Catawba Assumes Leadership Position in Solar Energy

After 20 years of sustained environmental efforts, Catawba College’s Green Step Initiative will catapult the college ahead of all other North Carolina colleges and universities in the implementation of solar energy. The Green Step Initiative is a campaign created in 2007 that is designed to make Catawba an environmentally neutral campus by the year 2030.

When completed in early 2015, the solar installations on seven separate buildings and a covered parking area will rank as the second largest campus solar energy installation in the Southeast, says President of Innovative Design Mike Nicklas, the project’s consultant and facilitator.

Construction will begin this year on eight solar electric systems, which are rated at one megawatt of capacity. “We will produce more solar electricity than that...”

Solarize Salisbury-Rowan to Save Residents Money

An innovative program to help individuals and businesses save on electricity costs is available to residents of Salisbury, Rowan County and the surrounding area until the end of the year. Solarize Salisbury-Rowan is a community initiative designed to inform residents of the advantages of solar power for their homes and businesses and to reduce costs through competitive bids by pre-approved installers, thereby streamlining the process.

It is a partnership between SmartPower, a national non-profit organization focusing on clean energy, and the Center for the Environment at Catawba College.

Expectations of success are high for Solarize Salisbury-Rowan since North Carolina boasts a 35 percent state tax incentive in addition to the 30 percent federal tax credit - making solar a smart investment and a proven way to lower energy bills. However, the tax incentives will soon expire so officials counsel residents who are interested in installing a solar power system to act soon.

Over the next 25 years an average resident can be expected to pay about $36,000 in electricity bills. With solar costing only around $9,000, this investment would save a homeowner about $25,000 on electricity bills during that period. A no-money down loan affords residents and business owners the opportunity to purchase solar with no upfront costs.

(For more on Leadership Position, go to page 7.)

(For more on Solarize Salisbury-Rowan, go to page 7.)
The Center for the Environment has been in the business of fostering leadership in its students, staff and volunteers for nearly two decades now. It is one of the most rewarding parts of our mission.

By helping “turn information into transformation,” in the words of Richard Rohr, we shepherd students as they develop qualities essential for effective leaders. It’s very satisfying to watch leaders emerge from the ranks in the classroom, in programs like our Environmental Stewards and through our sustainable efforts on campus such as the many initiatives generated by students themselves through the Green Revolving Fund.

The Environmental Stewards Program is proving to be an excellent incubator for leaders. Students inside and outside the program initiate projects that lessen Catawba College’s environmental footprint and demonstrate to other students the importance of living sustainably. Students, faculty and staff offer strategies to reduce energy and other valuable resources, which can be funded with mini-grants from our Green Revolving Fund. Others seek opportunities to educate children and the public about the importance of caring for the environment.

These burgeoning leaders serve as “multipliers.” They take what they have learned and, by influencing others, they multiply the number of people who are affected by the Center and its mission. The added benefit, of course, is that they will continue multiplying that impact throughout their lives. So the Center’s reach extends to classrooms and communities throughout the country.

We begin by planting the seed in our students – and our participants in the National Environmental Summit for High School Students – that they have the capacity to have a positive impact on others, on their community and on the world. Most haven’t considered that they can make a difference now. They don’t have to wait until later when they are firmly established in a career. It’s a new concept for them.

But once they begin operating out of that mindset, they do amazing things: They create educational programming for the community or initiate a bike-share program or install catchment areas for collecting rainwater. They discover that they can present their plans to the Green Revolving Fund Committee and receive grants to fund their projects. They learn how to galvanize others behind a cause. And finally their actions set a model for others to follow.

Somewhere in that process “information becomes transformation,” and students become multipliers. The staff and I have found little more satisfying than guiding students, helping them develop critical knowledge and skills, and watching as they emerge as effective leaders who are committed to the environment and a sustainable life.

Message from the Director

Fostering Leadership Multiplies our Impact

By Dr. John E. Wear, Jr.

The Center for the Environment has been in the business of fostering leadership in its students, staff and volunteers for nearly two decades now. It is one of the most rewarding parts of our mission.

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Green Revolving Fund Promotes Sustainability

The Green Revolving Fund (GRF) has now finished its first year of projects. Established in 2012 as a way to fund sustainable projects at Catawba, the revolving fund began accepting proposals in the 2013-2014 school year.

In that time, the revolving fund sponsored a student-run sustainable garden, a composting system for the cafeteria, a water catchment system in the greenhouse, recycling bins in the freshmen residence halls and a project to replace the bulbs in the Robertson College Community Center with LED lighting and to install motion light controls in the Cannon Student Center.

“I think it was a terrific start,” Catawba College President Brien Lewis said.

The fund provides mini-grants to students and others who wish to carry out environmentally focused projects on campus. “The mini-grant program gives students who come up with ideas and have the passion to carry those projects through an excellent opportunity to have a positive and often lasting impact on the campus community,” says Center for the Environment Executive Director Dr. John Wear.

Wear, who co-chairs the GRF with Lewis, notes that campus sustainability is not the only thing the GRF (For more on Green Revolving Fund, go to page 4.)

‘A Gallon a Day’ Encourages Sustainable Lifestyles

In the fall of 2013 Catawba Senior Dan Couchenour had a novel idea. What if he could make students more aware of their water use in dorms? So he created “A Gallon a Day,” a project that tracked students’ water usage to encourage them to conserve water—thereby saving money. As incentive, the money students saved on the water bill was put into a fund to be used for a student-chosen project, new project leader Joel Schlaudt says. “That amount was matched dollar for dollar by a donor,” he says.

Schlaudt took over the project at the end of the 2013-2014 school year when it became apparent that the project would extend at least another year.

“It has changed into something bigger,” Schlaudt says. “It now focuses on helping students become aware of not only their water usage but their whole lifestyle. It encourages them to use less paper, waste less food and recycle.”

Through savings and matched donations “A Gallon a Day” has accrued over $4,400 which includes the match. Project leaders recently purchased 12 new yellow bicycles with baskets, helmets and locks from the local Skinny Wheels bike shop, and students have the opportunity to check them out, much like they would a library book. As demand increases more bikes will be purchased.

During the fall 2014 semester, Schlaudt held a T-shirt design contest for the spring Green Campus Challenge. The challenge itself is designed to encourage students to meet certain sustainable criteria to win points. Schlaudt’s goal, he says, is to make his fellow students aware of their choices so they can make deliberate and simple decisions toward sustainability.

Rebecca Rider
Environmental Stewards Lead the Way

When it comes to building bridges between the Center for the Environment and the Salisbury community, Catawba College's Environmental Stewards step to the fore.

Dr. John Wear, the Center’s executive director who coordinates the program, notes that the Stewards are made up of students who are passionate about environmental awareness and good environmental stewards of both the campus and greater community.

The program includes students from any academic major on campus but requires that at a minimum they minor in one of the four environmental degree programs. This hardworking group collaborates on outreach projects to educate and lead Catawba College in environmentally focused projects.

Overall, they work to create projects that provide sustainable solutions on campus as well as better environmental awareness. Projects often reduce water and energy use or reduce waste. All of these efforts lessen negative environmental impacts.

They run on-campus projects and run community outreach programs – many of which focus on getting children interested in the environment.

“Parents learn from their children these days, not the other way around,” Steward Colleen Smiley said.

This year’s projects include a wide variety of initiatives, such as helping with the LandTrust for Central North Carolina’s Spencer Woods clean-up day.

The current group of Stewards has been collaborating on two major projects. “A Gallon a Day,” a project under the current leadership of sophomore Joel Schlaudt, focuses on conserving water in campus dorms, with money saved going to purchase bicycles for a campus bike-share program.

The other project – led by Smiley with Payden Mitchell and Eli Whittum – aims to identify all plants and animals in the 189-acre Stanback Ecological Preserve and 300-acre Catawba Wildlife Refuge.

“If it grows, if it breathes, if it walks, if it crawls,” Smiley said, it will be added to the database.

The program is funded through the National Wildlife Association as a Fellow’s Project and dubbed the Citizen’s Science Project. The Stewards will create a database of anything found in the preserve and make the information available to the public via phone, iPad or computer. When the database is in operation, visitors to the preserve will be able to snap a photo of anything they see and the app will identify it for them. The app will also alert users of poisonous, venomous and endangered species. A GPS will tag the photo on a map to help the Center for the Environment track habitat migration.

“It will be another way to keep track of what’s in the preserve,” said Smiley.

While both projects are ongoing, they are beginning to bear fruit. The Citizen Science Project is nearly ready to go live, and the water conservation project is expanding its focus to other sustainable living practices. Both point to the Stewards’ determination to continue to lead the way for their campus and community.

Green Revolving Fund

(Continued from page 3)

has fostered. “It also accomplished something that is in many ways just as important, if not more so,” he says. “The fund has allowed the students who submit their ideas to follow through as stewards of those projects to see them completed. This is a very important part of the personal growth of our students and helps set the standard for students who follow. We are truly seeing a growing enthusiasm in student participation in campus sustainability activities as a result.”

This year the committee will also begin measuring the effects of the previous projects. Center for the Environment intern Sloan Kessler has been working with Wear to account for the specific impacts and savings for each project so that savings can be funneled back into the revolving fund.

While the GRF projects are beginning to produce visible results, they are also bringing unexpected benefits. Lewis says that, in some ways, the fund unites the campus. Last year, the committee received proposals from faculty, staff, students and board members, and many of the projects have been collaborative. In addition to promoting sustainability, the revolving fund has been bringing the people of Catawba together.

“It has been a success on a number of levels,” Lewis said.
In July high schoolers from across the country had a unique opportunity to get up close and personal with environmental issues and experts in the field. The National Environmental Summit, hosted by the Center for the Environment at Catawba College in partnership with Rocky Mountain Institute of Colorado, encouraged teens aged 14 to 17 to learn about sustainability issues and gave them the tools they need to start environmental programs in their own schools and hometowns.

The program featured speakers such as Robin Emmons, CNN Hero of the Year and founder of Sow Much Good; Heather White, executive director of Environmental Working Group; and Francis Koster, author of Discovering the New America: Where Local Communities are Solving National Problems.

The summit allows students to pick a focus area for studying the environment, fine-tune their own skills and interests, learn valuable communication skills that they can use during interviews and presentations, and conduct various experiments and fun team-building activities in and around the college’s Stanback Ecological Preserve. The summit offers an opportunity for students who are passionate about the environment to meet like-minded individuals and to learn skills they will use for the rest of their lives.

Rebecca Rider
Solarize Salisbury-Rowan Plans to Save Residents Money

(Continued from page 1)

but will still save thousands of dollars over the lifetime of the solar energy system.

When customers go onto the Solarize Salisbury-Rowan website, they will be linked to an on-line “solar marketplace” that has pre-screened and qualified local installers to participate in the program. By visiting the site they can learn how much their home or businesses will save by going solar. From there, they can decide if they want quotes from participating North Carolina installers. When they are satisfied with the quote, they may ask installers to make on-site assessments, which will provide a more precise solar system recommendation.

“If you’ve ever thought about looking into solar power, this is the time to do it,” says Brian F. Keane, president of SmartPower, the non-profit organization that is running Solarize Salisbury-Rowan. “Through our award-winning, on-the-ground outreach, combined with our online ‘solar marketplace,’ we think Solarize Salisbury-Rowan will
Catawba Assumes Leadership Position in Solar Energy

(Continued from page 1)

break new records and become a new leader in residential solar adoption.”

Dr. John Wear, Center for the Environment executive director, notes that the campaign provides numerous benefits to the community and its residents. “We’re creating a solar community market for area citizens and business owners, much like a farmers’ market,” he says. “It’s a community service that will save people money and help reduce our dependence on fossil fuels at the same time.”

Solarize Salisbury-Rowan is available to all Rowan County residents, as well as others who live in the region, until December 31. “Time is running out because the tax incentives will soon expire,” says Lane Wallace, Solarize Salisbury-Rowan’s community outreach manager. “Now is the time to act.”

Residents and businesses interested in learning more about Solarize Salisbury-Rowan can contact Wallace at lwallace@smartpower.org or call (704) 637-4727 or visit www.SolarizeSalisbury-Rowan.com.

“All these entities together are really helping make this campus move to the forefront as a leader in sustainability,” Wear says.

Solar plays to Catawba’s strengths and is the next logical step, Catawba College President Brien Lewis says. “It seizes things that are already in reach and uses them to improve the quality of education for the students,” he says. “We already have the Center for the Environment; we already have the preserve.”

The panels will operate on a net metered system, and the energy produced will be used to offset Catawba’s utility bill. The project has been funded by creative strategies that utilize funds donated to the college and funds provided as investments by individuals.

“The combination of those efforts over the next 20 years will save the college nearly $5 million,” Nicklas says.

“Catawba’s aggressive efforts to reduce the college’s energy consumption from non-renewable energy by 11-12 percent will serve as a wonderful example to others about what is possible in our battle against climate change,” Wear says. “Part of our role as an institution of higher learning is to function in ways that address societal and community issues while teaching in more socially relevant ways. Our Green Step Initiative does exactly that while increasing both the environmental and economic sustainability of this college.”

Making this significant solar move will set the school apart from other colleges, Lewis says. “It will be a very visible manifestation of the college’s commitment to sustainability.”

Rebecca Rider

Cost comparison reveals that solar is the least expensive energy.
During the summer months the Center for the Environment continues its mission with outreach projects, activities and the National Environmental Summit for High School Students. Many of the Center’s summer programs are made possible by the hard work of its interns, who help set up and plan outreach programs, work on projects, keep social media sites updated and arrange for speakers.

The 2014 crew was a particularly strong group of summer interns that hailed from as close as Salisbury and as far away as China.

Sloan Kessler is a sustainable business and community development major from Onalaska, Wis. Kessler spent the summer gathering and inputting data related to the campus’ many sustainability efforts. Those efforts included updating the school’s greenhouse gas report for Catawba’s American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment as well as gathering information needed for the campus’ Green Revolving Fund.

“I had a great time working with the two Chinese graduate students who were interns from Duke University and enjoyed learning new things about how resource tracking is involved – especially at a post-secondary institution,” Kessler said.

Kessler is interested in fields that require the same method of data entry and compilation she used this summer, so her work at the Center is helping prepare her for her future.

Colleen Smiley, a senior environmental studies major at Catawba, is a second-year intern at the Center. She spent her summer managing Symbaloo – an online tool that provides STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) resources to teachers. She also helped with the National Environmental Summit. Smiley says she loves interning at the Center because she has a great opportunity to establish friendships and working relationships and meet a variety of people.

“If you want to succeed, this is the place to do it,” Smiley said.

The Center also had two Stanback interns from Duke University this summer. Wenjia Zhu is a graduate student at Duke pursuing a master’s degree in environmental management. Zhu said that while she could pick from several organizations for her internship with the Stanback program, she chose to intern at the Center because she knew that it was a leading environmental organization and felt that she could best develop her skills here. Zhu helped plan and run Salisbury’s Friday Night Out activities and the National Environmental Summit, worked with the American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment and attended the Appalachian Energy Summit. Zhu said that she gained a lot from participating in the Summit and listening to the various speakers.

“I was inspired by their personal stories,” she said.

Yimin Shen, the other Stanback intern, traveled from Jiangxi, China. Shen is a senior at Duke University pursuing a degree in East Asian Studies with a focus on cultural anthropology and cultural studies.

“The reason I chose to intern at Catawba is that there are programs and activities in the Center that focus on youth especially as part of the Center’s efforts to give students experience in community education,” Shen said.
The Center for the Environment brought a number of prominent speakers to Catawba College this year. They educated the community about healthy behaviors, environmental risks and sustainable programs.

Speakers for 2014 included Rick Dove, an award-winning former Riverkeeper, on pollution in North Carolina’s coastal rivers from animal and coal industries; Dr. Marisa Weiss, founder and president of breastcancer.org, on lifestyle changes that can help reduce the risk of breast cancer; Dr. Patrick Angel, senior forester and soil scientist for the U.S. Department of the Interior’s Office of Surface Mining, on reforesting surface mines in Appalachia; and Dr. Francis Koster, author of Discovering the New America: Where Local Communities are Solving National Problems, on the science behind the climate change debate.

The Center also hosted viewings of several award-winning documentaries, such as “Cafeteria Man,” followed by panel discussions featuring professionals from the community.

Summit: Reduce Energy

Catawba College students Colleen Smiley, Payden Mitchell and Eli Wittum were selected to attend the third Appalachian Energy Summit (AES) this summer at Appalachian State University. Students from North Carolina colleges are invited to attend based on their passion for energy conservation and their dedication to the subject in school.

The summit gathers leaders from higher education across the state of North Carolina for a period of brainstorming, sharing and learning. Representatives from businesses and universities that have successfully managed to reduce energy consumption speak to students, encouraging them to spearhead energy reduction efforts on their campuses.

The Summit’s main goal, says Center for the Environment founder Dr. John Wear, is to reduce energy use in schools across the state. The Center for the Environment has close ties with the summit because members of the Center’s advisory board were instrumental in forming the AES three years ago.

“It has been a great opportunity for Catawba to be a part of that initiative,” Wear said.

Rebecca Rider

Recycling Increases in Residence Halls

The installation of recycling and waste stations in five residence halls has precipitated the largest increase in recycled plastic drink bottles at Catawba in recent history. The installation was funded by the Green Revolving Fund, which has earmarked more money to expand the project.

The college captured more than 2,500 pounds of plastic and 300 pounds of aluminum cans from June through September. Glass, steel can and paper/cardboard recycling has also noticeably increased, says David Najarian, director of Environmental Services and 1997 Catawba graduate. Total recycling since June 1, including scrap metal, stands at 29,000 pounds.

“Our trash compactor, which last year was being emptied on average once every two weeks, is now emptied on average every three weeks, thanks to the increase in recycling efforts across campus,” Najarian says.
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- ‘Gallon a Day’ Offers Bike-Sharing Program (Page 3)
- Environmental Stewards Lead Way (Page 4)
- Solarize Salisbury-Rowan Kickoff Photos (Page 6)

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