

Changing the face of OARDC/OSU

By Linda Hall / Staff Writer

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WOOSTER — New construction on the campus of the OARDC means more than meets the eye.

The look of the campus spanning the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center and The Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute will change significantly over the next two years, beginning with the \$33.5 million, 60,000-square-foot building in which students from ATI will acquire classroom space; and the OARDC will gain a new entomology department.

But the physical evolution of the campus is just part of the story; the way the changes will impact programming and academics is the other.

Although they have been operating independently, said ATI Director Dr. Kristina Boone, the OARDC and ATI are "both units within the College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at OSU."

Working together, they'll be more effective and efficient in meeting Ohio's needs "in teaching, research and extension or outreach," Boone said.

The closer connection will offer "expanded opportunities to engage with faculty in research, which can open new career doors and influence critical thinking — a skill set that is crucial in today's world," she said.

"Many students currently work with Wooster campus faculty and staff in research, and bringing our Wooster campus together will help that increase," she said.

"We know that the more connections students have with people who work on their campus, the more likely that students will go on to become our graduates," said Boone, citing "89 percent of our students choose Wooster as their campus of first choice in the Ohio State campus system." The graduate students on the Wooster campus of OSU also will benefit, said Boone, by taking part in "student life programming that involves them." Additionally, "Our graduate students are able to access outstanding researchers, and, with the unification, they have the opportunity to learn from top-shelf educators."

The area of programming is an initiative being pursued by ATI with the assistance of Dr. Thom Janini, who joined the ATI faculty in 2007 and served as an interim director before Boone became director.

"(Janini) is leading our efforts related to this from a student life programming perspective," Boone said, to come up with "activities, events and programs that help build the student's skill set."

"Some are fun or recreational events; others are support systems for low-income, first gen, or disabled students," she said.

The transformation on all fronts is earning the OARDC/ATI a new label — the Wooster campus of OSU.

The concept has been taking shape over the last four years, according to Dr. David Benfield, director of the Wooster campus and associate vice president for agricultural administration, who said the strategy being implemented "makes more of an integrated campus."

The Wooster campus will ultimately "be like the main campus" in Columbus, but with fewer students, Benfield said.

The Wooster Campus Science Building, its name at least for now, is the most visible change.

"(Contractors) are digging up the parking lot, starting (June 10)," he said, adding the project will take about 18-24 months to complete.

The three-story building will bring ATI students over to the OARDC portion of the campus to use the science labs and large classrooms to be constructed on the main floor, which also will encompass a bug zoo and food kiosk.

The department of entomology, now located in Thorne Hall, will occupy the second floor of the new structure. When the new building is finished, Thorne Hall will be demolished.

The third floor will be unfinished to start, and may be used for future expansion of laboratories or for office space for new faculty potentially to be hired.

Construction of a new building "made more sense" than renovating Halterman Hall at ATI, Benfield said, and as a result, he, like Boone, anticipates "more interaction" between undergraduate and graduate students.

Also on the future agenda is a redesign of Fisher Auditorium to use open space more efficiently, he said, and to incorporate a new student services department.

In other overall upcoming initiatives, a new center for work force development is in the works, as are student engagement opportunities for service and leadership; and an additional focus on trans-disciplinary research bringing together "ideas to meet a major challenge (in the areas of) sustainability ... and 'one health — the nexus of human, animal and environmental," Benfield said.

All efforts are encompassed within advancement of "the culture of one college, one campus," he said.

"We're moving ahead on a lot of different things," Benfield said. "It's an exciting time. The campus will be really different in the next two years."

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