Course asks, helps answer question: What would you do in a life-death situation?

Ever wonder what you would do if someone were to attempt a repeat of the Virginia Tech shootings of 2007, only this time closer to home?

The Auburn University Department of Public Safety and Security is offering faculty and staff a new emergency preparedness training course, including techniques for responding to a shooter on campus.

“This new class began in January and has been well received,” said Chance Corbett, Auburn’s associate director of emergency management. “We work toward having a safe campus and believe Auburn is safe, but we also know it’s best to be prepared for any situation.”

The class, Employee Emergency Preparedness and Active Shooter Awareness Training, EM300, is a four-hour session and is available in the morning or afternoon. The first two hours provide an in-depth review of the university’s emergency guidelines, notification components and expectations of faculty and staff during an emergency.

The second half trains attendees how to respond to a potential active shooter situation by providing a range of options using Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter and Evacuate, or ALICE, techniques.

“We show employees what they can do in a variety of situations,” Corbett said. “This includes options such as barricading themselves in a room, fleeing or taking action to defend themselves and others. We encourage everyone to attend this class to be prepared for any situation.”

Registration is available on A-Train at https://atrains.auburn.edu/. More information is available on the Emergency Management website at http://www.auburn.edu/emergency, by phone at 844-8888 or by email at emergencymanagement@auburn.edu.

University Theatre revives musical ‘Cabaret’ for stage at Telfair Peet

Step into the Kit Kat Klub and hear the music play as Auburn University Theatre in the College of Liberal Arts continues its 2011-12 season with Kander and Ebb’s “Cabaret,” through March 3, on the main stage of the Telfair Peet Theatre.

The show opened Thursday and continues this Friday and Saturday and Feb. 28-March 3 at 7:30 p.m. with a matinee performance Sunday, Feb. 26, at 2:30 p.m. Tickets may be purchased online at www.auburnuniversitytheatre.org, or by phone at 844-4154. Tickets are free for students and $15 for the general public.

Set in 1931 Berlin during the dawn of the Nazi regime’s rise to power, “Cabaret” takes place in the seedy and decadent Kit Kat Klub where patrons and performers gather nightly to escape the growing turmoil that grips the country.

“‘Cabaret’ for me is like an approaching storm,” said director Chase Bringardner. “It starts off with the slightest hint of what’s to come, a few drops of rain here and there and by the end you are in the middle of a thunderstorm, lightning crashing, thunder clapping, and you have no idea how you got there.”

See Cabaret, Page 2

New for Veterinary Medicine

Workers are seen in a recent photo putting the finishing touches on a major new classroom building at the College of Veterinary Medicine. Many of the classes formerly taught in Greene Hall have now moved to this new Overton-Goodwin Educational Wing. The 34,000-square-foot classroom building is Phase I of the college’s capital building campaign. Construction began on this building in December 2010. Meanwhile, the second phase, the new small animal teaching hospital, is in the design stage. For more information, see a related story on Page 2.
College of Veterinary Medicine moves classes to new building

College of Veterinary Medicine freshmen through junior classes have moved from Greene Hall to the new Overton-Goodwin Educational Wing.

Construction on the new space began in December 2010. The wing, which contains 34,000 square feet for educational use, includes three new 150-seat classrooms and 13 conference rooms. The classrooms allowed the class size to increase from 95 students to 120 beginning fall semester.

"Wow! That’s what students were saying as they came in the rooms," said Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Donna Angarano. “We’ve made such a giant leap in our facilities. We’ve had good technology, but now it’s even better. And now we have the facilities to match our technology and our outstanding faculty.”

Betsy Welles, the Pfizer Distinguished Teacher for 2011 and a professor in pathology, gave the inaugural lecture on Jan. 20 in the cardiovascular systems course for second-year students.

"To have classrooms with electrical outlets and Internet access available at every seat, the type of projectors and document cameras, the tiered-classroom seating with every two rows the same height for small break-out groups, to have the flexibility in seating — these are opportunities we have not had in our older classrooms," said Angarano. “While they were functional for educational purposes, we now have something that is just so much more than functional. It’s state of the art.”

The classroom building expansion represents Phase I of the college’s capital building campaign. Phase II, construction of the new Wilford and Kate Bailey Small Animal Teaching Hospital, begins in April. Opening in 2014, the new hospital will feature approximately 200,000 square feet of clinical, examination and client-use space.

— Tara Lanier

Cabaret

Continued from Page 1

The Kit Kat Klub’s ghostly and flamboyant emcee sets the scene as English headliner Sally Bowles falls in love with American writer Clifford Bradshaw. Meanwhile, German boardinghouse owner Fraulein Schneider’s relationship grows with Jewish fruit vendor Herr Schultz. Their relationships, as well as the lives the Berliners have known, are threatened by the impending Nazi uprising. The exciting yet dark musical features Broadway classics such as “Cabaret,” “Tomorrow Belongs to Me” and “Willkommen.”

“Cabaret” features set and lighting design by Fereshteh Rostampour, costume design by Jeri Dickey and music direction by Joseph Bates. Cast members are Paula Bagley, Mallory Barrett, Tyler Baxter, Daley Browning, Blake Burgess, Marcus Clement, Christopher Cromer, Roxanne Gatian, Ashton Hatfield, Jake Hefflin, Nic Johnson, Perry Jones, Garrett Keller, Madeleine Koon, Caleb List, Houston Mahoney, Rachel Pair, Sarah-Jean Peters, Christian Rockhill, Emily Rourke, Haley Stevens, Kaye Stucky, David Tourtellotte, AnnaClaire Walker and Ben Young III.

— Kelly Walker
Dogs, researchers from Auburn help track pythons in Everglades

The scenario sounds like a low-budget movie from the 1970s: Humongous snakes are on the loose, eating everything in sight. But this is real – a problem that Auburn University and its canines are helping to combat.

Auburn researchers used detection dogs in the Everglades National Park to find Burmese pythons during a recent study on ways to manage and eradicate these nonnative, invasive snakes, which are eating native wildlife, mostly mammals and birds.

“The ultimate use for detection dogs is to suppress the expanding python population and to eliminate them in small areas, such as on an island. Our main concern is their impact on other wildlife,” said Christina Romagosa of Auburn’s School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences. “Interaction with humans is also a problem. The snakes, like alligators, can get in swimming pools, eat small dogs and cats, and could injure a human.”

The National Academy of Sciences published a paper Jan. 31 titled “Severe Mammal Declines Coincide with Proliferation of Invasive Burmese Pythons in Everglades National Park.” Romagosa, Auburn Ph.D. student Melissa Miller and Auburn alumnus Robert Reed were among the 11 scientists who composed the report.

Auburn worked last year with the Everglades Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area, or ECISMA, to test how well dogs could pinpoint the snakes’ locations so wildlife agencies could remove the snakes. ECISMA partners include the National Park Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Geological Service, USDA Wildlife Services, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians, South Florida Water Management District, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, University of Florida and other federal and state agencies and universities.

The problem started years ago, most likely by irresponsible python owners, Romagosa says. The first Burmese python was spotted in Florida in 1979 and the number is now estimated in the tens of thousands. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Jan. 17 made it illegal to import Burmese pythons or transport them across state lines.

“Irresponsible people released these snakes because they became too large and difficult to care for,” she said. “Now they have reproduced many times over,” Romagosa said. “Hurricane Andrew in 1992 probably didn’t help when a warehouse containing pythons was destroyed.”

The Army Corps of Engineers contacted Auburn’s EcoDogs program in 2010 about the possibility of using dogs to help find the pythons, which led to the pilot study funded by the National Park Service’s Everglades National Park, South Florida Water Management District and Auburn’s Center for Forest Sustainability.

EcoDogs is a collaborative project between the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences and the College of Veterinary Medicine’s Animal Health and Performance Program, where the dogs are trained and maintained.

Canines Jake and Ivy, both black Labrador retrievers, helped the researchers capture 19 pythons, most being 6 to 8 feet in length, including a pregnant one with 19 viable eggs. Burmese pythons in their native range in Southeast Asia have been known to reach up to 20 feet and weigh almost 200 pounds. The National Park Service has counted 1,825 Burmese pythons that have been caught in and around Everglades National Park since 2000.

“We found the use of detection dogs to be a valuable addition to the current tools used to manage and control pythons,” said Romagosa, who also conducts research for Auburn’s Center for Forest Sustainability. “Dog search teams can cover more distance and can have higher accuracy rates in particular scenarios than human searchers. We suggest that dogs be used as a complement to current search and trapping methods.”

The Auburn study found that dogs and their sense of smell were two-and-a-half times faster than people visually searching, but people did have the advantage in extreme humidity. Searches by detection dogs are ideal in the cooler months, Romagosa says, when dogs can work longer periods of time without overheating.

“Dogs can also be used throughout the year as part of a rapid response team going to a python sighting, which can be helpful in an urban as well as natural environment,” she said.

Prior to going to the Everglades, Jake and Ivy trained six months with Craig Angle, associate director of the Metcalf Veterinary Sports Medicine Program in the College of Veterinary Medicine, and trainers Terry Fischer and Bart Rogers, who taught the dogs to pinpoint the odor of Burmese pythons.

“There are very few dogs that can conduct python operations,” Angle said. “Their training is physically and mentally intense. We had to progressively condition their bodies so that they had the structural durability, speed, power, strength, cardiovascular endurance and muscular endurance to conduct searches. Their conditioning program is much like an athlete’s.

“Mentally, the dogs had to learn multiple operational tasks like how to track, how to utilize different search patterns, and how to work different wind currents. It is quite complicated to take a green dog and train it to locate a moving target like a snake.”

Auburn’s onsite research in the Everglades lasted six months and involved two aspects. First, searches for free-ranging wild pythons were conducted in areas along canal roads and banks. Second, searches for radio-tagged pythons were conducted in a controlled plot in which dog and human teams’ search time and success were compared.

The dogs were trained “alert,” or sit down, when they got within five meters of a python. “When the dogs alerted to a python’s presence in the field, we would put them in the truck so they would not come in contact with it,” Rogers said. “The dogs could even track pythons that had been present in the area hours earlier. They did not pay attention to gators and other snakes, which would also avoid the dogs.”

During the searches, Rogers would follow the dogs and watch for their alerts. Auburn biological sciences doctoral student Melissa Miller, along with several volunteers, would capture the python and record data such as location, time, habitat type, humidity level and air temperature.

“Burmese pythons over 16 feet long have been found in the Everglades,” Miller said. “We always had at least two snake handlers present in case we encountered a very large python. A snake over 12 feet has potential to harm humans and should not be handled alone.”

The snakes were sent to Skip Snow, a National Park Service biologist at the Everglades National Park.

Some snakes were euthanized, some were tagged with radio telemetry devices for further study and tracking, and some were donated to the Nature Conservancy for use in training personnel how to catch snakes.

Romagosa says the next step is for the ECISMA to develop a plan that combines the best uses of all search tools in trying to control the snake population.

— Charles Martin

Tracking pythons

After dogs trained at Auburn track down pythons in the Everglades, environmental workers capture, measure and remove the invasive species from the wild.
Countering vampire myth, professor’s book sheds favorable light on oft-feared creatures of the night

Thanks to vampire folklore and other unpleasant stories, bats have long had an unfavorable reputation. Troy Best, a professor of biological sciences and curator of mammals in the College of Sciences and Mathematics at Auburn University, has written a field guide on bats and is trying to change this misconception of the winged animals.

Best, along with collaborators Michael Harvey of Tennessee Tech University and J. Scott Altenbach of the University of New Mexico, wrote “Bats of the United States and Canada” as a follow-up and update of their 1999 book “Bats of the United States.”

Best said the group worked hard to cover all topics concerning bats and provide an informative and complete account of all 47 species of bats that occur in the United States and Canada. In hopes the book will help give bats a better public image than they have received in the past.

“If people know more about bats and understand more about their biology, we could change opinions of the public to positive ones,” Best said.

Best noted that in Asia bats are even considered good luck. While he may not expect to change opinions of skeptics to those of the Asian belief immediately, Best mentioned a few facts that might sway opinions a little more positively.

The U.S. agriculture industry alone is said to save nearly $3 billion thanks to bats, Best said. Bats like the Brazilian free-tailed bat eat crop-destroying insects. Bats also help in pollinating plants and their guano provides for rich fertilizer.

The book covers such fascinating facts, as well as everything from the bats’ habitat and diet to what to do if bats are causing a nuisance at your own residence. Best said the variety of topics allows the book to be of interest to people of all ages.

“We used science as the basis for everything that’s included in the book,” Best said. “So, while it’s educational, there are things that are going to be of interest to a 12-year-old and things that are also of interest to scholars.”

Benefit for Davis Arboretum set for April 14

The College of Sciences and Mathematics will hold a benefit for the Donald E. Davis Arboretum Saturday, April 14, at 6 p.m.

“A Night in New Orleans” will be held at the arboretum and will include a dinner of traditional New Orleans fare, music, entertainment and a silent auction.

Each year, the arboretum welcomes hundreds of local students for alternative classroom hands-on experiences; last year alone, the arboretum hosted more than 2,500 kindergarten through twelfth-grade students. In addition, the colleges across campus make extensive use of the arboretum each semester through classes, projects and research.

“Our hope is that the funds raised by the event will help to provide a way for the arboretum to better serve the growing needs of the university, the community and the state at large,” said Kim McCurdy, event coordinator.

For more information or to make a reservation, contact Kim McCurdy at kcm0021@auburn.edu or 844-7780.