Auburn completes final phase of access projects to make campus pedestrian-friendly

The sixth and final phase of a $6.6 million network of walkway projects at Auburn University has concluded with the opening of the Tiger Concourse, Carroll Commons and Ginn Plaza. These walkway projects began in 2002 as part of the university’s Comprehensive Campus Master Plan.

“The goal of the project was to create a safe, pedestrian-friendly area within the core of campus that is convenient and free of motorized vehicles,” said Cathy Love, civil engineer with Facilities Construction Management.

The pedestrian project was divided into six phases. The final phase of the walkway projects, Tiger Concourse, Carroll Commons and Ginn Plaza, was completed in May. Carroll Commons, a green mall that forms the exterior quad space of the Shelby Center, serves as a central walkway and gathering place.

The Tiger Concourse extends from the Thach Concourse to West Magnolia Avenue. Key features include a new Tiger Transit bus zone on West Magnolia and the Ginn Plaza fountain, a gift from Board of Trustees member Samuel Ginn, for whom the College of Engineering is named. The fountain includes a 12-foot waterfall that cascades near a granite seating area.

The complete network of walkways provides pedestrians with safe, vehicle-free east and west connectors. A north and south campus corridor now travels from Magnolia Avenue past Jordan-Hare Stadium and the Student Center to the residence halls on the south side of campus.

Officials offer condolences, discuss impact of deaths of two Auburn students

The Auburn community was grappling this week with the deaths of three people and wounding of three others at what began as a party Saturday night at an apartment complex two miles from the Auburn University campus.

Two of the dead and one of the injured are Auburn students, and the others are area residents.

The man accused of the shootings, Desmonte D. Leonard of Montgomery, surrendered to authorities in that city Tuesday night to face charges in connection with the shootings. He had been the subject of an intense three-day manhunt in Montgomery.

“We appreciate the dedication and commitment of the Auburn City Police Department and other law enforcement agencies,” Auburn University President Jay Gogue said following the arrest of the suspect.

Two of the dead, Ed Christian and Ladarius Phillips, were students this year at Auburn and were former members of the Tigers football team. Also killed was local resident Demario Pitts.

Auburn student Eric Mack and Roanoke resident Xavier Moss were treated at East Alabama Medical Center for gunshot wounds and released, while John Q. Robertson of Roanoke was transferred to the University of Alabama Birmingham Hospital with a wound to the head.

Witnesses told police the Montgomery man pulled a gun and started shooting about 10:30 p.m. near the pool of the University Heights Apartments on West Longleaf Drive after a fistfight erupted during an argument over a girl.

Christian and Phillips, both 20, were former members of the Auburn football team and were friends with many current team members and other students, including Mack, also 20, a current member of the football team.

“This is a difficult time for our campus and community,” Gogue said. “We’re remembering those who lost their lives, and it’s important that we pull together to help those who are grieving and recovering. We’re offering counseling to students, and we’ve reached out to the families. I ask everyone to offer your thoughts, prayers and support to those who need it.”

Head Football Coach Gene Chizik and Athletics Director Jay Jacobs issued additional comments, and Chizik met with the football team to discuss the deaths of recent teammates.

“This is a sad day for everyone associated with the entire Auburn family. I am devastated by the passing of three young men, including two that I personally knew in Ed Christian and Ladarius Phillips and my heart goes out to their families,” Chizik said Sunday.

“My thoughts and prayers are with their families and all of the victims involved in this tragic incident. Nobody should ever have to endure such unimaginable grief, and we will love and support the victims’ families during this terribly difficult time.”

Chizik continued, “We have a lot of people on our football team that are hurting right now and we’re going to do everything we can to help them get through this. This is a very trying time for everyone involved, and I would just ask that you lift up the victims and their families in your prayers.”

Jacobs noted that the loss is widely felt. “This is a tragic day for the entire Auburn community. First and foremost, our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims and their families who have been devastated by this senseless tragedy. We will support the families of the victims in the difficult days ahead in every way that we possibly can.”
Pedestrian access

The recently completed Tiger Concourse, shown here in front of Brown Hall and Shelby Center, has several refinements in design and features to make walking on campus more enticing.

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The pedestrian-friendly projects include:

Phase 1: Originally named Thach Pedestrian Way, the Thach Concourse replaced the vehicle route from West Thach Avenue from Mell Street to Duncan Drive.

Phase 2: The Roosevelt Pedestrian Concourse eliminated vehicular traffic from Mell Street to Duncan Drive.

Phase 3: “Traffic calming on Samford Avenue” utilized raised crosswalks to increase the visibility of pedestrians and bicyclists and slowed motor vehicles between Mell Street and Duncan Drive.

Phase 4: The Duggar Concourse was constructed between West Samford Avenue and the Roosevelt Concourse.

Phase 5: The Haley Center Concourse created a pedestrian pathway from the Thach Concourse to the Roosevelt Concourse.

Phase 6: The Tiger Concourse serves as a walkway from the Thach Concourse to West Magnolia Avenue.

— Gail Riese

CVM, company collaborating on cancer research

The Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine and Nuovo Biologics, a biotechnology company, have announced a collaborative research agreement to study a new anti-cancer drug which also has antiviral properties.

Scientists with the Auburn University Research Initiative in Cancer at the College of Veterinary Medicine will be working with Nuovo Biologics to examine the anti-tumor properties of this new drug.

These studies will look at the drug from the perspective of its interactions with cells, as well as in clinical trials in dogs with malignant melanoma, a form of skin cancer. Preliminary studies have shown that the drug appears to be safe, with no side effects and active against a wide variety of viruses.

“This agreement exemplifies how Auburn University scientists, working with biotech and pharmaceutical industries, can provide expertise to move exciting new discoveries from the laboratory into the clinic,” said AURIC Director Bruce Smith.

The Auburn University Research Initiative in Cancer, or AURIC, embodies the “One Medicine” concept which links human, animal and environmental health and where discoveries in one species advance health in all species.

Work starts on new facility at forestry education center

Representatives of Auburn University and its School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences broke ground June 6 for the new Solon and Martha Dixon Foundation Learning Center near Andalusia.

The learning center will be a part of the university’s Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center, which is used extensively by Forestry and Wildlife Sciences as well as many outdoors groups.

James Shepard, dean of the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, said the 6,000-square-foot facility will be home to a 100-seat auditorium and a 40-seat classroom. The $1.6 million project is funded in part through a $912,000 gift from the Solon and Martha Dixon Foundation, Shepard said.

The late Solon Dixon, a 1926 graduate of Auburn, was a prominent figure in the Alabama forestry industry during the middle of the 20th century.

In 1978, the Dixons donated 5,300 acres of their land in Andalusia to the university. The space was eventually dedicated as the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center.

Forestry students have long been required to complete a summer practicum at the center, and wildlife students are now required to do the same. The new learning facility will provide additional needed academic space at the center for those students.

The Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center also hosts various outdoors groups and university research projects throughout the year.

Shepard said the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences has benefited greatly from the Solon and Martha Dixon Foundation over the years. For instance, he noted, the foundation provided nearly $1 million in 2008 to build new dormitories on the Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center campus.

Construction of the new learning center is scheduled to begin this month and be completed by the spring of 2013.
Specialists try sugar, liquid fertilizer injections in effort to help oaks recover from poisoning

Auburn University’s endangered iconic oak trees at Toomer’s Corner are receiving weekly treatments alternating between a liquid fertilizer and a root stimulant application along with sugar injections with the assistance of Auburn University Landscape Services and Horticulture Professor Gary Keever of the College of Agriculture.

The trees, widely known as the Toomer’s Oaks, recently received sugar injection treatments after an initial, experimental dose in late March was administered by two arborists with Cortese Tree Specialists in Knoxville, Tenn.

The two oaks are absorbing a sugar mixture through 49 small holes that are drilled into the base of each tree, connected by ports secured into tubing that are looped around the trunk and channeled to a reservoir.

“The sugar injection treatments should aid the trees if photosynthesis is greatly reduced or not occurring,” said Keever.

Photosynthesis takes place primarily in a tree’s leaves, and is the process by which the energy in sunlight produces glucose (sugar) needed for a tree to live and grow. In late 2010, the Toomer’s Oaks were poisoned with Spike 80 DF, an herbicide that is absorbed by the roots and is carried to the leaves – blocking photosynthesis.

“On alternating weeks, the trees will receive applications of liquid fertilizer and a root stimulant,” said Steven Johnston, superintendent of Landscape Services. “We will continue with the process of administering this application, along with the sugar injections, until we deem that it is not advantageous to the Toomer’s Oaks.”

If the treatments are successful, experts predict that new foliage growth could develop during the next several weeks.

— Gail Riese

Researchers cite new evidence of increasing threat to Southeast from effects of global climate change

A scientific team led by Auburn University researchers has published findings in the journal Ecosystems suggesting that the Southeast region of the United States could be close to a turning point in terms of its carbon footprint.

The journal article was recently published as “Century-Scale Responses of Ecosystem Carbon Storage and Flux to Multiple Environmental Changes in the Southern United States.” What makes the findings so important and relevant to policy, said Hanqin Tian, lead author of the study, is that it is the first study to look at multiple factors affecting regional climate and carbon storage over an extended period of time.

Tian, the Alumni and Solon Dixon Professor in Auburn University’s School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, developed the computer model that examines the intricate ways in which climate change, atmospheric carbon dioxide, ozone, nitrogen and changes in the use of land work together. The Dynamic Land Ecosystem Model is a new generation of land ecosystem models to address multiple environmental stresses and changes over time.

“This is the first time that we have fully evaluated the impacts of human and natural factors on Southern ecosystems including forests in the last century,” said Ge Sun of the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, who was one of the researchers involved in the project.

Over time, the Southeast has been transformed from being a source of carbon emissions to being a carbon sink. This means that overall, the environment in the Southeast removes carbon from the atmosphere rather than contributes to it.

“For the last few years, people haven’t worried about this region,” Tian said. “They think it is not an immediate problem.”

The research team, however, sees reason to be alert to the possibility that could change. The present changes in how land is used are causing a major shift in carbon storage dynamics. That is, cities are growing, and the Southeastern landscape is changing at a rapid pace.

The researchers said one of the surprising things the study revealed was that air pollution – carbon and nitrogen in the atmosphere – was one of the key factors in rapid forest growth that turned the area into a carbon sink. However, the study also suggests that there is a tipping point at which fertilization effect from air pollution will begin to harm rather than help regional ecosystems, especially when considered alongside land use changes and heightened drought intensity.

Tian said careful urban and air quality planning is needed to address how and where our cities grow. Although the Southeast leads the nation in carbon storage at present, the switch could flip sooner than anyone expects without thoughtful preparation for the future.

Support for the project was provided by the U.S. Department of Energy National Institute for Climate Change Research Program, NASA Interdisciplinary Science Program, NASA Terrestrial Ecology Program, Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station Research Program and the Southern Forest Research Partnership.

— Jessica Nelson
Exhibition of photos of Southern artists opens at art museum

The exhibition “Facing South: Portraits of Southern Artists by Jerry Siegel” opened June 2 and will be on display through Aug. 18 at the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art at Auburn University.

“Facing South” features 100 images portraying some of the South’s best-known artists, from North Carolina to Louisiana, who share common cultural experiences that translate into a wide variety of artistic expressions. The collective group portrait by Siegel reflects an insightful examination of this multicultural community of artists and documents the richness of art-making in the South.

Siegel, a native of Selma, attended the Art Institute of Atlanta. After 29 years as a commercial photographer in Atlanta, Siegel relocated to Birmingham where he continues to shoot for commercial clients and to pursue his fine arts work through which he documents the cultural landscape of the South.

Accompanying “Facing South” is the related exhibition “Southern Artists/Southern Art?” featuring a selection of paintings, drawings, prints and sculpture by 25 of the artists that Siegel photographed. “Southern Artists/Southern Art?” will be on display through Aug. 11.

Human Sciences professor gains Evidence-Based Design certification

Interior Design Assistant Professor Lindsay Tan in Auburn’s College of Human Sciences has been awarded the Center for Health Design’s Evidence-Based Design Accreditation and Certification, or EDAC, credential.

The credential is awarded to individuals who demonstrate a thorough understanding of how to apply an evidence-based process to the design and development of healthcare settings.

Tan is the first Auburn faculty member and one of only a handful of professionals in Alabama to earn the credential.

Tan, who joined the faculty of the College of Human Sciences in 2011, said evidence-based design, or EBD, “is about basing your design decisions on credible research to achieve the best possible outcomes.

“Studies reveal how the design of a healthcare environment can relieve patient stress and pain, promote healing and improve overall well-being. Evidence-based design decisions can also reduce medical errors, infections and patient falls in the healthcare setting.”

Last spring, Tan challenged students in the capstone healthcare design studio to design a 50,000-square-foot hospital space in Hong Kong.

Students used what they learned from studying research articles to create designs that would benefit hospital staff as well as patients.

Tan said EBD is expected to be a major influence in the future of the healthcare design industry as it focuses on improving clinical outcomes.

Nursing professor named to Peer Review Advisory Board by SACS

Constance Hendricks, the Charles W. Barkley Endowed Professor in the School of Nursing, has been appointed a member of the Peer Review Advisory Board for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges.

Her appointment will be for three years, beginning July 1, 2013.

The SACS Executive Council established the board in 2008 as part of its effort to enhance the quality and value of the peer review process. The board provides guidance and assistance to the commission and its staff on issues bearing upon the peer review process.

The board is made up of representatives of the commission’s membership, as well as individuals from around the country who are knowledgeable about higher education and accreditation.