Cooperative Extension gearing up to launch men’s health initiative

If the old adage, “if Mama’s not happy, then nobody’s happy” bears any weight, then consider the reverse maxim:

“If Daddy’s not healthy, then nobody’s healthy.”

It’s a parable that Dr. Montreka Dansby, nutrition specialist with The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T, hopes to challenge. Dansby is focusing A&T’s nutrition program on men’s health, with special attention on minority men.

“There’s a lot of information out there on men’s health as far as the majority population and a lot of information on women’s health, because of the women’s health initiative,” Dansby says. “But I realized there was little information disseminated on minority men’s health. There’s an issue here because when our men are unhealthy, we are unhealthy.”

Heart disease, cancer and accidents are the top three causes of death, respectively, of men in the United States, according to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Among African American men, stroke is the No. 4 cause of death, with homicide, diabetes, HIV, chronic lower respiratory disease, kidney disease, influenza and pneumonia, rounding out the respective next six causes of death.

“It’s an issue for us all,” Dansby says, “because when men get sick who ends up taking care of them? Women.”

Men also often sacrifice taking care of their health so that their families can have such benefits as health and dental insurance; they also often forego regular checkups, and aren’t seeking general medical attention when they aren’t well. Even when expense is not a factor, many minority men mistakenly believe they are healthy, or have a mistrust of the medical profession, which Dansby says is likely rooted in the biomedical research study that went awry: the Tuskegee Experiment. In that 40-year study of syphilis, which began in 1932, Alabama researchers withheld treatment and information about penicillin and its successful treatment of syphilis from study participants, who were mostly poor and illiterate black sharecroppers.

With June as men’s health month, and men’s health week being celebrated June 15 through 21, this is a pertinent time to call attention to Extension’s efforts to highlight the well-being of men.

Extension wants to encourage men to get regular health exams, such as those for prostate cancer, as well as general checkups that can assess such risks as high cholesterol and hypertension. Yet because many of the diseases that befall minority men are affected by diet and nutrition, helping to educate men about what they eat and whether they exercise adequately is a key approach to helping limited-resource men improve their health, Dansby says.

By this time next year, Dansby hopes to have the men’s health initiative organized and ready to implement. Working through trusted community networks, such as churches, is part of a plan that she is formulating to conduct her outreach.

“We’re trying to remove that fear and that mistrust through nutrition education,” Dansby says. “If men know that they’re doing something preventative, they’re going to be more inclined to participate.”

Dr. Montreka Dansby, nutrition specialist for The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T

Dr. Mac’s Moment

I was listening to a radio interview with Chris Gardner recently and it got me thinking. Gardner, to jog your memory, is a self-made millionaire, entrepreneur, motivational speaker and philanthropist. His rags-to-riches story became the basis for the book and movie “The Pursuit of Happyness.”

Gardner told the interviewer that he has opted not to participate in the recession. As the owner of a brokerage firm, how can he opt out of the recession? Now, he said, is a prime opportunity to continue to do an excellent job, to find and hire the best and brightest and to seek out lucrative investment opportunities. Not doing so, using present economic conditions as the reason, is not acceptable.

What he said made sense. At A&T in general and in the SAES in particular, we will take the same stance. Now more than ever, having a degree that prepares you for today’s and tomorrow’s job market is invaluable. That’s what we will continue to do and do with a renewed passion.

Additionally, seeking answers to some of the problems — or should I call them challenges? — that perplex society is the work of our SAES researchers. Despite shrinking funding sources, we will search, seek and find the solutions.

And unlike never before, our work in Cooperative Extension is critical. When it comes to helping citizens better manage their funds, find new enterprises to keep the farm profitable or partner with schools and the community to enhance the leadership, citizenship and science, engineering and technology training for our young people, Cooperative Extension has the tools and technical competency.

Like Gardner, we in the SAES won’t let the present conditions define us. We will use these conditions to fuel our drive, determination and desire to remain on the move.

— Dr. Donald McDowell
Interim Dean, SAES
Lynch of FCS is SAES’s advisor of the year

Mentor and major motivator Dr. Patricia Lynch has been presented with the Advising Excellence Award, in recognition of her dedication to helping students succeed in college and beyond. The award was presented during the Annual Awards Banquet in April. Lynch, assistant professor in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, was praised for the “countless hours” she spends mentoring and advising students, and for her “caring, helpful, and dedicated” attitude.

“Dr. Lynch is unquestionably one of the most student-centered faculty members in the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences,” said Donald McDowell, interim dean of the SAES. “Her enthusiasm and dedication will carry students much further than they would be without her guidance.”

Ejimakor of Agribusiness, Applied Economics and Agriscience Education gets two recognitions for teaching

Dr. Godfrey Ejimakor, professor of applied economics and agribusiness, is a two-time winner in the 2008 – 2009 academic awards. He is recipient of the Gamma Sigma Delta annual Award for Excellence in Teaching as well as the University’s Outstanding SAES Teacher of the year. Based on his consistently high reviews from students, which average 4.5 – 5.0 — with 5.0 being the highest score — the awards are well deserved.

“Students like his teaching methods and the enthusiasm he brings to his classroom, noted Dr. Donald McDowell, interim dean of the SAES. “The enthusiasm Dr. Lynch generates, as she mentors and advises students is, in my opinion, one of the key reasons our enrollment is increasing and the retention rate is improving,” he added.

Lynch’s advising style includes giving students opportunities to meet and interact with professionals in the field and potential employers for internships, and assisting them in getting international work experience. Through his 17 funded research projects, which have garnered $1.2 million for the University.

In addition to conducting research, Ejimakor also maintains a busy teaching and advising role, teaching two to four courses each year, marshalling master’s theses through to completion, helping students secure scholarships and internships, and assisting them in getting international work and study abroad.

Ejimakor’s teaching methods include a healthy balance of classroom lectures with team assignments and team presentations, field trips, research and the use of computer technology. McDowell observed that he emphasizes a global perspective, and stresses that international experience is the key to professional success in agricultural professions and especially economics.

Research faculty in the SAES will be encouraged to make use of North Carolina’s 18 agricultural research stations and farms under a proposed strategic plan for the stations that was submitted to the General Assembly May 1. At present, the only sites available are the University Farm and the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) near Goldsboro. That could change, if the General Assembly accepts the plan. A&T and the University Farm could also be officially recognized as a partner in the state’s agricultural research stations framework.

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The plan was the culmination of a proposal in 2007 to close several of the stations and shift management of stations managed by the N.C. Department of Agriculture to N.C. State. Instead of acting on that recommendation, the General Assembly authorized that a strategic plan be developed aimed at improving efficiency. The plan was submitted to the General Assembly May 1 and can be downloaded from the N.C. Department of Agriculture web site at http://www.ncagr.gov/research/strategicplan.htm.

Trio gets Dean’s Collaboration award for broadening SAES research resources substantially

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on the move/flip side

Research Apprenticeship Program 2008

Mark your calendar

• Institute for Future Agricultural Leaders (IFAL) June 14 –19

• Food and Agribusiness Industries Summer Program (FAISP) for 11th and 12th grade students June 21 – 26

• Research Apprenticeship Program (RAP) for high school students June 29 – July 24.

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