

Living here a 'growing' experience for all involved

Greenhouse is home to plants, insects and humans

By LINDA HOWLEY
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

Few college students get the chance to really "live" in their majors, but Jim Dostal (2nd-horticulture) and "Big" Jim Comes (7th-horticulture) are doing just that. They are living in room 715 of Headhouse No. 1, a building attached to the University greenhouses.

Dostal said he began living in the greenhouse Summer Term. "I got to live here because I knew Dr. John White," Dostal said. Dostal said his father met White, a professor of floriculture, when he was attending classes at the University.

Comes said he moved into the greenhouse this fall. His parents heard about the opening in the greenhouse and were told to contact White when they attended the Pennsylvania Flower Growers Convention this year.

Dostal's interest in plant care developed from his father's involvement in the field. "I've been working with plants since I can remember," he said.

Like his roommate, Comes' interest in plants grew from his family — his parents own a plant shop.

Both enjoy living in the room, which resembles a dorm room with kitchen facilities. "Most people get tired of a small room. I lived in a room smaller than this when I lived at home, so it doesn't bother me," Dostal said. "I like it here because it's quiet here and away from a lot of people," Comes said.

In return for living in the room free, they perform nightly duties, including

checking the University's six greenhouses and two Quonset huts at 7 p.m. and 11:30 p.m. Both make the first check, which involves closing the greenhouse vents and checking greenhouse temperatures. Only one is required to make the second inspection, which is to insure everything is in order.

Dostal and Comes are responsible for handling emergencies, such as lighting and heating problems.

If the heating units fail and temperatures drop too low, an alarm wired to their room is activated, Dostal said he remembers one summer night when the alarm system went off at 3 a.m.

homecoming

When problems arise, one of the pair calls the "greenhouse manager," Mark Shedlosky (graduate-horticulture). Shedlosky is in charge of the overall supervision of the greenhouses and is directly responsible to White.

Each greenhouse requires different checks. For example, because of the location of streetlights outside one greenhouse, the poinsettias and chrysanthemums must be covered with a black cloth to prevent them from getting too much light.

Two special rooms they are responsible for are the growth room and growth chambers. Seeds are germinated in a controlled temperature in the growth room, while the growth chambers are

used for research projects, and require more refined control. Dostal and Comes check for lighting and constant temperatures where required.

They also check the greenhouse for rare and tropical plants, which supplies the HUB with plants, Dostal said.

The easiest room in the greenhouses to check is the rose room, because the plants water themselves and are protected from cold with a thermal blanket, a curtain which prevents heat from escaping at night.

"Another job we have to do is fumigation whenever insects get bad," Dostal said. A container of insecticide is placed on top of a chimney which sits in a dish of ethyl alcohol. When the alcohol is lit, the insecticide vaporizes. "It's like incense," Comes said.

Dostal and Comes do all checks without supervision. "It is critical that someone lives there," Shedlosky said.

"It would be inconvenient if I had to drive over to the greenhouses twice a night to check them," he said. During term breaks when Dostal and Comes go home, the full-time greenhouse workers will temporarily assume the students' duties.

Both students agree working in the greenhouse is a valuable experience. "I hope to learn from working here and believe that the position will help me in my future job pursuits. So far I've learned a lot about how greenhouses work and about different varieties of plants," Comes said.



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