Rural Studio honored for program to improve rural living conditions

The AU School of Architecture’s Rural Studio has received the 2005 Award for Distinguished Service to Rural Life from the Rural Sociological Society.

The award recognizes outstanding contributions to the enhancement of rural life and rural people by individuals or groups not formally affiliated with the Rural Sociological Society. This is the first time the award has gone to an educational program.

“Auburn’s Rural Studio struck us as a program with a very distinctive mix of professional development, collaborative learning and positive impact on rural communities,” said RSS awards committee chair Claire Hinrichs, who is an associate professor of rural sociology at Penn State. “The track record of the program exemplifies a model of rural social change that unites concrete material improvement and enlarged social understanding, both by architects in training and residents of the communities where the Rural Studio is active.”

The nationally recognized Rural Studio was established in 1993 by Auburn University architecture professors Dennis K. Ruth and the late Samuel Mockbee and is now led by Bruce Lindsey, head of the School of Architecture, and Andrew Freear, an associate professor of architecture. Mockbee and Ruth conceived of the program as a unique method to improve the living conditions in rural Alabama while providing hands-on architectural experience for students.

“The Rural Studio has built its foundation on the belief that regardless of your environmental and financial circumstances — be it rural, urban, affluent or modest — that people have the right to be enabled by their environment,” explained Lindsey. “This award is significant to us because of the group from which it is awarded. The Rural Studio, known for its architectural and social mission, is honored that the work is seen to contribute to the community from the important perspective of sociology.”

The Rural Sociological Society is a professional social science association that promotes the generation, application and dissemination of sociological knowledge. The Society seeks to enhance the quality of rural life, communities and the environment.
In a move toward universal direct deposit of payroll and travel reimbursement checks, AU will end the practice of issuing paper checks for those payments in January.

More than three-fourths of faculty and staff already receive payment through direct deposit of checks to bank or credit union. Approximately 90 percent of faculty and 12-month staff now receive payment through the direct deposit option; about half of AU’s bi-weekly, part-time and temporary employees, most of whom are students, still receive payment through paper checks.

The AU Federal Credit Union will offer accounts and debit cards to employees who do not have a checking or savings account elsewhere.

Ronnie Herring, director of Payroll and Employee Benefits, said AU’s experience with direct deposit over the past few years has been highly successful for both the university and the large majority of faculty and staff who have opted for the payment method. Herring said his office and the department heads of the remaining employees would work with them to resolve any obstacles they face in converting to direct deposit.

“Direct deposit just makes more sense for everyone,” said Herring, who noted that problems with lost, stolen or forged payroll checks have been virtually eliminated through direct deposit. Herring added that the deposits go in the banks sooner and are automatic, even if a natural disaster forces offices to close on payday. AU has had to close several times in recent years due to hurricanes and winter storms; if those closings had come at certain times, employees receiving paper checks would not be paid until the campus reopened.

Before they can receive their first payroll or travel reimbursement reimbursement must file a Travel Direct Deposit Authorization form. The forms are available in most departmental offices and online at www.auburn.edu/administra
tion/business_office/payroll.

For additional information about the new payroll policy, call 844-4183. Direct questions about travel reimbursement to the Office of Procurement and Payment Services at 844-7771. The AU Federal Credit Union can be reached at 844-4120.

University going to paperless pay for all employees next January

Web-based engineering programs rated 19th in survey

Auburn’s Samuel Ginn College of Engineering was 19th in a recent online ranking of the “Top 25 Best Buys” for web-based distance learning graduate degree programs. A nationwide survey by GetEducated.com — a consumer-oriented, online degree clearinghouse — lists Auburn Engineering’s graduate outreach program in the top 25 based on tuition costs at accredited, online degree programs. Established in 1989, GetEducated.com is the nation’s only service dedicated exclusively to showcasing accredited online degrees. Its annual survey identifies several trends in higher education pricing that directly impact consumers as they go online to earn master’s or doctoral degrees.

Described by its web site as the “fastest place in cyberspace to shop for online degrees,” the clearinghouse operates the Diploma Mill Police, a free online degree accreditation verification service designed to protect online degree seekers from fraud, and publishes a series of free downloadable guidebooks to online college programs.

Croker to lead AU program in women’s studies

Ruth Crocker, an Alumni Professor of history in the College of Liberal Arts, has been named AU’s new director of women’s studies.

“Dr. Crocker is a highly respected scholar and teacher who has a long history of active and successful engagement in Women’s Studies,” said Anne-Katrin Gramberg, dean of the College of Liberal Arts.

Croker holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from England’s St. Anne’s College of Oxford and a master’s and doctorate from Purdue.

Croker’s areas of specialization include gender, class and ethnicity in Progressive-era history and a critical history of social work and social welfare.

The AU Women’s Studies Program is not confined to one college. Since its inception in 1984, the program has coordinated the teaching and the promotion of research and scholarship about women and gender across the disciplines.

Planning consultants preparing master plan for research park south of campus

Consultants preparing master plan for research park south of campus

Planning consultants are in the final stage of a site master plan for a research park on AU property south of the main campus.

Groundbreaking will be scheduled this fall for the research park, which will face west of College Street and north of Shug Jordan Parkway. Construction plans call for completing the first of two buildings in late 2006 and the second in early 2007.

Besides providing space for companies that use AU technologies and researchers, the first phase of construction will provide incubator space for new and emerging start-up companies to develop commercial applications for Auburn research developments.

Science Ventures Inc. of Boston, which developed the AU master plan for future campus growth at the start of this decade, is making final modifications to a park site master plan that will include placement of the first two buildings, parking areas, streets and park entry features. Planners are also developing construction drawings for the first buildings.

“They are at the point where groundbreaking is drawing near, and there are many ongoing details related to the topography of the site and other design and infrastructure issues that are being completed,” said Syd Spain, executive director of the research park project for AU’s Office of the Vice President for Research.

“Tenants in the research park will have a close association with Auburn’s research program,” added Vice President for Research Michael Moriarty.

The Board of Trustees approved construction of the research park last October. Auburn Research and Technology Foundation is developing the project through a private, nonprofit developer. Support for the project includes a $10 million bond issue pledge from the State of Alabama and $5 million from the City of Auburn for infrastructure development.

First lesson

Even as new students start learning in class, they learn to always keep an umbrella handy. That has been especially true so far this semester.

Two research orientation sessions scheduled at Dixon Conference Center for new faculty

The Office of the Vice President for Research will host orientation programs for new Auburn faculty next week at Dixon Conference Center.

The Sept. 7 session is from 2 p.m.-4 p.m., and the Sept. 8 event is from 9 a.m.-11 a.m.

Those attending will receive documentation, but we offer a morning and an afternoon session to better enable faculty to work one of them into their schedules,” said Vice President for Research Michael Moriarty.

“New faculty received some of the information in a very brief format during the university’s general new faculty orientation on Aug. 16, but they have the opportunity at our event in September to talk one-on-one with representatives of the different units that provide services and assistance to AU researchers,” Moriarty said.

Each session begins with a general overview briefing by Moriarty in the Dixon Center’s Seminar Room. Breakout sessions follow in Ballroom B and Right. Units that report directly to VP/RFR, as well as other campus units offering services needed by AU research faculty, will be represented.

TPI helps Black Belt school superintendents find common ground

Superintendents of 15 Alabama school systems have joined forces in an attempt to remove obstacles to quality educational opportunities across the state’s financially distressed Black Belt.

Superintendents from largely rural counties have joined forces in an attempt to remove obstacles to quality educational opportunities across the state’s financially distressed Black Belt.

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Robin Sabino does not speak fluent Cherokee but the linguistics professor at Auburn is helping teach others the language through a specially designed web site. “What I am providing is basically vocabulary. It is a basis for language learning — a self-instructed language learning resource,” said Sabino, acting assistant director of AU’s Center for Diversity and Race Relations.

The Echota Tsalagi Language Revitalization Project web site teaches a version of Cherokee spoken by members of the Echota tribe, the largest state-recognized Cherokee tribe in Alabama.

The site, which includes lossless compressed audio files of more than 1,700 words, is organized by semantic sets — lists that include colors, numbers, objects of clothing, animals, etc. Each entry contains the word written in Cherokee syllabary characters, a set of written characters used to represent different syllables, and the English spelling. Many entries also contain pictures and sound files so the learner can hear the words pronounced by a fluent Cherokee speaker.

Sabino began working in earnest on the project in October 2002 when she received grants from AU’s Office of Outreach and Office of Research designed to encourage and broaden faculty participation in research and other scholarly pursuits. She provided the content while Bradley Morgan of AU’s Office of Distance Learning designed the site and built the utilities to make it user friendly.

However, the concept began years earlier when Patricia Edwards de Ortega, a member of the Echota, approached Sabino, who is an associate professor in AU’s Department of English, about helping to revitalize the Cherokee language. The College of Liberal Arts Department of English, about helping to revitalize the Cherokee language. The College of Liberal Arts Department of English, about helping to revitalize the college’s faculty member had focused her dissertation on the Cherokee language. The College of Liberal Arts Department of English, about helping to revitalize the Cherokee language. The College of Liberal Arts Department of English, about helping to revitalize the Cherokee language. The hardest part, she says, is reconciling differences in the language from source to source.

Sabino dedicated the site to the memory of the Ortega, who had devoted the last years of her life to the cultural revitalization of the Echota.

Sabino said the project received much assistance from AU administrators, faculty and staff. “You could not do this type of project without the resources of the university behind you.” The development of the web site is supported by the AU Office of Distance Learning and the Center for Diversity and Race Relations. To view the web site, go to www.auburn.edu/outreach/dl/echota.

“Although the site currently focuses on vocabulary, it is the key to the development of the site and I believe it could be an incredible resource for one who wants to learn,” Sabino said.

“Response to the site has been positive, Sabino, who relied primarily on word of mouth to advertise its existence. The site has received more than 20,000 hits or visits to date. “Some people have been using the site quite consistently for a long time,” she said. “I have found that people who use it have really liked it.”

The interlocking AU symbol, shown above and at the top of page 1, is a natural catch from the country’s lakes and rivers. Auburn receives $2.5 million grant to establish fish farming in Uganda

The AU College of Agriculture’s International Center for Aquaculture and Aquatic Environments has landed a $2.5 million award to help establish a commercial fish farming industry in Uganda. In the 40-month project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, a team of faculty from the Department of Fisheries and Allied Aquacultures will establish model cage- and pond-based fish farms in Uganda to help improve the high-quality fish feeds and best-management practices to be used in the captive culture of tilapia and other fish such as tilapia and the Clarisas catfish. These model production systems on private farms will be demonstrated to states to spread the technologies to other farmers in the region.

Faculty from Auburn’s Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology also will be involved in the initiative.

The project’s chief objectives are to increase the quantity and quality of fish feeds used for aquaculture, boost employment and help the African country generate export revenue.

“This is a very significant project and will be instrumental in establishing the infrastructure so that an aquaculture industry can grow and thrive in Uganda,” said Bill Daniels, an AU fisheries associate professor who is campus coordinator of the project. “Aquaculture is high and demand is increasing in Uganda, but the vast majority of the supply for both domestic consumption and export is natural catch from the nation’s lakes and rivers. With that supply threatened by increased pollution and unsustainable fishing practices, a conversion to fish farming, or aquaculture, in Uganda could be the solution. A major hurdle to the establishment of an aquaculture industry in Uganda is the lack of local, high-quality fish feed resources. “Fish require a top-quality, nutritionally complete and balanced diet to grow rapidly and remain healthy, so local feed production is critical to the overall success and sustainability of an aquaculture industry in Uganda,” Daniels said. “During the first two years of the project, we will be working to facilitate the transfer of feed production technologies, using locally available materials, to local farmers and the currently many manufacturers of other animal feed.”

AU fisheries research associate Karen Veverica has moved to Uganda and will oversee the project there and serve as the technical expert on pond construction and management and fish production.

Robin Sabino

Proffessor aids effort to increase numbers of Cherokee speakers

Web site instruction

I had worked with the last speaker of a language and I watched a language die, so I thought it would be a privilege to be able to help save one.

Robin Sabino

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, August 30

LITTLETON-FRANKLIN LECTURE “Our Inner Ape,” primatologist and author Frans de Waal, 4 p.m., Sciences Laboratory Center auditorium.

Brown Bag Lecture “Sustainable Community Development in Faya,” Scott Finn, AU School of Architecture, 11:45 a.m., Foy 202.

Friday, September 2

OPEN HOUSE newly renovated Veterinary Medicine Library, 2 p.m.-4 p.m., Cary Hall.

Saturday, September 3

EXHIBIT Scottish American cultural display, noon-4 p.m., tent near Parker Hall.

Monday, September 5

LARDON DAY Holiday No classes; offices closed; no AU Report.

Tuesday, September 6

MEETING University Senate, 3 p.m. Bronn Hall auditorium.

Wednesday, September 7

RESEARCH ORIENTATION for new faculty, 2 p.m.-4 p.m., Dixon Conference Center. Also Thursday, Sept. 8, from 9 a.m.-11 a.m.

Friday, September 9

SCOTTISH TRADITIONAL DANCE Celtic band Redhill, 6 p.m.-9 p.m., Foy Union ballroom, no admission charge.

Monday, September 12

NEXT AU Report.
Nationally acclaimed exhibition of quilts from Gee’s Bend coming to AU museum

Auburn’s Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art is the latest stop on a national tour for an exhibition of more than 60 quilts by African-American women in the small rural southwest Alabama community of Gee’s Bend.

“The Quilts of Gee’s Bend” exhibition will be at the Auburn museum from Sept. 11-Dec. 4.

Organized by the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, “The Quilts of Gee’s Bend” has been traveling across the United States for the past three years. Destinations in its 12-city American tour have included the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Newsweek, National Public Radio’s Talk of the Nation, CBS News Sunday Morning, the Martha Stewart Living television show, Oprah’s O magazine, and Country Home magazine are among the print and broadcast media organizations that have lauded the exhibition.

The Gee’s Bend exhibition celebrates the artistry and cultural heritage of a craft that flourished in rural Alabama throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries before nearly vanishing in the last half of the century.

Gee’s Bend, now officially known as Boykin, is a small settlement of African-American residents on the banks of the Alabama River. Although across the river from Camden, the county seat, Gee’s Bend is isolated to this day, the people of the settlement persevered, clinging to crafts that more prosperous areas abandoned in later decades.

Artistically, the town’s women developed a distinctive, bold and sophisticated quilting style based on traditional American — and African-American — quilts, but with a geometric simplicity reminiscent of modern art.

The quilts worked with fabrics reflective of their everyday lives, such as worn-out work clothes, old denim, grain sacks, corduroy and cotton sheets. The quilts were designed for practicality; yet their visual power has elevated them to artistic masterpieces. Together they represent a distinct artistic tradition and design sensibility, exquisite craftsmanship and a dialogue addressing composition and pattern that spans generations. Michael Kimmelman, art critic for The New York Times, described the quilts in the exhibition as “some of the most interesting works of modern art America has produced.”

“These are exceptional quilts made by remarkable artists,” said Michael Panhorst, director of the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art. “We are fortunate that these women have maintained an unbroken artistic tradition into the 21st century.”

The local exhibition is sponsored by Regions Bank of Lee County, and the national tour is sponsored by the Tinwood Alliance of Atlanta. In conjunction with “The Quilts of Gee’s Bend” exhibition, the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art will host a series of lectures, films and other events celebrating the exhibition. For more information, call 844-1484 or, online, see www.julecollinssmithmuseum.com.

Conference offers tips on funding for business research

University research faculty and area small business operators will have the opportunity on Sept. 13 to learn about ways to take advantage of $2 billion of federal funds for small business research initiatives.

Co-sponsored by AU’s Office of Technology Transfer and the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, the conference will be from 8:30 a.m. to noon at Dixon Conference Center.

The goal is to raise awareness about the Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer Research programs among Alabama’s small technology companies, said Terry Payne of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

Representatives of various federal agencies will discuss how funds available to small businesses for their innovative research in the Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer Research programs. Conference attendees will have the opportunity to participate in one-on-one meetings and informative seminars, research and development program managers, businesses, entrepreneurs, scientists and engineers.

In a program to spark greater public interest in reading, the Alabama Center for the Book recently completed a year-long project creating posters that show prominent Alabamians reading their favorite books.

With a grant from the Alabama Public Library Service, the center’s “Alabama Gets Caught Reading” initiative, recruited celebrities from a variety of professions posed for photos in familiar settings with their favorite books. The photos are the basis for a series of posters encouraging Alabamians of all ages to take time for reading.

For the campaign, Charles Barkley took time off during the NBA playoffs to pose at the TNT studios. Kathryn Tucker Windham posed at her favorite cemetery in Selma, where she goes to catch a glimpse of Jeffrey, the ghost-story-teller’s most famous ghost. Naturalist and Alabama Public Television celebrity Doug Phillips trekked up and down the roads of Oak Mountain until he found the perfect spot for his photograph. Former NASCAR star Bobby Allison was also photographed in his element.

More than 20,000 posters of these and other famous Alabamians are being printed in Alabama and will be included in one of the “Alabama Gets Caught Reading” promotion. The posters will be distributed statewide to independent bookstores and public and school libraries.

Phase one includes nine individual posters, each reflecting a different aspect of the diversity of well-known Alabamians, their interests, accomplishments and personalities.

For more information on “Alabama Gets Caught Reading,” call Connor Henton at 844-4948 or see the web site www.alabamabookcenter.org.

Princeton Review lists Auburn among top institutions

Auburn is classified in the new issue of the Princeton Review as one of the nation’s best institutions for undergraduate education. The New York-based education services company features AU in The Best 361 Colleges, the 2006 edition of its annual “best colleges” guide. Only about 15 percent of the four-year colleges in America and two Canadian colleges are in the book. It has two-page profiles on the schools and student survey-based ranking lists of top 20 colleges in the book in various categories.

The book’s profile on AU commends its “excellent programs in business, agriculture, engineering, nursing and architecture.”

The lists in The Best 361 Colleges are based on the Princeton Review’s survey of 110,000 students attending the colleges in the book. Students rated their schools on several topics and reported on their campus experiences.

Ranking lists range from best professors, the book cites AU having an outstanding library, good “town-gown” relations and student sports fans among the nation’s best. However, despite evidence of high academic achievement in the book’s profile of Auburn, the AU students who participated in the survey were among the largest sets of participants who admitted that they do not study enough.
Department’s LEGO art shows solution to age-old math riddle

When Auburn alumnus Eric Harshbarger looks at a pile of LEGO bricks, he thinks of geometry. For him, there is an innate relationship between mathematics and the popular children’s toy.

“They’ve been tied together for me my whole life,” he said. From learning basic mathematical functions like counting and addition at age 5, Harshbarger now uses complicated mathematical expressions and geometry when building with the multi-colored bricks.

This relationship has led him to a profitable, if bizarre, profession – as a freelance LEGO sculptor and toy consultant. Harshbarger’s mathematics background – bachelor’s and master’s degrees in the subject – is essential in helping him create mosaics and 3-D sculptures.

His latest pursuit is a nearly 6-foot by 6-foot configuration of 21 squares assembled entirely of LEGO bricks that hangs, appropriately, in AU’s math building, Parker Hall.

To a passer-by, the creation might look simply like an abstract work of art. What it illustrates, however, is something far more complex – the answer to an age-old mathematics problem: what is the minimum amount of times a square can be dissected into smaller squares so that no two squares are the same size? The answer: 21.

“When a person looks at this, all they see is a toy, but if you look at it from a mathematical perspective, there’s a lot of interesting things in it,” Harshbarger said.

Harshbarger said that he started building the mosaic as a way to illustrate a key concept to his students in the Math Department’s new LEGO puzzle-solution prior to class.

Michel Smith, chair of the Department of Mathematics in AU’s College of Sciences and Mathematics, said he hopes the mosaic will spark an interest in the subject among Auburn students.

“I am delighted that we are able to use a toy that people are very familiar with as a symbol of the playfulness of mathematics,” Smith said. “I hope when students see it and realize the mathematical nature of the composition they’ll see that math is enjoyable.”

Mathematics Professor Andras Bezdek was familiar with Harshbarger’s work and suggested that Smith solicit him to build a math-themed LEGO structure. “He felt, and I agree, that it would be nice to have an artistic composition that represents the fun and ambition that we have with mathematics,” Smith said.

The only instruction Smith provided was to create a piece that was mathematically themed. “He gave me plenty of leeway,” Harshbarger said.

“This particular geometric problem remained unsolved for many years until around 1978 and is not a trivial problem to solve. The squarness of it made me think of LEGO bricks so I thought it was the perfect illustration.”

The project took Harshbarger about a week to build but the preparation was more time consuming. “I had to make sure that I had 21 different colors of LEGO bricks and that I had enough pieces.” He relied on mathematics to lay out the piece. “Knowing the LEGO dimensions and how big I wanted the overall piece to be, I broke it up and drew it out using graph paper,” he said.

For more complicated mosaics and sculptures, Harshbarger uses a software program he created.

AU College of Education magazine wins award of excellence

The AU College of Education’s Keystone magazine for 2005 received an award of excellence from the Southern Public Relations Federation as part of the organization’s 31st annual Lantern Awards program.

The magazine won the award in the federation’s special-purpose publications category.

The college mails Keystone magazine to all its alumni and to members of various constituency groups. Katie Crew manages and edits the publication as the college’s assistant editor, along with Michael Tullier, director of external relations. Mike DeMent of the Learning Resources Center is responsible for the graphic design.