Magnolia pedestrian safety improvements scheduled for completion by September

The City of Auburn and Auburn University have joined forces to make pedestrian safety improvements on West Magnolia Avenue between College Street and Donahue Drive.

The project consists of adding seven stamped-concrete crosswalks where the current striped crosswalks are located. Plans call for the crosswalks to be at street level rather than raised like the ones on Samford Avenue. The temporary in-road signs for crosswalks will be replaced by permanent street-side signs.

In addition to the crosswalks, workers will install two landscaped islands, one near Cox Street and the other near Wright Street.

The $130,000 project on Magnolia is scheduled for completion before the first home football game, which will be on Sept. 3.

The current project is part of a long-range effort to improve safety for pedestrians and drivers along West Magnolia Avenue and South College Street, where the city and university meet.

The two streets are among the busiest in the area for traffic and are used heavily by pedestrians between the campus and downtown.

The city and university had promoted traffic safety in the past and stepped up their efforts in 2010, after a rash of car-pedestrian accidents.

Since late 2009, the university and city had jointly conducted a pedestrian safety campaign and made structural changes along the 100 block of South College Street to direct walkers to crosswalks. City and university representatives are also exploring ways to enhance pedestrian safety in the two blocks of College Street between Thach and Samford Avenues.
Auburn engineering team places in robotic lawnmower competition

Auburn University’s autonomous lawnmower team recently placed second in the Institute of Navigation robotic lawnmower competition in Ohio. The team earned a $10,000 prize for the dynamic event by navigating their robot, Moe, through a playing field while cutting grass and avoiding obstacles.

Auburn’s team includes Michael Carroll, mechanical and electrical engineering graduate student; William Woodall, software engineering graduate student; John Harrison, software engineering graduate student and Calvin Cutshaw, electrical and computer engineering technician, and is advised by Mark Nelms, chair of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering in Auburn’s Samuel Ginn College of Engineering.

“There are two classes to the competition, static and dynamic,” said Carroll. “The static competition features a rectangular playing field with a single standing obstacle. The dynamic competition is more complicated, because it is a non-square playing field and has two static obstacles – a fence and a flowerbed – as well as a dynamic obstacle, a remote control car”.

Areas of the field were assigned different points, with sections of grass closest to the static obstacles assigned the most points for degree of difficulty. Penalties were assigned for robots running outside of the assigned area, colliding with static and dynamic obstacles or needing a restart.

“Since this was our second year entering with this robot, we focused more on software development and controlling the robot instead of the mechanical and electrical aspects,” said Carroll. “The design was well thought-out last year, so we didn’t need to make many upgrades.”

First place in the dynamic competition went to Case Western Reserve University, which also won the prize for best cut. The University of Florida won first place in the static competition. Auburn’s team was the only robot that did not require a restart throughout the competition.

The Auburn team received financial support from Auburn engineering alumnus Julian Davidson and his wife Dorothy of Huntsville; their support went toward operational expenses and costly building materials for the lawnmower and the team’s travel expenses.

Davidson, a 1950 graduate in electrical engineering, is president and CEO of Davidson Technologies, a company that provides technical and management support to the aerospace industry.

– Morgan Stashick

Licensing Association honors Auburn office

The International Collegiate Licensing Association recently presented its Program of the Year Synergy Award to Auburn University. Susan Smith, director of Auburn’s Office of Trademark Management and Licensing, and Assistant Director Jennifer Blackmon accepted the award at the ICLA Annual Convention in Orlando.

“We are honored and proud to accept ICLA’s Synergy Award on behalf of Auburn University,” said Smith. “But as implied by the name of the award itself, we also accept this award on behalf of our many licensing partners, Auburn University administrators, retail partners and dedicated licensees who make the program a success.”

The Office of Trademark Management and Licensing works to ensure proper use and application of Auburn University trademarks, while strengthening the Auburn brand and generating revenue which funds academic and athletic scholarships.

ICLA noted that under the leadership of Smith, the Auburn licensing program has grown from $30,000 in the early 1980s to $3 million today. Auburn’s licensing program works closely with the Athletics Department, their media rights holder and other campus departments to fully maximize licensing opportunities.

Programs such as “All Auburn All Orange,” “True Blue” and “Auburn. Love It. Show It!” help build the relationships on campus as well as support retailers that carry Auburn University product.

ICLA provides educational and networking opportunities, enhancement of acceptable operating standards and ethics, and establishment of the overall prestige and understanding of the profession of collegiate licensing. ICLA is administered by the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics, which is in its 46th year.

– Carol Nelson

Campus Calendar

THURSDAY, JULY 28
FARMERS MARKET The Market at Ag Heritage Park, 3-6 p.m., adjacent to Ham Wilson Livestock Arena; also Thursday, Aug. 4

FRIDAY, JULY 29
LAST DAY of classes for summer semester

MONDAY, AUGUST 1
FINAL EXAMS BEGIN and continue through Wednesday, Aug. 3
FRIDAY, AUGUST 5

NEXT Auburn Report

SATURDAY, AUGUST 6
GRADUATION Ceremonies at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., Auburn Arena
EXHIBITION “Bacon Level, Hickory Flat, and the Illustrious Potteries of Randolph and Chambers Counties, Alabama,” Jule Collins Smith Museum; through Nov. 26

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17
FIRST DAY of classes for fall semester
Auburn detector dogs put on trail of fungus that is killing pine trees across South, threatening industry

The mystery surrounding a disease that is killing Southern pine trees may soon be solved with the assistance of Auburn University detector dogs.

Lori Eckhardt, an associate research professor in Auburn’s School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, is using dogs from the school’s EcoDogs program to detect deadly fungus in pine tree roots.

The pathogenic fungus involved in “Southern pine decline” disease is introduced by fungus-carrying beetles that burrow below ground and attack the roots. Especially susceptible are stressed trees during times of drought, when the trees produce a chemical that attracts beetles.

Southern pine decline is spreading and now affects more than a million acres in more than 80 counties across the southeastern United States, Eckhardt said. The disease hurts the industry financially and it reduces endangered species habitat. “The current way to detect the fungus is to dig up the roots, but this method is time-consuming and does not cover much area,” Eckhardt said. “Airplanes are useful in helping us spot dying trees, but this just looks above ground. We have to look below ground for these beetles.”

The School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences is working with the Forest Health Cooperative to develop methods for managing infected pine plantations and to research ways to combat the beetles and the disease. The Forest Health Cooperative is an association supported by the university, industry and governmental agencies to fight pine decline and other insects and diseases affecting pine forests.

Root-feeding, pine decline beetles are different from Southern pine bark beetles, which attack trees above ground. “For the Southern pine beetle, there has been 30 years of research and we know how to manage it, but research on the pine decline beetle has been underway for only 10 years,” said Eckhardt, who began studying pine decline as a doctoral student in 1999 and is cited by other researchers as one of the nation’s foremost authorities on the disease.

Auburn’s detector dogs, from the College of Veterinary Medicine’s Animal Health and Performance Program, are being trained to sniff out the scent of two fungi, Leptographium and Heterobasidion, that are attacking tree roots.

“In our tests the dogs detect the presence of fungus-infected roots,” she said. “We are working on small test plots and are researching the possibility of using them on pine plantations.”

The advantages are that the dogs are noninvasive and do not disturb the beetles or spread the fungus. As the dogs sniff through a pine tree stand, the handlers record the location of the “hits” – when the dog sits down – which would let landowners know the area and percentage of infected trees. By using this method, the researchers may not need to dig up the roots as compared to the current method of inspecting trees.

“Digging up the roots disturbs the trees causing them to release stress chemicals that can attract more beetles to the area,” she said. “Cutting down the trees doesn’t help because the beetles stay underground.”

The development of fungus-finding dogs is in the beginning stage, but Eckhardt and the dog trainers hope it will lead to a successful and feasible program in fighting Southern pine decline.

“This could be a very positive step,” Eckhardt said. “It’s not a cure, but we hope the dogs will help advance our management of the pine plantations and help in our research to stop the disease.”

— Charles Martin

Art professor to lead Auburn Women’s Studies Program

Joyce de Vries will become director of the Auburn University Women’s Studies Program at the start of the fall semester.

She will succeed Ruth Crocker of the Department of History, who has served since 2005. De Vries is an associate professor in the Department of Art, where she teaches Renaissance and Baroque art history as well as surveys of art history.

Joyce de Vreis

She has also taught Introduction to Women’s Studies and a course on gender issues in the visual arts. Her area of expertise is the visual and material culture of early modern (16th-17th century) Italy, and, in particular, material culture in the domestic sphere and the visual construction of gender.

Her book, “Caterina Sforza and the Art of Appearances: Gender, Art, and Culture in Early Modern Italy” published in 2010 by Ashgate, explores a ruling noblewoman’s patronage and collecting practices and the ways she harnessed culture to stretch accepted gender roles.

De Vries has presented papers related to this project at national and international conferences, and has published several articles on the topic. Her work on Sforza was supported by a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend and a Millard Meiss Publication Grant from the College Art Association.

Directors of Auburn’s Women’s Studies Program are elected by Women’s Studies affiliate faculty members and serve for three years, renewable once.

As director of Women’s Studies, De Vries will be responsible for future growth of the largest interdisciplinary academic program in the College of Liberal Arts, with more than 40 affiliated faculty and course offerings in 20 disciplines. Women’s Studies courses may be taken as electives by undergraduates in any major. The program also offers an undergraduate and graduate minor in women’s studies.

Nearing completion

Construction of the second phase of Shelby Center in the Ginn College of Engineering is in its final stage. Although grounds work and final touches on the buildings will continue for a few weeks, the $52 million project is substantially complete, according to a Facilities Division report. The college is scheduled to start moving into the buildings this fall and start classes there in January.
Campus News Briefs

Crystal capers continue with numerous sightings of trophy throughout Auburn

The crystal football “borrowed” by Aubie has been on the move around campus and the community. Check out its appearances based on requests made of Aubie, ranging from the Bass Sports Club to the glass blowing lab. To see the latest Crystal Caper, go to the Caper website at http://ocm.auburn.edu/caper or its Facebook page at http://www.facebook.com/AUCrystalCapers.

Satellite built by Auburn students scheduled for October launch

The Auburn University Student Space Program has completed AubieSat-1, the first student-built satellite in Alabama. The students – Ian Locklar, Kyle Owen and Andrew Slaughter – and their mentor, Jean-Marie Wersinger, will travel to California Polytechnic State University on Monday to go through a mission readiness review with NASA.

The group will also deliver the satellite for an Oct. 25 launch aboard a Delta II rocket. The satellite will conduct a science mission, testing various types of solar cells protective films in the harsh environment of space. It will also transmit “War Eagle,” upon request from the ground station in Allison Lab on campus.

Engineering faculty member selected for national symposium at Google HQ

Virginia Davis, an associate professor in the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering’s Department of Chemical Engineering, has been selected to participate in the National Academy of Engineering’s 17th annual U.S. Frontiers of Engineering symposium. The three-day event will be this September at Google headquarters in Mountain View, Calif.

Davis, whose research in nanomaterials dispersion, microstructure and processing was recognized last year with a Presidential Early Career for Scientists and Engineers Award, or PECASE, is one of 85 young engineers selected from among more than 300 applicants performing exceptional engineering research and technical work in industry, academia or government.

Small Business Development Center at Auburn earns agency award

The U.S. Small Business Administration recently awarded its Region IV Small Business Development Center Excellence and Innovation Award for 2011 to the Small Business Development Center in Auburn’s College of Business.

The award honors excellence in providing value to small businesses and advancing program delivery and management through innovation. Region IV covers the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. The center at Auburn provides professional expertise to small business owners in eight Alabama counties.

National association presents awards to university photographer at Auburn

Jeff Etheridge, chief photographer in the Office of Communications and Marketing’s Photographic Services unit at Auburn University, recently won honors at the 2011 meeting of the University Photographers Association at Brigham Young University in Utah.

Etheridge won the third-place award for a photo essay on Haiti for an Auburn Magazine feature on Auburn alumnus Valentin Abe’s fisheries program in the impoverished and earthquake-ravaged Caribbean nation.

Etheridge also received an honorable mention in the campus environment category for a photo of campus from inside the clock atop Samford Hall. He took the photo while the clock face on the west side was temporarily removed for maintenance work.

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