EPA gives Biological Engineering Students $10K to green up Sockwell Hall landscaping

Biological engineering students are proving that education in the SAES is not just academic. They are bringing what they learn in the classroom to life, with their plan to transform the landscape around Sockwell Hall from chemical-dependent turf and shrubs into a model of permaculture — and a model of what Biological Engineering can do. The students recently won a $10,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to make it happen.

The students hope to complete their project by April, and plan to use the site as a means to educate others about how to create a permaculture landscape on public or private lands.

Conservation and biodiversity are the goals of permaculture, which emphasizes native plants and spurns lawn mowers, pesticides and fertilizers. The practice is believed to have originated in arid Australia, but is slowly catching on in urban America. With proper management, the end result is not only aesthetically appealing, but biologically diverse and very low maintenance.

With clean water becoming scarcer worldwide, permaculture is a natural approach to landscaping that is slowly catching on in urban planning, said Dr. Manuel Reyes, the students’ faculty mentor. “Until recently, urban planners saw rainwater as a problem to be funneled into storm drains for rapid disposal,” he said. The result has been soil erosion and polluted surface waters. Now, he said, planners are beginning to value rainwater as a resource and are incorporating swales and berms in cityscapes to trap rain so it will infiltrate slowly into the soil, not only to water landscapes, but to filter pollutants and replenish dwindling aquifers.

Research is an important part of the project. Students will gather data so they can present a before-and-after picture of biodiversity, water quality, and other aspects. They will also research student attitudes to the new landscape.

Carmen Young, a sophomore, said the students see permaculture as “modeling human settlements after nature.” Their inspiration came about after observing the irony about their building, which houses a program dedicated to applying engineering principles to environmental protection and conservation.

“We thought it was a little strange, here we are in the Biological Engineering Program, which is in this building that has all these issues with runoff and flooding,” she said.

“We wanted to do a project that was not only for ourselves, but for future students to see what they can accomplish, and to show that there are sustainable practices that can be brought onto the campus,” said Scott Carter, a senior who helped spearhead the project.
In the fall of 2008, the Department of Animal Sciences rolled out a program geared up to prepare students for a broad range of careers in equine industries, with Dr. Rusty Miller as the coordinator. Miller had joined the SAES a year earlier, bringing with him more than 30 years of experience in the equine world — including judging at two world championship horse shows.

Less than a year-and-a-half later, in the first week of December of 2009, there were groundbreaking ceremonies for a $13.5 million equestrian center in Rockingham County that will vault the SAES into the national equestrian education scene at a hot gallop.

“As a full partner with teaching, outreach, and research laboratory facilities at the new equestrian center, the SAES is going to expand its student recruitment base in a new direction dramatically,” says Dr. Donald McDowell, the SAES interim dean. “There’s an incredible demand in the equine industries, across the nation as well as in North Carolina, for the training we will be providing students.”

Home for the Rockingham County equestrian center is a 155-acre parcel south of Reidsville. As a full partner in the project, along with Rockingham County and the city of Reidsville, the SAES received a grant of $2.4 million from the state of North Carolina for facilities that will soon be under construction.

The SAES equestrian-center facilities will include a classroom — replete with digital blackboards, projection and sound systems — along with Rockingham County and the city of Reidsville, the SAES received a grant of $2.4 million. In addition to being an active member of her Cooperative Extension Program. She is a dedicated faculty, but to the relevancy of their research to society, says Dr. Donald McDowell, the SAES interim dean.

“The research we are doing here ranges from addressing concerns about diabetes and nutrition, to food safety, rural poverty, soil conservation, green energy, and bio-technology,” says McDowell. “All these things are focusing on topics and concerns that affect the people of North Carolina and the nation.”

However, there is still room for improvement, points out Dr. Shirley Hymon-Parker associate dean for the Agricultural Research Program. She is a student representative. A junior at A&T, Brooks is studying food and nutritional sciences and is an advocate for nutrition and food-safety issues. Brooks is a regular volunteer at health fairs and other workshops organized through the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences.

• Cernita Gibbs of Albemarle, who is executive director of the Stanly County Habitat for Humanity. Habitat in Stanly has been a partner with local Extension to help prepare families, financially, for home ownership. Gibbs is a member of the Stanly County Cooperative Extension Specialized Committee.

• Velma Fryar-Maddox of Turkey. In addition to being an active member of her Wilson Chapel Church, Fryar-Maddox is a recent graduate of the Cooperative Extension Agricultural Leadership Institute, which is supported by a consortium of 1890 land-grant universities, financial for her work in the community with children and culture, Stevens is working to preserve the Rosenwald Center for Cultural Enrichment. Greene County is home to one of the historic Rosenwald schools, which were built across the South in 1917 after educator and Civil Rights organizer Booker T. Washington urged Julius Rosenwald, philanthropist and former president of Sears, Roebuck and Company, to help educate black children across the South.

SAES research funding hits all-time high

Scientists and Extension specialists in the SAES continue to break records in garnering external funds for research. In the 2008-09 academic year, the SAES brought in close to $6.5 million in competitive funding, breaking the previous year’s record of $5.1 million. In the past six years the faculty has doubled the amount of the flow of external funding into the SAES. In the

New Rockingham County Equine Center has SAES riding tall in the saddle

The Strategic Planning Council that serves as advisory board to The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T returned to campus in early November for its annual meeting, welcoming eight of nine new members to the 25-member panel.

Meeting in Coltrane Hall for a two-day immersion in all things Extension, the board has been present and involved on programmatic and legislative initiatives. The council comprises agribusiness, education, human services and community leaders from across the state and keeps Extension administrators and specialists informed on issues that affect audiences.

The new members of the Strategic Planning Council are:
• Jasmine Brooks, of Knightdale, a student representative. A junior at A&T, Brooks is studying food and nutritional sciences and is an advocate for nutrition and food-safety issues. Brooks is a regular volunteer at health fairs and other workshops organized through the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences.

• Cernita Gibbs of Albemarle, who is executive director of the Stanly County Habitat for Humanity. Habitat in Stanly has been a partner with local Extension to help prepare families, financially, for home ownership. Gibbs is a member of the Stanly County Cooperative Extension Specialized Committee.

• Velma Fryar-Maddox of Turkey. In addition to being an active member of her Wilson Chapel Church, Fryar-Maddox is a recent graduate of the Cooperative Extension Agricultural Leadership Institute, which is supported by a consortium of 1890 land-grant institutions that includes A&T. She also advises Sampson County Cooperative Extension on small farm issues.

• Mitchell McIver of Laurinburg. McIver’s community service includes membership on the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council and the Scotland County Gang Taskforce. McIver is a graduate of East Carolina University with a bachelor’s degree in sociology.

• Eddie McNair from Plymouth. For 20 years, he has been the pastor of The Fountain of Life Full Gospel Baptist Church in Roper, and is also the founder and president of The New Life Community Development Corp., which has received a $150,000 grant from the Golden Leaf Foundation to start an agribusiness incubator. McNair also serves on the Martin-Tyrell-Washington District Board of Health.

• Amy Hardy Moye of La Grange. She and her husband, Jack Moye, own Rahnzeitig Farms & Vineyard. She is the founding member and board secretary of Slow Food Down East, a chapter of Slow Food USA. Moye teaches English as a second language at Lenoir Community College and is also a member of the N.C. Muscadine Growers Association and the N.C. Agri-tourism Network Association.

• Justin Simmons of Supply, a student representative. Simmons, 17, is a home-schooled senior. He is the son of Shelly Simmons, who also serves on the Strategic Planning Council. Justin Simmons is a member of 4-H through the Brunswick County Cooperative Extension 4-H Specialized Committee.

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Preparation, finding, implementing solutions.
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on the move/flip side

The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T and 4-H hosted an elite “Force of 100” teenagers from across the state, in mid November. The teens were selected for training to address hypertension, diabetes, strokes and other health issues that are disproportionately rampant among African Americans and other minorities. Edgar Veloz of Mecklenburg County, and Denise Blackburn and Devin Patterson, both of Warren County — pictured here — are among the “Force of 100” teens who returned to their communities with new insights into nutrition, food safety and physical fitness that they will pass along to their friends, families and classmates as part of the second phase of the program. The training was funded with a grant from the Walmart Foundation.

Check www.ag.ncat.edu/extension for “Force of 100” updates