakoon also wrote that the family is staying with a relative 20 miles from the ocean - far enough away to offer some protection from the deadly tsunami waves. "We are hoping the worst is over," Dr. Amarakoon wrote to Pennisi.