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Georgia Southern University celebrates Arbor Day

FEBRUARY 19, 2016



A breezy, cool morning didn't deter more than 100 Georgia Southern students from trekking across Veterans Parkway to the new South Campus to help plant more than 1,000 slash pine tree seedlings in celebration of Arbor Day.

Unlike National Arbor Day which is recognized in April, Arbor Day in Georgia is celebrated on the third Friday of February. Because of the more subtropical climate in the southeast, planting this time of year gives trees a better chance at survival.

The day not only provides an opportunity to celebrate trees and the benefits they provide to the environment, but closer to home, it also gives students the opportunity to appreciate their campus, according to assistant professor of biology, Subhrajit Saha, Ph.D.

"This event is not only celebration of trees or sustainability, Arbor Day connects the students to soil and nature. They are getting hands-on experience of planting trees and naming them," he said.

"Fifteen to 20 years from now, when they come back as alumni with their family, they will see the

how big the trees have become that they planted and named. It is like leaving a mark or a piece of them on campus that will remind and connect them better to the old college days and Georgia Southern University.”

The [South Campus property](#) is located across Veterans Parkway near Lanier Drive. While the land is undeveloped, Saha said the trees will provide many benefits for the property as it is developed.

“As the trees grow, they will create a live barrier from the road so we will have less noise, it’ll provide a wind break, we’ll have soil erosion reduction, it’ll create a nice view and it will create a great habitat for biodiversity — more birds, small mammals and more,” he said. “Altogether this celebration is ecologically, environmentally and educationally an ideal thing to do.”

Interim University President Jean Bartels, Ph.D., RN, joined the celebration and helped plant the first seedling of the day.

“If you have been on our campus at any point in time, you know the beauty of our campus,” she said. “It is full of green spaces and it’s a wonderful place to observe what happens when you take care of the environment in your area.

“Georgia Southern has a long tradition of its association with trees,” she continued. “We have an official forestry place on campus that is a document to the fact that Georgia Southern is very dedicated to what happens with the environment. We plant trees every year, we’ve done this for many years, and it’s a way to continue our legacy of building a beautiful, green campus and one that really celebrates trees.”

In addition to celebrating trees and helping beautify campus, Saha said the event aids students by giving them hands-on application of what they are learning in the classroom.

“Some of these students are taking classes in biology of plants, sustainable forestry, environmental biology and others, so they learn about trees and see tree management in pictures, but this is the time they get connected to nature, and this is a practical application of what they’re learning in class,” he said, noting students also added mulch around the base of each seedling, expanding their hands-on experience even more.

Kennard Sutton was among many students who picked up a shovel to help. He’s taken more than five classes with Saha, and has participated in the event since its inception in 2013.

“This event is important to me because we’re helping out. We’re helping out the environment itself, and helping it improve overall here in Statesboro,” he said. “With us helping to plant new trees, it makes Statesboro look better overall and we also are helping out the future kids who come [to school] here so they might want to come and help out the environment too.”

The annual tree planting is a combined effort from Saha's students, faculty and student volunteers within the College of Science and Mathematics and other colleges on campus, the Division of Facilities Services and the Center for Sustainability. In past years, volunteers have planted trees on the banks of Beautiful Eagle Creek and on campus near the Lady Eagles' Softball Fields.