

**Campus Events, General Information****Going Green: LSU Hilltop Arboretum Sharpens Its Focus on Sustainable Design and Gardening**

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Photo available for download at <http://www.lsu.edu/pa/photos>

BATON ROUGE – Over the years, many have visited the LSU Hilltop Arboretum to see its extensive collection of Louisiana native trees and shrubs and enjoy the peace and serenity of nature.

What many may not know is that the lush, 14-acre nature sanctuary located on Highland Road south of the LSU campus is also a dynamic, educational arm of LSU's top-ranked Robert S. Reich School of Landscape Architecture that, in recent years, has sharpened its focus on sustainability and expanded the list of programs it offers for professionals and students of all ages.

Part of that focus includes plans for a new enclosed educational facility that will be the first building at LSU registered with the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, program and will have the program's prestigious Silver distinction. Not only will the facility be a model of smart "green building" and sustainable design, but it will enable the arboretum to double its capacity for presentations and classroom-style lectures.

"Hilltop is really a place where you come to study design," said arboretum director Peggy Coates. "Whether it's a group of children, adults or professionals, we're trying to make this the center for sustainable design and sustainable gardening."

That is what the late Emory Smith wanted when he left the sanctuary in 1981 to the LSU School of Landscape Architecture, which has since been renamed the Robert S. Reich School of Landscape Architecture. Then 90 years old, Smith wanted the grounds to be used as a teaching tool and as a place the community in general would enjoy.

There is certainly plenty to enjoy about the arboretum. It showcases dozens of Louisiana native shrubs and trees on property that includes a 20-foot ravine. Its pathways wind through a bamboo grove and under a towering "cathedral," where tree canopies form a green protective roof. It is also home to a variety of avian wildlife, as well as rabbits, squirrels and as many as six varieties of snakes.

The complex also includes a gift shop, a small meeting room and a large open-air pavilion, which is used for gatherings and social events during most of the year. It is open to the public, but also available for private parties.

For years, the arboretum has offered a variety of popular programs. Its Plant Fest event is a major fundraiser in the fall and boasts one of the broadest selections of plants in the country. Its spring and fall garden tours showcase some of the city's most prized gardens. It also sponsors lectures by nationally recognized experts.

But in recent years, the arboretum has honed its focus on sustainable gardening and design. To that end, it has created several new programs designed to educate professionals, students and the general public about the importance of sustainability when planting.

"The idea that you have to manage a landscape is something very important to get into your thinking," Coates said. "With that come issues like what is the best material to plant with, what's going to maintain the native character of the area, what kind of plants and trees will do best here? That's what this is all about."

The Junior Master Gardner Program is a way school-age children are introduced to those kinds of issues. Created in partnership with the Junior League of Baton Rouge and the Boys and Girls Club of Baton Rouge, the program is held in the spring over four consecutive weekends and is a fun, hands-on way for kids to learn about responsible gardening.

A grown-up version of the program is the Sustainable Landscape Series, an adult education program focused on sustainable landscape design, gardening and tree care. Coates said that such topics are especially important since Hurricane Gustav leveled so many of Baton Rouge's older trees.

"When you look at what we've lost, first in Andrew then in Gustav, you realize how important it is that we consider planting what is best for the soil and climate," said Coates.

The LSU Hilltop Arboretum has also created a new event called Landscape Architecture Day. It will be held this year for the first time on April 11 to coincide with the American Society of Landscape Architect's National Awareness Day and will be open to high school students and Boy Scouts, who will be able to earn their landscape architecture badges.

"Students from the Robert Reich School are going to come, as are members from the local ASLA chapter, and they will be able to interact with the Boy Scouts and the high school students," Coates explains. "By the end of the day, they will have badges. But it's really about getting them interested in the field."

Hilltop also offers summer camp for younger children, as well as programs for teachers and speaker series.

"A lot of people still connect Hilltop with what it has been — a place for ladies to go and organize garden tours and pot plants," said Cathy Coates, president of Friends of Hilltop Arboretum and no relation to Peggy Coates. "But we've come a long way since then. We're an important educational organization."

As it looks to the future, LSU Hilltop Arboretum is hoping to do even more. It is currently raising money to build an enclosed educational facility, which will be located off the east side of the open-air pavilion. The facility has been in the works since 2000, but was never constructed because funding ran out. Fundraising is currently on hold, but the project is still about \$90,000 away from being able to go to bid and some \$170,000 away from groundbreaking.

Still, supporters are optimistic they will be able to raise funds once the economy improves and they are optimistic about what the new facility will be able to do for the arboretum once completed. It could more than double the current capacity for educational forums, presentations and classroom groups. It will also give the arboretum more flexibility to host year-round events, without having to worry about the weather.

The new building is already LEED-registered, a designation that comes from the United States Green Building Council. It is given to buildings that meet strict criteria for sustainable, energy-efficient and environmentally friendly design. The internationally recognized firm of Lake/FLATO Architects, which designed the existing facilities, has done the design for the new building and it meets the prestigious LEED Silver standards.

"We're excited that we will be the first building in this area to have such a distinction," said Cathy Coates. "And we're especially excited about how this will help us to further our mission and reach so many more people in the community."

While construction of the new facility will depend on support from the community, Hilltop supporters look forward to the day when they will be able to truly fulfill the mission envisioned by Emory Smith.

"There are so many more things we can do," said Peggy Coates. "We're trying to develop new ways of thinking about Hilltop."

The LSU Hilltop Arboretum is located at 11855 Highland Road, Baton Rouge. It is open to the public free of charge during daylight hours seven days a week. Self-guided tour maps are located on the grounds. To schedule group tours, contact the Hilltop Arboretum office at 225-767-6916 Tuesday-Friday between the hours of 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.

For more information on the LSU Hilltop Arboretum, visit <http://hilltop.lsu.edu>.

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