

Sustainability plan preserves Behrend's natural beauty

by Christine Kleck
staff writer

Behrend's natural beauty has long been one of the college's most visible assets. An effort is now underway to preserve and protect the college and surrounding land for future generations.

As requested of all Penn State campuses by the University's Green Destiny Council, a task force of Behrend teachers and administrators has established an ecological sustainability plan geared toward preserving the college and its adjacent areas.

Previously owned by the Mary Behrend family, this 700-acre Harborcreek township college has "naturally" drawn in students, faculty and staff members from all different areas of the world.

Upkeep of the college and surrounding scenic areas is no easy task. With expansion of the campus and construction of nearby roads, upkeep of the college and the surrounding scenic areas is a growing challenge.

Tom Wortman, special projects assistant to the Provost and Dean, and Dr. Robert Light, associate provost and associate dean, acted as coordinators of a task force for this project.

"The University feels a responsibility to the land, the people, and the rest of the world, because the resources are finite," Wortman said. The task force was then divided into seven working groups, with each working group including faculty and staff members required to devise their own short-term and long-term goals. The goals outlined in the 2001 plan for Ecological Sustainability plan, are:

* Reduce energy use and promote cleaner fossil fuels.

* Conserve water use.

* Minimize solid, liquid and hazardous waste.

* Increase healthfulness and reduce waste of food.

* Delineate, protect and preserve forest-wetland communities.

* Incorporate "green" practices into the renovation and construction of facilities.

* Promote ecological stewardship within the college community.

Wortman says this project does more than just educate students - it forces them to act. "It's about more than just awareness, it's about a positive effect on the future," he said.

Dividing specific working group areas has

made it easier for the members to gather information on past statistics about Behrend (water, paper, land use, etc). From that information they are able to see where they would like to be in the future and how to make these sustaining practices second nature to all members of the Behrend community.

When it came to searching for ideas and practices to preserve the local resources, Wortman said that each working group started small. "We were able to collect up numbers and discover a lot of little things that just needed to be adjusted to be corrected," he said.

Actions promoting sustainability have not only been seen within the task force's working groups. The Student Affairs office is planning Behrend sustainability events surrounding the April Earth Day celebration within the college. The Behrend Biology club has tackled several pressing ecological issues within its education committee. The Pennsylvania Sea Grant has also played a big part in this project, as its staff members are bringing their educational efforts related to sustainability to the Behrend Community. Beta Beta Beta, the biological honors society, is planning several elements of an Earth Week celebration that coincide with the efforts of the overall sustainability project.

Several of the Bi Sci classes are also taking part in the efforts, as they have been instructed to form mini working groups within their classes, to tackle the real-world environmental issues that are pressing Behrend.

As for the future of the Sustainability project at Behrend, Wortman has very strong faith in the leaders of the working groups and the Behrend community at large. "We have some real active minds, and some live eyes working together. Some of the most responsible people on campus are included in this. I don't know how it can fail," he said.

As with any Earth preservation project, Wortman believes that the efforts and ideas established at this time will become common, everyday practices and beliefs of the Behrend community. "The Behrend family would be very happy to hear that we are taking an interest in their land - it is a process that will take forever," he said.

Continued coverage of events occurring within the task force at large and specifics on each of the seven working groups will appear in up-coming issues of the Behrend Beacon.

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