Family Fun Day
Auburn University employees and their families celebrated the successful conclusion of the regular academic year on May 15 with the university’s 17th annual Family Fun Day. The afternoon festival at Ag Heritage Park included food, games and a picnic atmosphere for all, with a children’s play area, as always, attracting the younger set and their parents. Organized by Auburn University Human Resources and dozens of volunteers from throughout campus, the event celebrates the Auburn Family through Auburn families.

Legislature backs growth in cyber security programs
Auburn University is expanding its research, education, workforce development and economic development in the growing cyber security field with $1 million in support recently approved by the Alabama Legislature.

Government officials report that cyber espionage ranks among the top threats to the U.S. “Cyber concerns range from disabling the electrical grid to hacking into financial institutions to stealing intellectual property,” said retired Lt. Gen. Ron Burgess. The former director of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, Burgess now serves as senior counsel for Auburn’s cyber, national security and military programs.

In the Alabama Legislature, House leadership led by Speaker Mike Hubbard and Education Budget Committee Chairman Jay Love won support for the initiative to invest in Auburn’s cyber capabilities and its economic development potential. State Sen. Tom Whatley helped secure Senate support during the budget process.

At Auburn, cyber security programs are among strategic initiatives supported by the Office of the Vice President for Research. Educating a workforce prepared to defend against cyber crimes is a priority, said Professor Bob Norton, who trains Auburn students and industry officials. “The threat to our infrastructure, commerce and security will only continue to grow,” Norton said. “The state and national economy depend on a workforce capable of protecting us against it.”

Research speeds super-bacteria diagnosis
A research team has created a test using a biosensor that will help medical professionals more quickly identify antibiotic-resistant bacteria commonly known as super bacteria.

These bacteria can be difficult to diagnose, and quick diagnosis and treatment can mean the difference between life and death, says lead researcher Vitaly Vodyanoy. The biosensor can identify specific bacteria in as little as 10 minutes instead of hours, as is the case with traditional testing practices.

Vodyanoy, a professor in Auburn’s College of Veterinary Medicine, said he and his research team created the prototype biosensor as the first step in fighting super bugs like MRSA, methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, a potentially dangerous type of staph bacteria resistant to certain antibiotics, that can cause skin infections and even death.

“Though only MRSA were used in this work, it can also be applied to other antibiotic resistant bacteria,” said co-author Iryna Sorokulova, a professor of microbiology at Auburn.

The disease is of particular concern to hospitals, prisons and the military, where individuals are at risk for infection. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that 12 million doctor visits a year are for suspected staph and MRSA skin infections.

The research, published in the May 8 edition of Journal of Visualized Experiments, JoVE, is a collaborative effort between Vodyanoy, a professor of physiology and director of the Biosensor Laboratory, and Keesler Air Force Base, with funding from the U.S. Air Force.

“What we have studied to date has been related to laboratory conditions,” Vodyanoy said. “We are...”

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Jule Collins Smith Museum extends artistic touch to its new bike racks
Three sculptural bicycle racks were installed at the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art during May’s National Bike Month, giving museum visitors a place to park their rides.

The museum’s assistant director, Andy Tennant, said the museum collaborated with Auburn industrial and graphic design students and faculty to design a bicycle rack that maintains the artistic integrity of a museum, but also incorporates the necessary functions of a bicycle rack.

New twist on bike racks at art museum
Pursuing closer ties
Auburn University Provost Tim Boosinger and visiting Chinese educator Mingjia Li, right, vice president of Huazhong Agricultural University, recently signed a memorandum of understanding to encourage collaboration between the two universities. Li led a delegation from the Chinese institution to Auburn’s College of Veterinary Medicine for an open forum and exploratory discussions on establishing interdisciplinary collaborations between the institutions. They were assisted at the signing by Auburn Veterinary Medicine Professor Juming Zhong, standing.

Program expanding training opportunities for early child care providers in Alabama

The Family Child Care Partnerships program at Auburn University will soon offer early child care providers in Alabama new training opportunities to guide children’s learning, particularly in arts and sciences.

The program, a part of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies in the College of Human Sciences at Auburn, is able to expand its course offerings with the financial support of the PNC Foundation.

A $16,400 grant from the foundation, which receives its principal funding from the PNC Financial Services Group Inc., is supporting the addition of several six-week training courses and mentorship opportunities designed to help more than 230 state family child care providers meet national quality standards in math, science, art and music.

Family Child Care Partnerships’ executive and managing directors, Ellen Abell and Elaine Miller, said children often do not receive adequate instruction in these areas. Child care providers may use music with children, but Abell and Miller said the activities are limited in scope, not always developmentally appropriate, and are rarely used to extend learning activities.

With the financial support of PNC, Family Child Care Partnerships will develop materials and expose providers to the best and most appropriate ways of incorporating these topics into mixed age group settings that would otherwise not be available to the providers, or the children in their care.

Additionally, the PNC Foundation is supporting the annual Focus on Family Child Care Conference, scheduled for June 7-8, with a pre-conference leadership event on June 6, at The Hotel at Auburn University and Dixon Conference Center.

The conference is generally a one-day event, but with funding from PNC, additional workshops featuring lessons in intermediate and advanced level content in art, music, science, math and professionalism have been added for a two-day conference.

“Both the conference and the subsequent modules will feature programming for math, science, art and music. Family child care providers

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ready to take the next step in our research, which is clinical studies with people.”

According to the published report, Vodyanoy’s technology takes advantage of bacteriophages, simple viruses that can target and kill bacteria. Bacteriophage literally means “to eat bacteria.”

Vodyanoy said the research is complex, and that publishing it in the Journal of Visualized Experiments, a peer reviewed, video format PubMed indexed journal, will help promote recognition and acceptance of the technique.

— Janet McCoy
Farmers market returns
The Market at Ag Heritage Park is operating again this summer, with locally produced seasonal fruits, vegetables, honey and other seasonal products. Hosted by the College of Agriculture in cooperation with AAES and ACES, the market is open from 3-6 p.m. each Thursday through August.

Leading American sculptor
Museum showcases career of Jean Woodham

The Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art will present the works of artist and Auburn alumna Jean Woodham in exhibition as part of its 10th year anniversary focus on sculpture.

“Full Circle: The Sculptures of Jean Woodham” will be on display June 1-Oct. 12 and will include 16 pieces of sculpture in bronze, brass, wood and steel. Woodham, a 1946 alumna of Auburn, has two sculptures sited on campus: “Spinoff” at the museum’s entrance and “Auburn Monody” outside Goodwin Hall.

Her early works were forms in stone, clay and wood, but she began welding in the early 1950s.

“I prefer welding because I can make anything I want to make,” she said. “I realized the moment I first saw a piece by sculptor David Smith that welding would allow me to make a skinny form carry a heavy weight. It was the physics of what I could do with heated metal that inspired me.”

Her large outdoor sculptures can be seen at museums, government buildings, schools, corporate headquarters and outdoor spaces, with more than 150 pieces in public and private collections. Her commissions have come from the World Bank, General Electric, Nynex, GTE, the New York Board of Education, Connecticut Commission on the Arts and Auburn University, among others.

“We have wanted to present a retrospective of Jean Woodham’s sculpture for some time,” said Dennis Harper, curator of exhibitions and collections. “In addition to her own achievements, Woodham has worked alongside some of the most important sculptors of the 20th century.”

While some sculptors make two or three graduated sizes of a piece before the larger version, Woodham first made a five-foot version of “Auburn Monody” and moved directly to the nearly 20-foot piece seen today at the entrance of Goodwin Hall.

Campus sculpture
A nationally prominent example, at right, of Jean Woodham’s sculpture from the 1960s is “Auburn Monody,” outside Goodwin Hall.

Book offers tips for doctors to help patients help selves

Taking medications, engaging in healthy lifestyles and quitting harmful habits are vital for good health, but patients often don’t follow the advice of health care professionals and thus put their health at risk.

Two Auburn University professors emeriti address the problem in a new book written to help doctors, nurses, pharmacists – anyone working with patients – assess the patient’s motivation to engage in healthy behaviors, or not engage.

The book, “Motivational Interviewing for Health Care Professionals: A Practical Approach,” by Bruce Berger and William Villuame, professors emeriti of the Auburn University Harrison School of Pharmacy, is being published by the American Pharmacists Association. It is due to be released in August.

“We are excited about the book and believe the motivational interviewing approach will help improve our nation’s health and well-being,” Berger said. “The book is for all health care professionals, such as pharmacists, doctors, nurses, dietitians, nutritionists, social workers, psychologists – really everybody who wants to help patients make better health care and lifestyle decisions.”

“Someone might quit taking medication because he doesn’t feel any improvement yet. We can’t make patients comply, but we can find out their motivation and increase the probability that they will make good decisions,” said Berger. “We train health care professionals how to do motivational interviewing.”

“Health care professionals are experts, but the patients are experts, too, in that they are decision makers and they have reasons behind their decisions,” Villuame said. “We want the health care professional to find the motivation behind those decisions and then help the patient make the best decision regarding his or her health.”

Berger, cofounder of Auburn’s Motivational Interviewing Training Institute with Villuame and Jan Kavookjian, is a former head of the Department of Pharmacy Care Systems. Villuame spent 21 years in the Department of Communication and Journalism in the College of Liberal Arts and eight years in the Harrison School of Pharmacy. They now teach motivational interviewing skills through workshops for hospitals, insurance companies, pharmacies, organizations with health care plans and other groups. Clients include Blue Cross Blue Shield, Humana and CVS Pharmacies.
Growth rings confirm age of Auburn Oaks at 83-85 years

Growth rings from the base of Auburn University’s College Street live oak at Toomer’s Corner have revealed the tree’s age of 83-85 years old at the time they were removed April 23.

This month, two Auburn professors independently counted 81 growth rings in two directions from the center of the tree’s trunk.

“The center one-inch section of the trunk was split and not clearly delineated,” said Professor of Horticulture Gary Keever. “This growth most likely occurred over two to four years, making the trees 83-85 years old.”

Keever worked with Brian Via, an associate professor in Auburn’s School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, to age the tree by counting the growth rings. The rings are comprised of alternating bands of early and late wood and typically constitute the growth in trunk diameter that occurs in one year.

The findings support the previously reported planting of the two oak trees in 1937—one beside College Street, the other beside Magnolia Avenue. Photographs taken in 1938 and 1939 show two trees that were eight to 12 feet tall.

“Field-grown live oaks of that size would typically be eight to 10 years old,” Keever said. Via added, “The photographic evidence coupled with our growth ring count makes us confident in aging them at 83-85 years.”

University officials are looking at ways to publicly display the wood from the oaks, including the cross-section from the base of the College Street tree. Items made from the Auburn Oaks’ wood are being sold by several manufacturers that have been licensed by the university. Photographs and descriptions of the items can be found at www.auburn.edu/oaks. Royalties from their sale will fund scholarships for Auburn students.

— Mike Clardy

Training child care providers

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around the state will receive curriculum, instruction and materials to promote these subjects in a developmentally appropriate way to the infants, toddlers and preschoolers in their care,” said Miller. “We would not be targeting these specific developmental learning opportunities without PNC support.”

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Family Child Care Partnerships is the only training organization in the state that targets family child care. Family child care settings are privately-owned, state-licensed enterprises offering paid caregiving services for children in the service provider’s own home.

“The opportunity to partner with Auburn University’s Family Child Care Partnerships to deliver quality early learning opportunities is at the very heart of our mission,” said Jim Hansen, PNC regional president, Northern Alabama. “Investing in young children is simply the right thing to do for our communities, and for the economic health of our region and nation.”

The Family Child Care Partnerships program is externally funded through a competitive grant process by the Alabama Department of Human Resources. Since 2000, it has worked with family child care providers to develop and apply their knowledge, encourage the use of available professional supports and resources, and promote professional practices that foster the healthy growth and development of the infants, toddlers and preschoolers in their care.

The PNC Foundation supports organizations that provide services for the benefit of communities in which it has a significant presence. The foundation focuses its philanthropic mission on early childhood education and community and economic development.

— Amy Weaver

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