Changes afoot at Child Development Lab

A temporary relocation for the Child Development Lab won’t stop this five-star facility from delivering on its mission of instruction, research and service. From its temporary location in a leased church building close to campus, the lab delivers a high-quality child development curriculum to 34 preschool children Monday – Friday, while also educating undergraduate and graduate students, and serving as a laboratory for social scientists exploring the family and childhood development.

“We’re experiencing no disruption in service,” said Juliette Jackson, the Center’s director. “In fact, many parents have told us we have done a fantastic job of making this temporary site feel like home.”

Jackson, who became director in August, would know how to make the center “home,” because the lab and SAES are, in a sense, “home” to her, having awarded her a bachelor’s in child development in 1979, and a master’s in adult education in 1994. She credits her student experiences in the lab — as well as the “tough” but inspiring faculty mentors in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) — with instilling in her a lifelong passion for child development. She returns to the CDL after more than 25 years in the field, most recently as assistant professor of early childhood development for Rockingham Community College.

Although on the surface the CDL appears to only serve families, the reality is that its primary purpose is academic. FCS students serve practicums and learn research methodologies there, while faculty researchers find it a valuable window into how children and families behave and interact.

However, space limitations in the past have prevented the lab from reaching its full potential. That could change when renovations to a building on campus are complete sometime this winter. The new building will be more spacious and will also better serve parents because it can offer more parking and easier access than the former CDL site in Price Hall Annex, a building almost 60 years old that is no longer a viable home for the CDL because of the building’s structural inadequacies.

Research is critical for child development curriculums, Jackson said. SAES researchers are currently using the lab to explore eating habits in African American families, but scientists from other schools use the facility too, said Dr. Valerie McMillan, coordinator of the Child Development Program.

“This is a university facility not just an SAES facility, she said “Our hope is that the new space, when complete, will enable us to serve more families, as well as more students and researchers.”
The A&T Extension community garden accomplishment list that set the groundwork for a landmark grant of more than $600,000 includes guidance that was provided to an immigrant community in Catawba County.

In spite of hiccups in the economy and staff attrition, The Cooperative Extension Program is having a banner year in grant funding. More than $1 million in grants has been announced for the program, which has a mission of empowering people by helping them find solutions to their problems.

"Grants to create community gardens, to help livestock producers, and to help young people lead healthier, more active lives are racking up dollars for Extension and for the audiences served by the organization."

"We’ve really scored big this year," says Dr. Keith Baldwin, Agriculture and Natural Resources program leader and horticulture specialist. "We’ve hauled in over $1 million this year, and there are still several pending grants."

The grants support Cooperative Extension’s base funding and further help specialists and support staff reach audiences and help resolve their needs, says Dr. M. Ray McKinney, associate dean and Extension administrator.

"We have had an extraordinary year and it’s the result of the energies and commitment of our staff," McKinney says. "These types of grants are crucial to our being able to reach people and help them lead healthier, safer and more productive lives."

One of the biggest awards — announced earlier in the year — is a five-year, $630,000 grant to pay for an intensive community gardening project that will involve various Extension disciplines. The grant was awarded by the National Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) program and is designed to benefit at-risk children and their families. The Extension team whose members sought and won the grant is planning a series of community gardens that take a multidisciplinary approach to helping communities.

The gardening project aims to help low-income families reduce their food costs, improve their nutrition, engage their children and teenagers in gardening and agribusiness activities, engage their neighbors, and develop grassroots leadership. The project will have a test run in Bertie, Cumberland and Durham counties and planning is under way to hire site coordinators in each of those counties to help Extension agents oversee the work. The grant will also pay for a project coordinator to administer the program, and organizers hope to have that position filled by January.

The Agriculture and Natural Resources team members include Baldwin, Dr. Michelle Eley, community development specialist, and two Extension associates, Travella Free and Rickie Holness. Specialists from Extension’s Family and Consumer Sciences Team will also be involved, including Dr. Jean Baldwin, parenting specialist; Dr. Montreka Dansby, nutrition specialist; and Dr. Claudette Smith, program leader, who will also oversee 4-H involvement in the project.

Dr. Chantel Lumpkin and Mershay Wheeler of the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences will also be providing assistance, as will subject matter specialists with N.C. State University’s Cooperative Extension Service.

Meanwhile, specialists are working to complete a gardening curriculum to guide participants and plans to have the materials in place in May, in time for the start of the 2010 gardening season. The first two years of the program will involve starting and harvesting the garden. In year three, the community garden should then expand to nearby schools. By the final year, the program should then grow beyond the pilot areas.

"Community gardens bring people together to work on their own issues; they provide a forum for communication," says Keith Baldwin, who is overseeing the project. "Community gardens also provide community residents with an opportunity to impact their own lives by growing food they can serve at their own dinner table."

Extension was also notified over the summer of a $100,000 grant, covering three years, to help train minority livestock producers in production efficiencies, alternative marketing, and improvements in record keeping that will qualify them for more USDA programs.

The project leader will be Dr. Niki Whitley, Extension’s animal sciences specialist, with help from Baldwin, Eley and members of Extension’s field staff. The grant is from USDA Outreach Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers program.

In another development, Extension has received $50,000 from the Wal-Mart Foundation to launch Youth Voice: Youth Choice, a program created by the National 4-H Council that encourages young people to develop and maintain healthy, active lifestyles. The program will tackle wellness issues such as nutrition, physical fitness, and safety.

Smith and Dansby lead the project, which will ultimately empower youth to create action plans to share with their county commission- ers, school boards, health care committees, and state legislative offices. Extension has also received a grant for $4,652 from USDA’s Southern Region Risk Management Education Center to set up a series of “Grovvers Schools” in Bertie and Northampton counties.

Following interest-group meet- ings and needs assessments to determine appropriate livestock enterprises for the region, the training for farmers will include animal health, biosecurity, breeding and genetics, business planning, environmental protection considerations for waste management, feeds and forages, marketing and risk management.

M. Ray McKinney, associate dean and Extension administrator, says the team is making a conscious effort to help Extension agents work with other agencies and organizations.

"The communities we serve work hard to bring people together in creative ways to help them improve their lives," McKinney says. "And we want to be a part of that."

Wake County children in a community garden at their church exemplify the healthy and active lifestyle encouraged by the $50,000 Wal-Mart Foundation grant.

Cooperative Extension pulls in more than a million in external funding

Wiley McCawn and operate a small farm in southeastern North Carolina that is among the type of enterprises that stands to benefit from new funding for The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T.

John McCay

Dr. Montreka Dansby

Dr. Mohamed Ahmedna, an SAES professor of food science, has been named director of the Center of Excellence for Post-Harvest Technology at the North Carolina Research Campus in Kannapolis. Ahmedna joined the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences in 2003, with a research focus on product development. He has been involved in 17 multidisciplinary projects garnering more than $5 million in funding. His research accomplishments and patent applications include a process to inactivate aflatoxins in peanuts. His research efforts have resulted in 50 peer reviewed scientific publications, and he is the coeditor of a book on Probiotics in Food Safety and Human Health. Ahmedna was the recipient of the 2008 Tharpood Marshall distinguished faculty member award, the 2007 NC A&T Outstanding Senior Researcher Award, the 2006 USDA George Washington Carver Agricultural Excellence Award, and the 2002 A&T Outstanding Young Investigator Award. Ahmedna holds both master’s and doctoral degrees in food science as well as a master’s in applied statistics granted by Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. He recently completed an MBA from the Kenan-Flagler business school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

A&T Outstanding Young Investigator Award. Ahmedna holds both master’s and doctoral degrees in food science as well as a master’s in applied statistics granted by Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. He recently completed an MBA from the Kenan-Flagler business school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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Faculty & staff notes

Dr. Mohamed Ahmedna

Dr. Shirley Hymon-Parker has joined the SAES as associate dean for the Agricultural Research Program. Hymon- Parker comes to A&T from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, where she served for the past five years as chair of the Department of Human Ecology. For the past 11 years and while attending to teaching and Extension responsibilities concurrently, Hymon-Parker has also served as associate director of 1890 programs for the School of Agricultural and Natural Sciences at UMES. She received her doctorate in education policy, planning and administration from the University of Maryland; her master’s in apparel design from Cornell University; and her bachelor’s from North Carolina Central University in Durham. Hymon-Parker is origi- nal from Warrenton, N.C., and a graduate of Graham High School.

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Re:search ready for readership, Small Farms Week ready for schedule

The 2009 issue of the Agricultural Research Program’s annual magazine, Re:search, will be mailed in a few weeks. Featured topics include research in post-harvest technologies, agroforestry, green fuels and poultry. For extra copies call 336.334.7612 or visit the SAES Web page at www.ag.ncat.edu for an electronic copy.

Also available on the SAES Web page, www.ag.ncat.edu, are nomination forms for the 2010 Small Farmer of the Year and for Small Farms Week scholarships. Small Farms Week is set for March 21 through 27.