

# Campus battles run-off toxins

Students working in the Environmental Learning Center are green with resolve to keep things clean

Story by Megan McCoy

Hidden on the far end of campus, near the Beavercreek Road exit, lies the Environmental Learning Center. Not many people have seen it, or know where it is, but some students are getting hands-on experience working through horticulture and water-environmental technology classes offered at Clackamas Community College.

CCC Foundation Executive Director Greg Fitzgerald said that through a mini grant from the foundation, the water and environmental technology department purchased monitoring equipment for students to use. The equipment is in use now in the ELC and provides students with information on baseline data about flows and water quality.

Department of Engineering Science Chair and water and environmental technology instructor Jim Nurmi's classes have just started working in the ELC this year to help clean the water that flows into Newell Creek. Nurmi explained that 50 percent of the storm drain water from CCC flows into the ELC as well as water from Oregon City High School. So anything on the ground when it starts to rain flows into the ELC, which damages the environment. Nurmi's classes focus on cleaning that up.

"Oil, gasoline, organic contaminants, Cheetos, you know. Whatever's in the parking lot that runs off,"

Nurmi explained. Nurmi's classes have also recently been working on water quality tests.

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*-Jim Nurmi*

"We measure dissolved oxygen, pH, turbidity, conductivity all very typical water quality parameters," Nurmi said. Horticulture Department Chair Renee Harber said that her department has been working on improving the ELC for years. Harber's horticulture classes have been teaming up with Nurmi, using GPS systems to find the exact locations of the trees and create a map for the design team who consists of, Yost Grube Hall architects, Pacific Habitat Services, Lango Hansen Landscape Architects and KPFF En-

gineering. Another handy tool with the GPS and GIS systems is the ability to assess the health of the trees.

"If you could see that this tree has a big rotten spot in the middle of it and it might come crashing down in the next big wind storm, then we want to take that one out regardless of what kind of tree it is," Harber said. This was the first time many of her students had used a GPS system for something horticulture-related. Harber said that several students were interested in taking a class about that subject, so that's what they're going to do in order to "give students new learning opportunities by being involved in what's going on at the ELC."

The next project horticulture will be working on is propagating in the places where invasive plants are taken out.

"After we take out the junk stuff that we don't want anymore, we're going to have to put the good plants back in," Harber said. "A lot of those will be water plants, growing in the water or around the water's edge because that's going to help filter the water as it moves through. I just want to make sure that we keep the whole process educational for our students, by giving them real-world projects to work on is a great way to educate them. So as long as we can do that, then I'm happy."



Environmental engineering sciences instructor Jim Nurmi, left, works with students at the Environmental Learning Center, right.



photos by Andrew Koczan