Childhood obesity prevention is part of Project Eat Right

North Carolina’s children are not just growing up — but out, and in epidemic proportions.

So say figures from the North Carolina Healthy Weight Initiative, guided by a 120-member task force that includes Dr. Wilda Wade, nutrition specialist with The Cooperative Extension Program.

Wade says that the surge in overweight children is part of a national trend, which in North Carolina means that one of every four teenagers, one in five elementary-aged children, and even one-fifth of all preschoolers, is overweight.

Even more disturbing is that overweight children have greater chances of becoming overweight adults contributing to the already escalating incidences of hypertension and diabetes. Those diseases already affect minorities at a disproportionately high rate.

Wade, though, is helping communities fight back through the nutrition-education program, Project Eat Right Add to Life. Through her outreach Wade helps teachers, cafeteria workers, Cooperative Extension agents and others develop better teaching skills to help children eat healthy.

“We have to raise the awareness and the importance of nutrition and get the message to parents and to children early,” Wade says.

No one realizes the value of school nutrition better than Jamie Roberts, a Rockingham County school cafeteria manager. She learned new strategies to promote better nutrition during a Project Eat Right workshop held in June at A&T.

At Stoneville Elementary, Roberts holds tasting parties — partly funded by Project Eat Right — to introduce children to new menu items such as fresh broccoli with low-fat and regular ranch dip, vegetarian ravioli, and shortcake with peaches.

Although some of these foods have sugar and fat, the cafeteria choices are designed so that no more than 32 percent of a child’s total lunch calories is derived from fat.

“We do try to give them different choices of food to see whether they like it, and how it works out,” says Roberts, who could recently be found serving lunch amid a table of third-grade students.

The Stoneville cafeteria is a bright place, with fresh-cut flowers from a staff member’s garden, decorated bulletin boards, and food arranged colorfully and in an appetizing manner — all ingredients that help stimulate children’s appetites.

Project Eat Right also gives a stipend to teachers to help them incorporate actual food into their academic lessons: teaching math to kindergarten students by letting them count — and then eat — apples and oranges, for example.

“The Healthy Weight Initiative’s statistics on childhood obesity are measured from 1995 to 2000, and are based on data from public health departments and some school-based health centers. Lunch programs and other school-based activities play a key role in helping reduce the numbers of overweight children, Wade says.

She says that: “Focusing on these kids that are in school is a very important place to start.”

Stonville Elementary cafeteria manager Jamie Roberts and cafeteria worker JoAnn Klinger (r) ready fresh fruit for students.

Dr. T’s Moment

This year, the faculty, staff and students in SAES will join the rest of the campus and read or reread The Souls of Black Folk by W.E.B. DuBois. This book, celebrating its 50th anniversary, is the University’s first “text in community” edition.

As you know The Souls of Black Folk is an American classic. In this work, DuBois proposes that the “color line” is the problem of the 20th century. Is the 21st century any different? His concept of life beyond the veil of race and the resulting “double consciousness” has become a touchstone for thinking about race in America.

But Souls is not only a book for African Americans and whites in America, but for people who are negatively stereotyped by their outer appearance or accent rather than by their skills and deeds. In addition to race, Souls offers assessments of obstacles to progress, the role of education, the role of religion, the economic system, and many other interesting themes that are still relevant today.

In Souls, DuBois successfully captures the essence of an SAES scholar: intellectual acumen coupled with independent and strategic thinking, and a willingness to address relevant and difficult problems and issues.

I ask all “on the move” readers to join us in reading this book, which is available online at: http://ext.lib.virginia.edu/modeng/public/DubSoul.html.

Let the conversations begin.

— Dr. Alton Thompson
Dean, SAES

inside

• Landscape Architecture
  students hit jackpot

• 2+2 = Degree in Agricultural Education

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An idea to enter a senior project into the Imaginations University Design Competition began on a whim but turned into a win for four seniors in the landscape architecture program last spring. None of them seriously believed they would place in the national competition, sponsored by Walt Disney Imagineering — the design subsidiary of the Walt Disney Company. But not only did they capture second place for their hypothetical theme park, “Mirijato Cultural Gardens,” three of them also landed paid internships with the company.

Perry Howard, coordinator of the landscape architecture program, is accustomed to students’ senses of humor, so he shrugged it off when word started trickling in that Disney was interested. “I thought it was a joke,” he said.

Michael Feiock, Jameka Kelly, Toney Mooney and Richard Wagner got the last laugh. Disney representatives spent several days at A&T looking over their work in the spring. Then the four were flown to Anaheim for a week at Walt Disney World, where they underwent more scrutiny. “We were really under the microscope,” Wagner said.

For their winning project, the seniors applied the real-life topography and physical characteristics of the University Farm to the fictional park, taking into account drainage, soils, and other environmental issues in planning for vehicular traffic, placement of roller coaster rides and other attractions. Disney appreciated the artistry and quality of their work, and was also struck by the exotic name, “Mirijato Cultural Gardens,” which came from combining one syllable from each of their names.

In addition to placing second, each received $1,500 and the opportunity to apply for internships. Mooney and Wagner complete their internships this month, while Kelly plans to begin her internship in January. Feiock declined applying because of other commitments.

Wagner was assigned to Walt Disney World in Orlando, where he learned about concrete and hard-scaping and reviewed construction documents, among other duties. “What I learned in the classroom has really carried over,” Wagner said. “Practically everything there is exactly the way we learned it at A&T.”

Mooney agreed that the A&T curriculum prepared him for the real world. His internship was spent at Walt Disney Imagineering in Anaheim, where he created CAD drawings for attractions at Tokyo Disney. “Perry and John Robinson (professor of landscape architecture) have really, really high expectations. They’ve done a good job preparing me for that,” he said.

Mooney isn’t certain the internship will immediately translate into a job, because, he said, the company rarely hires recent college grads. Either way, the experience will prove extremely valuable, he added, repeating the familiar refrain of college students everywhere: “It looks great on the resume.”
New Online Education Program Launches

A new online program in agricultural education created by SAES for community college graduates has already enrolled seven new students this fall, but faculty here and in community colleges say that the fledgling program is certain to grow.

“It’s just a wonderful opportunity for people who work 40, 50, 60 hours a week to get a four-year degree. For somebody who wants to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, this is the way to go,” said Dr. Bruce Williams, president of the North Carolina Community Colleges Horticulture Instructors Association.

The program, “2 + 2 Online Studies in Agricultural Education,” is for graduates who hold associate’s degrees in a landscape, turf grass, or a horticultural discipline, and want to get a four-year degree to teach agriculture in North Carolina schools. Dr. Antoine Alston, coordinator of the Agriscience Education Program, developed the online courses and worked with 10 North Carolina community colleges to establish articulation agreements.

Alston foresees the program filling multiple needs: creating new opportunities for community college graduates, helping ease the statewide teacher shortage; and expanding on the land-grant university mission and legacy.

The SAES came up with its own version of a “No Child Left Behind Act” in mid August. After hearing about thousands of Pillowtex workers left jobless by plant closures, more than 150 members of the SAES faculty and staff pitched in to purchase school supplies for children of Rockingham County Pillowtex families. Benjamin Forbes and Angelia Johnson-Williamson, coordinators of the effort, presented the cash and supplies to the Eden Chamber of Commerce on Aug. 15. The chamber then distributed the donations to families affected by the plant closings.

faculty & staff notes

Mrs. Larree S. Cherry of Aulander, NC, was recently elected chairman of the Strategic Planning Council for the Cooperative Extension Program at A&T. A retired educator, Cherry has been an active volunteer in her community for years, and also has served on local, state and national Extension advisory councils.

The revised Strategic Planning Council has been meeting since February to advise Cooperative Extension on issues affecting members’ communities. The group’s next meeting is scheduled for Dec. 4-5 in Boone.

Dr. Osei-Agyeman Yeboah has joined the Department of Agribusiness, Applied Economics and Agriscience Education as an assistant professor for international trade, environmental and natural resource economics.

Dr. Yeboah comes to the SAES from Auburn University, where he was a visiting scholar in environmental and natural resource economics. Before his stay at Auburn, Yeboah was a graduate research assistant and a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Nebraska. His research specialties include the economics of soil and water quality, economic biodiversity, wetland evaluation and spatial econometrics.

Dr. Claudette Smith, family resource management specialist with the Cooperative Extension Program at North Carolina A&T, is among a select group of Extension professionals from across the U.S. recently selected for internships with the National Extension Leadership Development (NELD) program. Smith and other NELD interns will participate in four extensive leadership seminars in the next 16 months.
North Carolina A&T State University is committed to equality of educational opportunity and does not discriminate against applicants, students, or employees based on race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, or disability. Moreover, North Carolina A&T State University is open to all people of all races and actively seeks to promote racial integration by recruiting and enrolling a large number of white students.

Gathered around Dr. Willie Willis (second from right) are students in his advanced commercial poultry class. From left to right: Kandi Fuller, Sean Miller and Alicia McCormick. Willis is demonstrating how to identify the gender of day-old chicks, using “feather sexing.” Identifying the gender of chicks as early as possible — so the faster-growing males can be separated from their slower growing sisters — is an important facet of broiler chicken production.

Over $3 million has been earmarked — $1.8 million from the Higher Education bonds, passed two years ago; the remainder from a combination of other sources for improvements at the A&T State University Farm. Improvements include a new poultry unit, scheduled for completion in the summer of 2004.