SOLUTIONS
for NORTH CAROLINA

The Cooperative Extension Program at North Carolina A&T State University
The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service at N.C. State work collaboratively to offer research-based educational programs to individuals, families and communities. A long-range Plan of Work follows guidelines in the Agricultural Research, Extension and Education Reform Act of 1998 to establish a focus on five major areas of public concern. Noteworthy recent impacts in the five major areas include:

Sustaining Agriculture and Forestry
A group of some 300 farmers without the economic and social advantages mainstream Americans enjoy, worked with business-management workshops by A&T Extension that set the groundwork for a 25-member, nonprofit cooperative in 2007. In 2008, the cooperative held monthly business meetings, coordinated regular shipments to slaughter facilities and increased member earnings. A majority of the co-op members had contracts with a national grocery chain (Whole Foods) in 2008, a development that hiked overall income by more than $200,000 in less than a year.

Protecting the Environment
A&T Extension’s multi-county farm management agent in the state’s northwest corner has worked with growers of a variety of crops to establish the New River Organic Growers (NROG) cooperative. Among the co-op’s 2008 milestones was $30,000 in new grants for insurance equipment and enhanced marketing. In the state’s southwest corner, Robeson and Bladen counties, A&T Extension’s multi-county farm management agent pushed the grand total of $165,000. The work to introduce plastic mulch and drip irrigation to former small-sale tobacco farmers in Robeson and Bladen counties began five years ago.

Developing Responsible Youth
A dozen youths from homes with limited financial resources started their own small-scale business enterprises as a direct result of Extension entrepreneurship youth development programming. The Entrepreneurship Investigation program (ESI) reached 4,103 volunteers, Extension agents and youth from 14 counties. In the wake of the introductory phase, new county Extension centers are continuing to pilot test, and one county has already moved to implement ESI.

Maintaining Viable Communities
Extension’s efforts to bring non-traditional participants, particularly communities hit hardest by the economic downturn, gave more than 100 community development organizations a starting point for getting involved in public policy decisions. There were more than 130 instances of Extension-led leadership for community activities, and 168 examples of specific applications of Extension training and technical assistance to community problem solving.

Developing Strong, Healthy and Safe Families
A shared-use equipment and enhanced marketing. In the state’s southwest corner, Robeson and Bladen counties, A&T Extension’s multi-county farm management agent pushed the grand total of $165,000. The work to introduce plastic mulch and drip irrigation to former small-sale tobacco farmers in Robeson and Bladen counties began five years ago.

“Parenting Matters” training by social service agencies often participating in the training reported consistently using positive parenting strategies. Almost one-third of these stressed parents (157) attended at least seven of the eight sessions in the “Parenting Matters” curriculum. With foster care now costing North Carolina as much as $381 monthly and 393 children remaining with their parents as a direct result of “Parenting Matters,” the program may have saved taxpayers as much as $17,957,888 for that group alone.

With the economic downturn fueling 22,393 bankruptcies in North Carolina in 2008, A&T Extension specialists and family and consumer sciences agents continue to work to increase the financial literacy of families with limited financial resources. Family and consumer sciences agents in five counties provided financial literacy training to 2,000 limited-resource families. These trainings taught participants how they can improve their financial status by developing budgets, setting financial goals and tracking their spending habits.
The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn. Ralph Waldo Emerson said that first and best. Yet, the poetic symbolism of those words also illustrates how The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T State University operates. The people we’ve worked with this year as you view our annual report, “Solutions for North Carolina,” will discover how the forests and the acorn are applicable to what we do: When we help a homemaker or a farmer, a teenager, a student in a literacy class or a single mother, what we provide doesn’t just benefit that individual. Those that we help, go on to help others. We nurture the fruit; we sustain the forest.

As you’ll read in the following pages, the people we’ve worked with in the past several months exemplified our mission — empowering people, finding solutions. We’ll introduce you to young workers we’ve taught to cook. What they learn not only benefits themselves, but their children as well.

A military wife who strengthens her financial skills through Cooperative Extension is so impressed that she passes on the information not only to her husband, but to her husband’s mother too. A young man who found his voice in 4-H is so impressed by the communities he’s gotten to know that he wants one day to become the governor.

What they all have in common is taking the success they’ve gleaned through Cooperative Extension and planting it, nurturing it from seeds into mighty trees with powerful branches and deep roots: sharing information and knowledge with their families, their friends, their churches, and their schools, communities, cities and state. The people we’ve worked with in the past year, and the past 95 years, are learning lessons that go far beyond themselves.

They’re learning lessons that last for generations. The acorn becomes the oak, stable and strong, with roots that endure beyond a season. That strength is needed more now than ever, as our country deals with the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression. Employees are being laid off and taking salary cuts. Deferred dreams of home ownership and college education are being played out across the state and country. Times are serious and the demand for Cooperative Extension’s varied services is more urgent than ever.

Ask the farmer whose computer skills were learned from Cooperative Extension, and who used those skills to determine that he could afford a new tractor this year. His children are learning the family business, and using the income from their own farming to pay their private school tuition. Touch one acorn. Sustain generations.

Dr. M. Ray McKinnie
Administrator’s Message

Dr. M. Ray McKinnie
Associate Dean and Administrator
The Cooperative Extension Program
N.C. A&T State University

Solutions for North Carolina
The Cooperative Extension Program at North Carolina A&T State University
L E L A N D — Carlos Cisneros was a boy in Chicago when his father died, taking with him knowledge and management of the family’s finances.

Although she was an immigrant from Cuba whose late husband was also an immigrant (from Mexico) who suddenly found herself with financial riddles to sort out and resolve, Cisneros’s mother and her family made it. Those lessons learned as a widow in a new country with young children have been passed along to her daughter-in-law, her son Carlos’s wife, Mirna G. Cisneros. Mirna too is an immigrant, from Mexico, for whom English is a second language.

Mirna Cisneros found that the key to getting a lock on her fiscal resources was a series of financial literacy classes taught through Brunswick County Cooperative Extension. It’s a particularly bold step for a Hispanic household in which husbands generally oversee money management.

As the wife in a military family that has moved a few times in a 13-year marriage, Cisneros has learned the importance of staying abreast of ever-evolving finances. She has now checked her credit report and confirmed that her family is in good financial standing; she’s copied all her credit card numbers and information; and she regularly monitors her checking account through online banking.

“When you get in the class, they open your eyes,” says Cisneros, 35. “You say, oh, it’s serious!” Cisneros also feels more empowered and prepared to return to work once her youngest child is old enough for school. Such goals and interaction are key factors for maintaining a stable military marriage.

“Military Families Under Stress: Implication for Family Life Education,” a study from the University of Missouri, notes that in addition to the issues common to all families — such as parenting and careers — military families have to contend with such disruptions as repeated relocations, separations of service members from their families and expectations that children and spouses live up to the high expectations of the military spouse.

Educational programs that address the needs of military families are part of the recommendation that the study makes for addressing and reducing the stress on military families. The classes that Cisneros attended in 2009, were taught by Pearl Stanley, a family and consumer science educator with Brunswick County Cooperative Extension. The classes are held at the Family Literacy Center in Leland and integrate early childhood education and adult education into a unified program. After a finance class covering record-keeping and debt management, Cisneros sat down for a serious discussion with her husband, a chief petty officer in the Navy.

“I went through the list with him and I said, these are the things that we need to do,” Cisneros says.

The list included building six months of savings — which they are working to build — and for her to know all the insurance information and where the papers were stored.

“When my father-in-law passed, my mother-in-law had to learn everything,” Cisneros says. “It was hard. I don’t want my kids to go through that. I want them to have a normal childhood, not dependent on the system.”
Nutrition education is giving young mothers more than just food for thought.

SNOW HILL — Long-time friends Christina Corbett and Jessica Shackleford had a lot in common. They were both teenage mothers and both quit high school to care for their children. Neither of them could cook. Both relied on fast food as a regular nutrition source, not only for themselves, but also for their young children.

“Every weekend, I used to go get fast food,” says Shackleford, 19. Corbett, also 19, was even more dependent, saying: “I used to go every day.”

Then when they enrolled in GED programs at the Greene County Education Center, both were required to take parenting classes that included nutrition education. It was in these classes, under the careful tutelage of Greene County Cooperative Extension Program Assistant Shirley Howard, that both young women learned to cook.

Not only can they prepare nutritious and tasty meals, but they also know the value of eating well and the impact that healthful eating has on their children.

“We learned about milk, to drink 2 percent and how much milk we need to drink per day,” Corbett says. “We also learned how important it is to drink water; to keep food at the right temperature; about how many calories are in food.”

Food choices have a significant impact on children’s weight, which in the past three decades has increased at alarming rates. Health experts have described the rate of children’s weight gain as an epidemic and note that 17 percent of children in the United States — 12.5 million — are overweight, according to the U.S. Surgeon General’s Office.

Comparing what they used to eat to the food they prepare at home has also brought about its own revelations.

“Fast food has more calories than you get cooking and eating at home,” Shackleford says. “It’s healthier at home, and you’re also saving money. You don’t have to go out to the restaurant and spend.”

She estimates that she was spending a minimum of $20 per week on fast food, money that she can now use on “things for my child, for clothes and shoes.”

The Surgeon General’s strategies for preventing and confronting obesity include recommendations that parents and care providers “shop, cook and plan for healthy meals”; that they ensure that children eat a healthy breakfast every day; that they know how much food to serve a child, and that they sit at the table with their children and eat as a family.

Using lessons from The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T’s Project Eat Right and other curricula, Howard has worked with students on simple recipes that are nutritious but nonetheless appeal to teenagers and children. One of Corbett’s favorite recipes is for stove-top lasagna, and she easily reels off instructions for making it, right down to how to “boil your little noodles.”

Shackleford is cooking up a storm, preparing chicken, hamburgers, pork chops, green beans and corn at home, to the surprise and delight of the grandmother with whom she and her daughter live. Her favorite recipe grazed from Project Eat Right lessons is for personal pizza, which she makes with English Muffins, shredded cheese, tomato sauce, diced ham, pepperoni and peaches. More healthful cooking and eating is also benefiting Shackleford’s daughter.

“When my child was born, she was 8 pounds, 8 ounces,” Shackleford says. “Fast food was making her even bigger, but since I’ve been cooking, she’s slimmed down a little bit.”

Forsaking fast food for quick but healthy eating
THE CHEROKEE RESERVATION — For somebody who’s supposed to be retired, Pat Oocumma, 55, is a busy woman. Make that businesswoman.

Retired after 33 years as a registered nurse, with a master’s degree in education, Oocumma specialized in maternal and child health — particularly the hard cases that involved domestic abuse.

Three years ago she and a partner started NativeScapes Landscaping and Nursery, specializing in what Oocumma describes as “hardscapes” — rock gardens, walls and fencing. Oocumma is also a partner in Maney’s Clean-up Crew, which handles maintenance for residential and commercial property.

With her husband Wilson Oocumma, she is also a partner in Double O Enterprises, through which they purchase and rent mobile homes and cabins. Two new businesses, Native Energies and Environmental Remediation, are also on her horizon.

It’s no wonder that she needed Cooperative Extension to help her keep track of her finances.

For years now, through volunteer work as well as becoming a master gardener, Oocumma has been involved with Extension. But she became a bona fide client when she took a QuickBooks software bookkeeping class offered through Cooperative Extension. Oocumma uses the software to completely take care of the accounting for two of her businesses.

Although there are two accountants in her family, they’re not always available to assist her. Oocumma also knows that if she has problems with the software that she can get help from Extension Agent Tammara Cole.

“The accountant who did my taxes this year says my books are some of the best that he’s ever seen,” Oocumma says.

That observation is more than a personal accolade for Oocumma. As she prospers in her business, so does her family and her community.

She is the oldest child of a contractor, who, with only a ninth-grade education, needed help understanding some of the written language in certification classes. He took his daughter, Pat, along to help him, and she absorbed many of the lessons.

When he had a heart attack 13 years ago, her father turned the family business — Smith & Sons Construction — over to her. As the owner and partner in her other businesses, Oocumma is intent on using her expertise to enrich her community.

If they want a chance, and everybody deserves a chance, I’ll help them,” Oocumma says.
GREENSBORO — When Andre Harris was a delegate to the National 4-H Conference in Washington in the spring of 2009, he insisted — against all odds, advice and discouragement — that he was going to meet U.S. Sen. John McCain. He did.

To understand how impressive a feat Andre’s interaction was, consider the Andre Harris of 2005. Back then he was an introverted boy of 11. When he joined a local 4-H Club that year, public speaking was his worst nightmare.

Yet within a year, through structured activities and encouragement, Andre became one of the club’s most skilled orators. Required presentations and the support he got from peers and club leaders boosted his confidence like rocket fuel.

“At first I was nervous because I had to do public speaking and I wasn’t comfortable,” says Andre, 15. “Now I prefer to do public speaking.”

His preference comes with wings. After college — he’s interested in American University, Temple, N.C. State and Duke — Andre wants a career in politics.

So when Shannon Wiley of Guilford County Cooperative Extension told Andre he’d be a delegate to the national 4-H conference in Washington, Andre was honored and excited. He also had an extra goal — to meet McCain, his political hero and the 2008 GOP presidential nominee.

Andre knows the irony of being a young African American male in a historic era in which the country has elected its first African American president, but is undaunted in his support of the septuagenarian, white senator.

Once in Washington and following meetings with members of North Carolina’s Congressional delegation, Andre happily realized that U.S. Sen. Kay Hagan’s office was near McCain’s office.

Andre’s mother, Cheryl Carrington, as well as 4-H Extension agents, Wiley and Peggie Lewis, and others had all cautioned Andre about getting his hopes up. The senator represents Arizona and the little spare time he had would likely be devoted to those constituents, people warned. Andre, though, found his way to McCain’s office and asked to meet him. Sorry, said members of McCain’s office staff, the senator would be on his way to a press conference and didn’t have time.

Instead of becoming dejected, Andre waited outside the senate office door.

Within a few minutes McCain came out, flanked by aides, and Andre stepped up and introduced himself, saying, “It’s nice to meet you.”

McCain returned his greeting and kept moving. A few steps later, though, the senator stopped, turned around, came back and told Andre that he’d take the time to pose with him for a picture. A quick one for sure. It was hard to tell what was brighter that day, the flash of the cameras or Andre’s smile.

More inspired and determined than ever, Andre wants to serve his country as an elected official. While serving as a page for N.C. Sen. Katie Dorsett, Andre got to watch the 2008 General Assembly in action. His goal is to serve in the Legislature as well, and then become governor.

His most immediate plans, though, are to finish school. He’s a sophomore at Smith High in Greensboro.

“4-H has really helped me,” Andre says. “It’s helped my public speaking ability. It’s increased my confidence.”

Andre Harris

Shannon Wiley (l) and Andre Harris

A high school sophomore got an unexpected once-in-a-lifetime opportunity during a trip to the National 4-H Congress.
KINSTON — Sherlene and Charles Allen hug all the time now. He tells her he loves her and she says it back. She’s the mother. He’s the son. What used to be all out war in their relationship has reached détente and is evolving into a peace accord. Allen, 45, says she has been a better mother to her teenage son since she completed parenting classes offered through the Lenoir County Cooperative Extension Center. Her home life is calmer. She has less anxiety about the future of her family.

“There’s a sense of relief now,” Allen says. “It makes a lot of stress come off you, too.”

Using curricula, including parts of Parenting Matters developed by The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T, Lynn Battle-Owens, a Lenoir County Extension program assistant, helped Allen and others learn techniques for dealing with their children.

After Charles Allen, 16, got in trouble and came under court supervision in 2008, his mother was ordered by the court to take a parenting class. Like many parents in those shoes, she initially balked at the prospect, even to the point where a court counselor reminded her that failure to comply with the order would get her 30 days in jail. So Allen showed up in Battle-Owens’ class in January 2009 with a dash of attitude and a plate full of skepticism.

“What can you teach me that I don’t already know?” asked Allen, a mother three times over. “My mama spanked me and it made me better.”

By the end of that first two-hour session, Allen began to realize that maybe she could learn new ways to parent. Goodness knew that what she’d been trying before the court order wasn’t working. She and Charles — her youngest child and only son — were having terrible screaming matches that were escalating toward physical confrontation. He was smitten by peer pressure and continually challenging her authority.

Through parenting classes, Allen learned to communicate without yelling or raising her voice, and to watch her language.

“Before, I might have used a cuss word … or two,” Allen says, adding that the new strategy benefited her as well as her son. “I tried it and I felt more ladylike.”

Allen also stopped ordering her son around and began asking and reasoning with him. The first time she tried that technique and it worked, she was thrilled. Charles was home for a visit after living in a group home for eight months. He’d been walking the straight and narrow, until one night when he broke curfew. When he came home, she spoke calmly.

“Normally, I would go at him cursing and threatening, and I didn’t do that this time,” Allen says. “I said, you know what time your curfew is and you need to make it. That’s what I expect; nothing more, nothing less.”

There was some huffing and puffing, but it was all Charles. Even he realized that his mother was different and it didn’t take long — the very next morning — before he was impressed enough to find out what was going on. They began to talk to one another, instead of at one another.

Allen also uses some of the techniques with her daughters, both adults, who also live with her. She also has discovered that some of the parenting strategies work with the patients at the nursing home where she works.

Now back home with his family, Charles loves to tease his mother and lay his head on her shoulders, envelop her in a bear hug and tell her he loves her. Allen reciprocates. It’s new behavior for them; a reigniting of affection that had begun to fade after Allen and her son’s father broke off their relationship. When Charles was 12 and his father left, he began to act out.

Now on the road to improved behavior, Charles makes curfew and listens less to his friends and more to his mother.

“I want to do right,” Allen says, smiling, “and I want my son to do right. I want him to be to the point where he can stand alone.”
**Mushroom finds home in the High Country**

Small-scale farmers are scrambling for innovations that will fill the voids left by the demise of tobacco farming.

**MARSHALL —** Fred Treadway, 75, says he isn’t a farmer.

He grew up on a farm in Marshall. He helped his daddy crop tobacco, wheat and corn. He helped his father-in-law farm as well.

Today, Treadway raises chickens and grows corn and, looking for some extra income to supplement his Social Security check, has also been growing shiitake mushrooms on forested logs along his sprawling mountain land. He insists, though, that he’s not a farmer.

“Too just playing around,” he says with a laugh.

Treadway’s just say, is an inventive fellow.

After three years of U.S. Army service during the Korean Conflict, he went to Louisville, Ky., to help a buddy get settled in his new job running a theater. The friend lasted only a few weeks in the job, and because Treadway had been helping him and had quickly learned the ropes, he became the new theater manager. Treadway continued in that job, then managed a drive-in theater, and then owned a hardware store. Along the way, he and his wife Geneva raised two daughters.

Still, Treadway would come home to the North Carolina mountains to help his family work their land. Preparing for the future, he bought a big tract from his father-in-law in 1975, planning to one day come home to grow a little something. In 1995, the Treadways and one of their daughters moved back to care for his wife’s ailing parents. Treadway built a two-story house next to his in-laws, resumed working the land and leasing his tobacco allotment.

When the government stopped its price supports for tobacco in 2003, Treadway sold his allotment. Looking for a way to make up that lost income, Treadway discovered a niche-farming opportunity six years ago after attending a demonstration sponsored by N.C. A&T and Madison County Cooperative Extension. That’s when he first tried growing mushrooms.

“I was trying to supplement what I lost,” Treadway says. “Nobody gets rich off of anything. I was just trying to make a few dollars.”

He grew about 1,500 pounds of shiitake mushrooms in 2008, enough to pay the $2,600 annual tax bill on the land that he purchased through the years. In 2008, he made $3,000 in profit off the mushrooms, selling primarily to a local restaurant for $8.50 per pound. Treadway could actually get $12 per pound if he sold at the local tailgate market, but says he doesn’t want to sit around all day making his sales.

His mountain land provides the ideal environment for mushroom production, with the requisite shade of 50 to 75 percent that allows some sunlight penetration. He can also supply part of the materials, using legs from white oak on his property. He also built a water supply system that is used to irrigate his mushroom crops and to clean up white oak logs before they are inoculated with mushroom spores.

David Kendall, agricultural agent for Madison County Cooperative Extension, describes mushroom production as, “a good, high return, low-tech industry.”

Kendall worked with Treadway on writing a Tobacco Trust Fund grant, which resulted in a $3,000 award to build a mushroom fruiting house. Treadway is building it himself, and will use it to experiment with oyster mushrooms, and to grow other vegetables during the off season.

“David sends me everything that’s going on,” Treadway says of Kendall, “Anything I need, if he can help me, he’ll help me.”

Treadway also works with economists and agribusiness specialists from A&T who are helping him and other farmers form a mushroom farmer cooperative. And it was a demonstration by Dr. Omon Isikhuemhen, A&T’s resident mushroom expert, that originally inspired Treadway to grow the fungi.

Still, Fred Treadway doesn’t think of himself as a farmer. Real farmers like his father and father-in-law worked hard for their livelihood. They had the hardscrabble task of farming the side of a mountain with a horse pulling a plow and swearing a list from the fields.

“I’m not a real farmer,” insists the modest Treadway. Mostly, “everything we grow other than mushrooms I either give it away or we eat it. I just play around on the farm.”
PLYMOUTH — Revelations don’t always come with Shakespearean intrigue or New Testament thunder. Sometimes they come simply, as in the case of Washington County farmer Eddie McNair, who got inspiration from atop a tractor as he mowed the rolling lands of the church he pastors.

McNair sat, the tractor motor chugging, and looked across the expanse of the 15-acre site. The majesty of the rolling fields tugged at his aorta. Tears streamed down his face. “All I could see,” says McNair, 61, “was my daddy.

“He loved the land.”

So too, does McNair, who returned to farming the fall of 2007 in quest of a connection to land in this northeastern North Carolina hamlet that his ancestors once owned, sold and then reclaimed. This is the land where his father, who died in 2001, wrested a living for a wife and 13 children. Of that baker’s-dozen brood, McNair is the only one who has returned to the land to farm.

After his tractor revelation three years ago, McNair set out to reclaim his roots. “I don’t have to farm,” McNair says. “It’s something that I really enjoy doing. In five years, I still want to be a farmer.”

He planted 60 acres of wheat and harvested it to great success in the early summer of 2008. Then McNair immediately planted 100 acres of soybeans, but by then realized he needed help from experts. He turned to the Washington County Cooperative Extension Center.

“I was calling them sometimes two and three times a day,” says McNair, whose 2009 crop consisted of 150 acres of soybeans.

Cecil Sumner, the agricultural technician for Washington and Martin counties, says he and Extension agriculture agents were glad to help. In a county where there are only 75 farmers and only six of them are African American, Sumner has been ecstatic about even helping McNair try his hand, let alone succeed. “What you see is not supposed to exist,” Sumner says, proudly surveying McNair’s land. “A minority is not supposed to start farming and start up with no equipment, no real experience and have this kind of success. But it’s happened.”

Sumner’s point, of course, is that in the face of dwindling black ownership of farmlands, the odds haven’t been favorable for black farmers.

“The number of African American farmers is increasing — from 37,791 in 2002 to 41,024 in 2007, according to the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture — but that increase comes after decades of dwindling farm ownership by black people. In the days when McNair’s ancestors were farming, black farm-ownership was closer to 1 million. In 1920, black farm operators numbered 926,000, according to the Land Loss Fund.

Like the Land Loss Fund, the North Carolina organization that works to maintain and increase black farm ownership, McNair also recognizes that land ownership is a key source of power for African Americans. For the early McNair family, that power included sustenance, while for Eddie McNair it is a dual linchpin that links him to the traditions of the past, and to the future of his family.

At 61, McNair is at the average age of black farmers — 60.3 years — but he is also in the category of beginning farmer, having seriously undertaken farming as a profession after a lifetime of other jobs and careers. He served a tour in Vietnam after being drafted in the 1960s, worked as a photojournalist for a newspaper, worked as a freelance photographer, and also worked for a manufacturing company after moving back to Washington County in 1976. McNair, whose first wife died of breast cancer a decade ago, also has four daughters, and grandchildren, and a new wife, having remarried a few years ago. He has a good life.

“But he wants that life to reflect the traditions in which he was raised, and to pass down the lessons of hard work and its rewards. He has grandsons, three of them, watching and emulating him.

“I’m doing my part,” McNair says. “Being raised on a farm taught me a good work ethic. My daddy always said, ‘Eddie, take care of the land and the land will take care of you.’”
Swamping grounds are a gain for the High Country

The New River, with headwaters in Watauga County, is historically one of the cleanest watersheds in the three states it traverses. The New River watershed is nonetheless feeling the stress from urbanization, utilities and tourism.

BOONE — Knee-deep in marsh water, surrounded by volunteers and dragonflies, Wendy Patoprsty looks across her surroundings and sees what isn’t actually there — yet.

Families are strolling along the banks of the water. Teenagers are setting off for a hike. Couples of various ages are standing beneath an arbor exchanging vows in outdoor wedding ceremonies.

Patoprsty, a Watauga County Extension agent working with issues involving natural resources management, doesn’t just have a dream. She and the many partners in this environmental endeavor have built a manmade wetland to contain stormwater runoff in this mountainous town. The wetland will sift and block pollutants from spilling into the nearby New River, which supplies the area’s drinking water.

“Stormwater is something that we eventually drink and everything that we can do that takes care of this environmental issue helps us,” says Boone Mayor Loretta Clawson, who adds that all residents will benefit from a cleaner water supply. “Water is such a precious resource. To make the water better, that’s the whole thing.”

Located in a flood plain whose waters so continually invaded area houses and a nursing home that they were removed, the wetland site has been transformed into an ecological playground. Last June, Patoprsty and a crew of volunteers from Watauga County’s Master Gardener Program worked all day setting various plants — 900 of them — along the lip of the marsh.

Now complete, the wetlands include 50 different native species for biodiversity, habitat and filtration. Fruit-bearing trees such as apple, pear and cherry, and such shrubs as azaleas and rhododendrons serve as food for wildlife, as well as for their aesthetic value. Little condominiums for bats, 300 in each of four shelters, are also on site to encourage bats, which in turn help control mosquitoes and other insects, as well frogs and purple martens.

“There’s going to be tons of flowers and a lot of wildlife” by summer 2010, says Patoprsty.

Kristan Cockerill, a volunteer who also teaches sustainable development and water policy at nearby Appalachian State University, says with all the runoff from parking lots, athletic fields and other surfaces going into the streams, the wetlands will benefit Boone and other communities that depend on the New River as a drinking water source.

Protecting the Environment

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Now complete, the wetlands include 50 different native species for biodiversity, habitat and filtration. Fruit-bearing trees such as apple, pear and cherry, and such shrubs as azaleas and rhododendrons serve as food for wildlife, as well as for their aesthetic value. Little condominiums for bats, 300 in each of four shelters, are also on site to encourage bats, which in turn help control mosquitoes and other insects, as well frogs and purple martens.

“There’s going to be tons of flowers and a lot of wildlife” by summer 2010, says Patoprsty.

Kristan Cockerill, a volunteer who also teaches sustainable development and water policy at nearby Appalachian State University, says with all the runoff from parking lots, athletic fields and other surfaces going into the streams, the wetlands will benefit Boone and other communities that depend on the New River as a drinking water source. Protecting people’s health is a direct benefit of the constructed marsh, but providing a new recreational space is also a boon for the community, she says.

This is an amenity for our community,” Cockerill says.

Patoprsty began working on the wetlands initiative in 2007. Partnering with the town of Boone, she wrote a grant to the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. The project was funded for $178,000 in the fall of 2007. With assistance from Greg Jennings and the N.C. State University Biological and Engineering Department, design work and construction began in 2008.

“I’ve been working on this for two years,” Patoprsty says, “and this is the finale.”

The park was officially dedicated in July 4 ceremonies, a few months before it was actually ready for use. Ultimately, though, officials say the entire town should benefit from the cleaner supply of drinking water as well as the expanded recreational offerings.

“As this area starts blooming and then growing, I think people are going to really appreciate our wetlands, and what they can do for our environment and our water quality,” Patoprsty says.
MAGNOLIA — It’s been almost a decade since Donald Stokes was introduced to a computer, courtesy of the Farmers Adopting Computer Training (FACT) program offered by The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T.

Just last spring, Stokes used the FARMWIN record-keeping software to show his wife that they could indeed afford a new tractor. Stokes had made his case verbally to no avail, but when he showed his wife, Marjorie, the cash-flow analysis he’d done with the software, she relented.

“I was able to show her what the old tractor was costing us — a lot of times it would break down — and what the new one would cost,” says Stokes.

So on a hot morning in June, Stokes is in that $50,000 John Deere 5603 as he and his family survey the farm. His children, Donald Jr., 11, and Ruthie, 9, — better known, respectively, as D.J. and Sweetums, also the name of the family farm — are now experienced farmhands.

Stokes farms 250 to 300 acres, and the Stokes children have their own garden that includes about 12 acres of naturally raised cabbage, onions, butterbeans, okra, green peanuts, squash, bell peppers, cucumbers, pickling cucumbers and sweet potatoes.

“There’s always stuff that you can learn,” D.J. says. “We’ve done many gardens before, and this is the first one that’s organic. We don’t put any chemicals to it. We only use organic fertilizer.”

D.J. and Ruthie sell much of their garden produce from a roadside stand a couple of days a week. In 2008, they did well enough to pay their tuition to New Life Christian Academy in Clinton, and they were expecting to have as much — if not more — success with the naturally raised produce in 2009.

Their dad is even teaching them to use the FARMWIN software to help track their records. Says Stokes: “I’m preparing the next generation.”

GREENSBORO — Cameron Clark, like most 11-year-old boys, likes nothing better than to munch on a good old hot dog, or two or three.

Clark, though, realizes that good old hot dogs are actually not that good for him.

He learned that and other valuable lessons two years ago, while in a summer camp that used a nutrition educator from the Guilford County Cooperative Extension Program to teach children about healthy eating. Clark was already getting nutrition guidance at home and school, but the lessons from camp underscored how to make good food choices.

“In camp, they told me more about it than I knew,” Clark says.

Now in middle school, Clark opts to take his lunch to school and packs it himself. He includes such healthy options as a granola bar, fruit cup and water. His mother used to insist that he eat an apple in the mornings. Now she lets him choose from a menu that includes cereal, orange or apple juice, and oatmeal.

For the Clarks — parents Alonzo and Janice, Cameron and twin sister Alexandra — family health merits attention.

Obese and overweight children face more health threats than thinner children. Obese and overweight youth are at a greater risk for high cholesterol and high blood pressure, bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, and such social and psychological problems as low self esteem. Cameron Clark has only to listen to stories from his maternal grandmother, Roslyn Harris, to be motivated to eat well.

“She has people in her family who didn’t eat so healthy and they’re not doing so well,” Cameron says. “They’re also a lot of people in my dad’s family who have diabetes.”

Cameron takes it all in — family history, motherly insistence, grandmotherly advice, food pyramid education — then he bites an apple, picks up his basketball and heads outside to shoot hoops with his buddy.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

2008

2004

Cameron is stretching summer camp nutrition education lessons from two years ago to fit the parameters of middle school. Cameron Clark

Solutions

Cameron Clark is stretching summer camp nutrition education lessons from two years ago to fit the parameters of middle school.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

2008

2004

Includes about 12 acres of naturally raised cabbage, onions, butterbeans, okra, green peanuts, squash, bell peppers, cucumbers, pickling cucumbers and sweet potatoes.

2008

They are aware of some of the statistics, including that the prevalence of obesity among children 6 to 11 has more than doubled in the past 20 years, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 1980, some 6.5 percent of children were overweight and obese, but by 2006 — the most recent year for which figures are available — the rate was up to 17 percent.

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2004

Orchard Island

Solutions

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Their dad is even teaching them to use the FARMWIN software to help track their records. Says Stokes: “I’m preparing the next generation.”

2008

Cameron Clark

2008

Cameron Clark

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

2008

Cameron Clark

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?
Although they always had plans to go to Facebook and MySpace pages, the face is how much attention to split between their Age tools. The only technology divide they seem to members of communities with access to Information bright and busy young women are wired, full-fledged today, siblings Afina Henry, 20, and Manika Fleming, 22, have crossed over — laptops in tow. The bright and busy young women are wired, full-fledged members of communities with access to Information Age tools. The only technology divide they seem to face is how much attention to split between their Facebook and MySpace pages. Although they always had plans to go to college, the sisters say a 4-H technology program in Halifax County helped them better prepare for their futures. Organized through a partnership between the Halifax County Cooperative Extension Center and the Roanoke Rapids Housing Authority, the 4-H Youth Tech program helped teenage residents of government-subsidized housing learn and refine their computer skills.

The girls in the program were also permitted to take home personal computers and printers, which Henry says was pivotal for successfully completing her high school course work and making her qualified for college.

"It made a large difference," says Henry, who is a student at UNC-Greensboro. "It wasn't for the computer at home, I wouldn't have been able to complete certain assignments and do the research that I needed."

Fleming, who is scheduled to graduate from UNC-Greensboro in May, says a home computer "helped a lot with papers and not having to go to somebody else's house."

Their involvement through the Cooperative Extension-supported technology program also helped motivate them to pursue higher education.

"On a personal level, we were always the type who wanted to get involved," Henry said, adding that Tech Youth organizers worked with them to "make sure that we were informed and involved."

For more information about the 4-H Technology program, contact the Halifax County Cooperative Extension office, 430 Main St., Halifax, N.C. 27835, at 919-582-9526.

Contributing Extension staff: Dr. Keith Baldwin, Dr. Jean Baldwin"

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