

## **Recent Roots Newsletter Highlights, Winter 2016:**

### **Enhanced Learning with Agri-theatre Improvements**

Opened in 1981 and well utilized for 35 years, it was time to give the Agri-theatre lecture hall a facelift.

On Monday, October 5, 2015, the doors to the Agri-theatre reopened, showcasing an attractive, comfortable and revitalized theatre. The renovated facility now accommodates 215 students, enough seats to hold the record-breaking first year agricultural diploma class of 188 students.

The demand for this lecture space is significant. With total Agriculture Diploma enrollment close to 330 students, this room will be home to many lectures. "It's the only room on campus large enough to hold many classes," says Liz Meidlinger, Manager, Communications and Advancement. "A strong interest in agriculture careers is reflected in strong student numbers for another year."

Theatre improvements include new seating and desktops, new dimmable lighting, accessible teaching desk, updated education technology, and acoustic improvements. Familiar to all Westags, the Agri-theatre has provided lecture style seating for more students, conference guests and special presentations than any other room on campus for the last three decades.

Theatre improvements were managed by campus Chief Executive Officer, John Brooks, along with Campus Facilities Manager, Doug Howse. In addition, information technology (IT) staff member, Joseph Krogman, provided important input throughout the renovation process.

Along with improvements to the Agri-theatre, there were several further capital enhancements throughout the campus in recent months. Overall, \$2-3 million in investment was completed through the support of the Agriculture Research Institute of Ontario (ARIO).

It was a very busy summer for project management leaders and the management team. Thank you to everyone for your hard work.

### **Researchers Studying Sugar Corn**

In a project funded by the Grain Farmers of Ontario and the OMAFRA – University of Guelph Partnership, researchers at Ridgetown Campus are currently studying the creation of alternative energy using novel "sugar corn" varieties.

In comparison to traditional corn which concentrates energy in kernels, sugar corn has sucrose-rich juice that remains in the stalk much like sugarcane. When the corn stalks are pressed, a juice can be collected and then fermented into ethanol. Led by Professor Brandon Gilroyed, Department of Environmental Sciences, and in collaboration with Dr. Argyrios Margaritis at the University of Western Ontario, the researchers are studying the agronomics of sugar corn varieties grown in southwestern Ontario and their potential for creating renewable energy as ethanol, butanol and biogas.

“We may be able to avoid expensive upstream processes associated with conventional corn by instead growing sugar corn that naturally yields a lot of sucrose, which is directly fermentable,” said Gilroyed. “If so, ethanol production using corn becomes a lot more economically attractive.

This year’s sugar corn crop, which has a shorter growing season, has already been harvested. In addition to ethanol and butanol production, Gilroyed, biofuels researcher Rob Nicol and biomass researcher Doug Young, will also study potential uses for corn stalks left after pressing. The stalks will be tested as a substrate for biogas production and the silage will also be tested as livestock feed.

### **‘Doctor Dave’ Honoured with OAC Award Extension**

Over the past five years, Dr. David Hooker has delivered nearly 200 presentations, written various research papers, contributed to numerous publications and built a large Twitter following. In recognition of his creativity and outstanding commitment to information sharing, “Doctor Dave” was awarded the 2015 OAC Award for Excellence in Extension at the OAC Community Barbeque on Tuesday, September 15.

Dr. Hooker, Assistant Professor and Field Crop Agronomist, recognizes the importance of extension for distributing information to the wider agriculture sector. “It was an honour to be recognized,” said Hooker. “Extension is all about sharing information and the results of research. I enjoy finding creative ways to do so.”

It is Dr. Hooker’s creativity in capturing the sector’s interest that places him at the top of extension work. As an engaging speaker, social media expert, excellent writer and personable professor, Dr. Hooker is respected across the Ontario agriculture sector.

“It is always impressive to watch a truly excellent extension specialist at the front of the room, holding the audience’s attention, delivering a relevant message from a base of good science,” said Peter Johnson, Agronomist, Real Agriculture. “Dr. Dave puts a checkmark in every one of these boxes, and is absolutely one of the best.”

### **Robinson Honoured for Research Achievements**

At the recent 70th annual meeting of the North Central Weed Science Society (NCWSS) in Indianapolis, IN, Dr. Darren Robinson, Associate Professor, Plant Agriculture, received the Distinguished Achievement Award in Research. Darren’s research focuses on high value vegetable crops including tomatoes, sweet corn, cucumbers, pumpkins, squash, green and lima beans, field peppers, carrots, red beets, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, potatoes and peas.

Selection for this award is based on demonstrated excellence and creativity in research activities and applying the results to solve problems in weed science.

As a well-respected Ontario agricultural scientist, Darren has published 85 peer reviewed manuscripts, authored or co-authored three book chapters, supervised or co-supervised 14 graduate students,

presented 74 papers at scientific conferences, given over 120 extension presentations and helped deliver 19 short courses.

Darren has served on the board of the Canadian Weed Science Society and is an Associate Editor for the Canadian Journal of Plant Science and Weed Technology.

Congratulations on this significant research achievement, Darren!

## **Scholarship Honours Alumnus**

To honour the late Gordon Illes, Class of 1974, the Illes family has developed the Gordon Illes Memorial Scholarship to support a student heading off to study at Ridgetown. Recipients are individuals who combine academic excellence in high school with leadership and proven community involvement, and aspire to an agriculture career.

In mid-November, Hilda Illes was on campus to present the very first \$1,000 scholarship to Anthony Sacks, Agriculture Diploma student.

Anthony completed high school at Chesley District Community School where he was involved in the curling, badminton, and archery teams, along with involvement in the senior band and jazz band. His leadership was exhibited with participation in the music council and the student government. Outside of school Anthony was active in the Chesley curling club, 4-H clubs, and his faith community.

Sincere thanks to the Illes family for their terrific support to students entering Ridgetown Campus in pursuit of excellence

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