

ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER IN FULL BLOOM

STORY AND PHOTO BY JARED PREBLE
ARTS AND CULTURE EDITOR

The Environmental Learning Center here at Clackamas Community College is a five-acre natural area that houses the headwaters of Newell Creek which has served as an educational wildlife habitat for over 40 years. It is deeply intertwined with the history of CCC and thanks to the Newell Creek Headwaters Restoration Project, it has undergone numerous changes to further benefit the land as well as the surrounding area.

In November of 2017, the center began the process of covering the ground with plants in order to help cool the waters that run through the ELC, Abernethy Creek, the Willamette River and the Columbia River. In addition, various dams have been added throughout the ELC in order to clean and filter the water of sediment and other harmful runoff. All this in hopes of frequent visits from the community, surrounding it while still maintaining a healthy ecosystem.

Roseanne Yoder, restoration plant manager, and Benny Kuang, service-learning specialist, have taken charge and organized volunteer work days where people can offer their time and effort in order to get the many jobs that need to be done in the ELC finished. Yoder has been working on this project for over a year. She initially got involved by taking on responsibility for things that needed to be done gradually around the ELC. Whilst enrolled in horticulture programs here at CCC after receiving her bachelors in Environmental Science from PSU, Yoder decided that she could make the difference that the ELC needed and the school put her at the head of the restoration process.

The goal of the ELC is to have 100 percent ground cover within the next three years in order to comply with the regulations set by NROD (Natural Research Overlay District) which encompasses the ELC.

Yoder believes, as many others do, that by working to undo the previous damage that has been dealt to the ELC due to sediment, fertilizer and other runoff that flows through its rivers, the habitats downstream can be saved while preserving a natural habitat.

"The reason why I want to do restoration technology, the reason why I have an environmental science degree, the motivation behind that is I want to undo some of the damage that humans have caused," Yoder said. "We are the ones that are putting oil and fertilizer and pesticides into our water. That's something we're doing. So let's try our best to remove those

pollutants before they reach a salamander habitat or salmon habitat."

So far, 20,000 plants have been planted throughout the ELC, many of them thanks to the volunteers that have come in. Kuang recently organized a volunteer event in honor of Earth Day that held two work shifts throughout the day. Many people came to lend a hand, including Kuang who stayed for both shifts to work and help others get the hang of planting.

"I think it helps out with the general welfare of us all. I think having a place to come around and see is also good and on top of that, it helps the environment, it helps the world, it helps sustainability," Kuang said. "I can see how people live a busy life but I think we can find a way that allows students with busy lives to still help out. I think that's a good thing because you can still contribute to your community."

Not all renovations to the ELC help the ecosystem solely, several of the structures added are for the purpose of encouraging community members to visit the ELC more frequently. An amphitheatre has been installed, along with an open class room with glass windows that open from within the frame in order to let fresh air flow. Finally, another renovation made for the public is the building that offers rental space for meetings.

Various workshops will be held within the ELC such as basket weaving, yoga and meditation.

"For Oregon City, for Clackamas Community College, for the surrounding area, this place is really important," said Beth Grant, an attendee of the Earth Day workday.

"I want people to get out there and appreciate nature again. Our heritage comes from appreciating nature and I feel like if we can find that interconnectedness in nature then maybe we could find the connectedness with each other again."

As a whole, the ELC is vital to our community if we hope to preserve nature and lessen the harm that we inflict on a daily basis.

"It's not just us here on planet earth, or in Oregon City or even on this campus," Yoder said. "As cliché as it sounds, we are connected to our environment. What we do directly impacts other living beings and being eco-friendly is acknowledging that we are living here too and so are you. It's us taking responsibility for our actions."



The nature surrounding the Environmental Learning Center.

Ready to complete your degree?

\$250 Visit Scholarship just for visiting campus!



Transfer to Concordia University

and develop the skills you need to begin your career.

Scholarships of \$7,000 to \$14,000 per year make a

bachelor's degree affordable. Block transfers and helpful transfer coordinators make the admission process easy.

There's even a \$250 scholarship just for visiting campus.

Call, click, or come by today.



CONCORDIA
UNIVERSITY

PORTLAND • OREGON

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

VISIT: WWW.TRANSFERTOCONCORDIA.COM

CALL: 503-280-8501 / 1-800-321-9371

EMAIL: ADMISSION@CU-PORTLAND.EDU

Let's Go!