University, city collaborating on efforts to enhance safety for pedestrians, drivers on campus streets

Auburn University and the City of Auburn are collaborating on several projects to enhance the safety of pedestrians and drivers on campus.

The Auburn City Council approved a plan on March 2 to install 20 new light poles along the university side of Magnolia Avenue. The project will be completed in July. Temporary solar-powered LED in-roadway marker lights have been installed at all mid-block crosswalks in the meantime.

“We have hired a traffic engineering consultant to conduct a full traffic engineering study on College Street and Magnolia Avenue,” said Catherine Love, civil engineer in the university’s Facilities Division. “Once we receive recommendations from the study, we will add barriers such as chain fences to move pedestrians toward existing mid-block crosswalks. Channelization is a very important part of the solution.”

The university is already removing sections of sidewalk along Magnolia Avenue that do not lead directly to crosswalks.

Love said this month the city plans to install in-street pedestrian crossing signs at all mid-block crosswalks. City representatives are also working with the merchants along Magnolia to promote safety awareness among their customers.

The city and university have already placed a message board at the intersection of Donahue and Magnolia to warn drivers of pedestrians crossing. Love said they plan to use it approximately one week a month, but with different messages about roadway safety.

The city has planned a week-long safety campaign titled “Travel with Care” to raise awareness about pedestrian safety for April. The program will focus on education and enforcement.

“Other ideas are in the works such as students watching a safety video before purchasing a hang tag or adding a program to Camp War Eagle to educate incoming students,” Love said. “We are exploring several ways to educate everyone about pedestrian safety.”

University planners are seeking to address similar concerns on other roads on campus including Donahue, Thach, Wire and Roosevelt. Love said they will address the conflict points between pedestrians and drivers.

“We will put a raised crosswalk and speed table where the Village residents cross at the intersection of Donahue and Thach,” Love said. “We will add pedestrian signals which will be synchronized by a radio transmitter along Donahue and Wire and to several other intersections to stop traffic for pedestrians. These projects will be completed this summer.”

Love said if the intersections on campus are working well, pedestrians will not have to wait as long at traffic lights and will be less likely to jaywalk.

— Brittany Cosby
Tree Campus

Arbor Day Foundation honors Auburn for dedication to trees

The trees at Toomer’s Corner are not the only trees getting recognition on the Auburn campus these days.

The Arbor Day Foundation recently honored Auburn University as a Tree Campus USA University for its dedication to campus and forestry management and environmental stewardship. Auburn is the first college or university in the Southeastern Conference to be named as a Tree Campus USA University.

“The Tree Campus USA program will have a long-lasting impact at Auburn as it engages college students and local citizens to plant trees and create healthier communities for people to enjoy for decades to come,” said John Rosenow, chief executive of the Arbor Day Foundation. “The school will benefit from exceptional tree-care practices on campus as it works with tree-care professionals in the community to improve the tree canopy in Auburn.”

Auburn met the five required standards of tree care and community engagement in order to receive the award, which include establishing a campus tree advisory committee; evidence of a campus tree-care plan; verification of dedicated annual expenditures on the campus tree-care plan; involvement in an Arbor Day observance; and the institution of a service-learning project aimed at engaging the student body.

“When we first discovered the program, we did not meet all the criteria,” said Charlie Crawford, the university’s superintendent of landscape services. “We worked to meet and maintain these standards by establishing a campus tree inventory and having a designated tree management budget. We have been able to work with the best minds around, and there is no reason why we shouldn’t have the best trees and landscape as a land-grant university.”

Crawford

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Crawford

landscape crews have averaged planting more than 200 new trees per year.

“Our inventory is a cutting-edge technology that is computer-and Geographic Information System-based, or GIS,” said Art Chappelka, a professor of forestry and wildlife sciences. “We now know the location, health and value of every single tree on campus. Trees tend to be taken for granted. We can now put a dollar value on these trees and Auburn has $10 million worth of trees.”

Crawford said Landscape Services could not have achieved this success without adequate funding from the university and a cooperative relationship with a succession of administrations.

“We plan to maintain this designation through yearly documentation and continuing to plant trees on Auburn’s campus,” said Horticulture Professor Gary Keever. “Our long-term goal is to maintain a healthy, sustainable tree canopy. We want trees to live and grow to maturity.”

Chappelka said the Toomer’s Oak Project is just one of the ways landscape services seeks to maintain the tree canopy on campus. Professionals assessed the condition of the trees and changed out the soil to give them a new lease on life because people valued and cared for those trees.

“We have made a point to plant native, sustainable trees,” Crawford said. “Since 1990, we have removed 650 trees but planted several thousand. In 2009, we removed 25 trees but planted 974. We plan to continue increasing our canopy each year.”

— Brittany Cosby

Grant aids service learning program initiative at Loachapoka High School

Auburn University Outreach has received a grant from the State Farm Youth Advisory Board, or YAB, to develop a service-learning based preparatory program at Loachapoka High School to help students enter and perform better in college, and ultimately qualify for better jobs.

The funding will support programs developed as part of a partnership among the university, Loachapoka Schools, Lee County School District and Verizon. Auburn faculty and students practice service-learning strategies to help prepare Loachapoka students to enter and be successful in college. Programs will focus on computer and technological skills as well as math, reading and writing.
Japanese emissary

President Jay Gogue welcomed Atlanta-based Consul General Takuji Hanatani of Japan to Auburn this month as part of a series of visits from international dignitaries. The consul general was accompanied by Elmer Harris, an Auburn alumnus and retired Alabama Power CEO who is honorary consul general of Japan in Birmingham. Bob McGinnis, senior counselor to the president, helped arrange the visit as part of a strategic plan to increase the international perspective of Auburn’s students. Shown, from left, are McGinnis, Harris, Hanatani and Gogue.

Faculty, staff asked to contribute as example for alumni, friends

Auburn has launched its Faculty Staff Campaign for 2010. The campaign, which will run through April 30, is an annual fundraising campaign by faculty and staff volunteers on behalf of the university. Recognizing that not all employees can contribute a large amount, the campaign asks all faculty and staff to contribute what they can afford.

Contributions may be a one-time gift or a monthly donation through payroll deduction. In each case, the employee may designate his or her gift for a department, program or university activity of the employee’s choice.

Development officers say that a high participation rate on campus often encourages alumni and friends to offer or increase their own contributions to Auburn. Campaign leaders say this occurs because alumni and other potential donors view the participation rate on campus as a sign of the level of commitment by faculty and staff toward the university.

Auburn, which had a faculty-staff participation rate of 70 percent last year, has historically far outperformed SEC universities in this regard.

Two Auburn students enter final round of competition for Truman Scholarships

Auburn University has two national finalist candidates for the Harry S. Truman Scholarship, a highly prestigious scholarship that prepares students for careers in government or public service.

Juniors Taylor Baronich and Scott Seitz, two members of the University Honors College, will be interviewed Monday in Nashville by regional review panels that will judge leadership potential, intellectual ability and likelihood of “making a difference.”

Scholarships of $30,000 will be presented across the United States this spring to 60 to 65 juniors, who will use the funds to attend graduate school.

“The Truman Scholarship is the most prestigious national scholarship for college juniors as it seeks to support students committed to pursuing a career devoted to public service,” said Paul Harris, associate director of the University Honors College. “This year, a total of 176 finalistas were selected from 122 colleges and universities.”

Baronich of Jackson, Miss., is a double-major in political science and Spanish. She is cofounder of Closing the Gap, a student organization that bridges the cultural and linguistic gap between Auburn students and the community’s Spanish-speaking immigrant population. Baronich currently works at the U.S. Department of State desk at the United Nations. She plans to pursue a career in immigration law working as a staff attorney for Catholic Charities on refugee and asylum issues.

Seitz, a political science major, is from Huntsville. He has been involved in many campus organizations and has served as assistant director of elections for the Student Government Association and homecoming chair for Omicron Delta Kappa, a national leadership honor society. Off campus, Seitz is leader of a weekly Bible study at First Baptist Church of Opelika. His career goal is to become a foreign service officer with the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The scholarship is endowed by The Harry S. Truman Foundation, which was established by congress in 1975 as a memorial to the 33rd United States president. Truman Scholars also receive assistance with internship placement, graduate school admissions and career counseling. More information is available at http://truman.gov.

— Melissa Hand

Foundation grant to aid recreation program for persons with disabilities

Auburn’s Program for Students with Disabilities has received a Quality of Life grant from the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation to use toward increasing Adaptive Recreation and Athletics for students, faculty and staff.

The Foundation awarded $520,000 in Quality of Life grants to 75 non-profit organizations within the U.S. and Canada. Created by the late Dana Reeve in 1999, the Reeve Foundation’s Quality of Life Grants are awarded twice a year to non-profit organizations that provide services and programs to individuals living with paralysis.

The Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation is dedicated to curing spinal cord injury by funding innovative research, and improving the quality of life for people living with paralysis.

York speaker to discuss new concepts in landscaping for food, aesthetics

What if we were to replace our front lawns with gardens that provide food for humans and habitat for wildlife? What roles could artists and designers play in rethinking our ideas about landscapes and how we relate to our environment and each other?

Artist, designer, gardener and activist Fritz Haeg will discuss these and other ecology-related topics at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 23, at the Jule Collins Smith Museum. His presentation, “Welcoming the Wild,” is part of the College of Agriculture’s E.T. York Distinguished Lecture Series.

In the Edible Estates project he launched in 2005, for instance, Haeg advocates replacing front lawns with gardens that produce vegetables, fruits and herbs. He documents several of the prototype edible landscapes he has installed in the United States and England in his 2008 book “Edible Estates: Attack on the Front Lawn.”

The second edition of the book will be released by Metropolis Books in April.
Gift boosts fund for first-generation college students

The Provost Leadership Undergraduate Scholarship, or PLUS, Program at Auburn has received its largest gift ever, a $250,000 donation from the Wachovia Wells Fargo Foundation.

The program recently received national recognition when Auburn was named Scholarship Provider of the Year by the National Scholarship Providers Association for creating the PLUS Program.

A primary purpose of the program is to focus on the recruitment and retention of talented first-generation college students. The PLUS Program provides a $2,000 annual scholarship to recipients, renewable for up to three years, plus other support beyond financial aid.

It also benefits talented students that demonstrate financial need or are from a diverse background. PLUS Scholarships have been awarded to a total of 125 incoming undergraduate students since its inception in 2006. For the current academic year, 75 students have been awarded a scholarship or are participating in the program.

To help ensure that participants succeed at Auburn, the students are placed in a learning community. PLUS students participate in peer mentoring, leadership training, time management and study-skills training, study and tutoring sessions and counseling by a PLUS coordinator.

“Students participating in the program since its inception in 2006 have an average first-year retention rate of 95 percent, compared with an average overall retention rate of 86.6 percent for the university,” said Overtoun Jenda, associate provost for diversity and multicultural affairs.

Jenda added, “This generous gift from the Wachovia Corporation will allow us to continue to support our students and make sure they stay and graduate from Auburn.”

“A college education is the key to success for so many people, and helping first-generation students is especially appealing,” said Mike Donnelly, regional president for Alabama for Wachovia, a Wells Fargo Company. “With such a track record of success, this program is well deserving of support.”

The gift comes as the first recipients of the scholarship are set to graduate this May.

“If it were not for the PLUS Scholarship, I would not know the pluses in life,” said Chris Colvin, a senior PLUS Scholarship recipient. “No matter where I end up in life, no matter what I end up doing, I know that PLUS in some way, shape or form had an influence on getting me there.”

Panel to explore links between art, law

Auburn’s Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art will host a panel discussion exploring the interdisciplinary connections between art and law at 3 p.m. Thursday, March 25, in the museum auditorium.

The public program “Art and Law: An Interdisciplinary Investigation” is sponsored by the College of Liberal Arts’ Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities, the college’s Student Council, the Association of Visual Artists and the Pre-Law Scholars Program. The panel will feature speakers who are artists and lawyers, who will discuss the role of creativity and critical thinking, drawn from their arts and humanities backgrounds, in their professional careers.

Speakers include Janet St. Denis, a visual artist and lawyer who served as council for Auburn University, Trey Granger, director of the Montgomery Elections Center, and Emil Wright, an Auburn lawyer, physician and musician. A student member on the panel will represent the Pre-Law Scholar Program.