Canada’s dry bean industry received a big boost for a new research initiative that will enhance quality and improve world-wide marketability of white and coloured beans. The federal government has announced they will be contributing almost $800,000 to research being led by Ridgetown Campus scientist, Chris Gillard.

Getting beans to mature evenly is critical for top quality, and growers often use a desiccant as a harvest-aid to control weeds and ensure uniform, rapid dry-down of beans. Gillard says there is a lack of information on the desiccants in regards to application timing and rate effect on crop yield and quality. “The objective of this research is to provide new environmentally and economically sustainable harvest-aid programs for dry beans that will provide the best quality bean for our customers,” he says.

Much of the research will occur in Huron, Perth and Middlesex counties where dry bean production is a large part of farm revenue. Canada is the fourth largest exporter of dry beans in the world, valued at $136 million annually.

Mr. Bev Shipley, MPP for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, made the funding announcement at Ridgetown Campus’ Huron Research Station near Exeter. “We want to help farmers succeed by creating new opportunities for Canadian producers through investment and innovation,” says Shipley. “I’ve been a dry bean producer, and I know what this investment means to this industry.” This is the first investment announced under the Developing Innovative Agri-Products (DIAP) program, which supports industry-led science and technology projects.

In addition to DIAP funding, the project is receiving significant funds from CanAdvance, and further project funding from several producer and industry organizations including: Ontario Agri-Business Association, Ontario White Bean Producers, Ontario Coloured Bean Growers Association, Manitoba Pulse Growers, BASF, Valent, and Nufarm.

Continued on page 5
Director, Ridgetown Campus | Congratulations!  
Record Registrations for September Classes  
September 2009 saw the largest student enrollment in Ridgetown’s history with just over 600 students registered for classes.  
I want to thank each one of our teaching and administration staff for rising to the occasion when enrollment figures increased 38%. Everyone pitched in working extra hard – adapting teaching techniques for bigger classes, arranging more textbooks, adjusting timetables and allocating space, staying late to assist with long lines for student inquiries on loans, signing in and paying fees – all to accommodate the increase. Increased pressure on residence and cafeteria services was also part of the big challenge!  
Math instructor Chris Gillard and soils instructor Doug Young had over 200 students enrolled in each of these introductory courses, which resulted in seven different lab sessions. Additional marking and lab assistants were hired, for these courses and others, to make sure everyone had enough support.  
Agriculture Diploma program junior year enrollment numbers were up 90% from September 2008, a trend partially attributed to the down turn in manufacturing, as well as good job prospects in agriculture.  
The Environmental Management Diploma program also saw an increase of the same size, welcoming a large number of Second Career retraining students keen to find new careers addressing environmental issues.  
And it’s looking like student enrollment for fall 2010 will remain strong as all early indicators, including early application numbers, are very positive.  
Once again, my sincere thanks to all our staff for their outstanding commitment and dedication to our student body. You do a great job at CHANGING LIFES and IMPROVING LIFE!  

Art Schaafsma  
Director, Ridgetown Campus

Dean, OAC | Congratulations Again! Record Registrations for January Conference ‘Classes’  
Another registration record for learning was recently set at the Southwest Agricultural Conference (SWAC) held in Ridgetown the first week of January. Classrooms were filled to capacity throughout the entire campus.  
This year, for the third year in a row, SWAC welcomed record numbers of ‘students’ through their doors. These 1200-plus students, Ontario’s producers and production agriculture professionals, are keen to sharpen their knowledge in preparation for a new farming season.  
Although these learners are only on campus for one or two days, it’s a great opportunity for them to brush up on their production, business or technical skills and certainly to find some time for reconnecting with friends, neighbours and colleagues.  
The transfer of new and timely information from researchers, OMAFRA and agribusiness professionals is what extension and events like SWAC are all about. OAC is proud to have many of our researchers sharing their most recent findings at the conference, and we will continue to partner with OMAFRA and the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association to serve the agri-food industry through excellent extension.  
While attending the conference, I had the opportunity to recognize one of Ridgetown’s own extension experts. On behalf of the OAC Alumni Association, I presented Dr. Peter Sikkema with the prestigious T. R. Hilliard Distinguished Extension Award, honouring his 20-plus years of stellar weed management efforts for producers.  
Congratulations Ridgetown staff on your record breaking event. This event is a reminder of the relevance and excellence at Ridgetown and how, together with alumni and friends, we can sustain and improve the capacity of Ridgetown to serve the agri-food industry!
The story of Lily Tamburic-Ilincic’s wheat breeding success started in 1999 when she was a PhD student doing wheat breeding with Dr. Art Schaafsma and Dr. Duane Falk. A key goal was to develop a new winter wheat breeding program at Ridgetown in response to the devastating Fusarium epidemic in 1996.

During her first five years, Lily laid the foundation for her current success by making the right crosses of wheat parents, sorting out the genetics of Fusarium resistance and developing advanced tools for making selections more quickly and efficiently. This work led to the development of a breeding line named RCATL33, with excellent levels of resistance to Fusarium head blight along with competitive yield and quality performance traits. One exciting outcome of the research is a new value-added market opportunity for wheat producers in Ontario. Winter durum varieties must meet or exceed requirements relating to quality, agronomic performance and susceptibility to Fusarium head blight."

It takes over 10 years to develop new winter wheat varieties and Lily is right on track. After careful crossing and selecting, Lily’s breeding program has resulted in a number of exciting new lines. She has impressed the Ontario wheat industry by having three new wheat varieties registered in 2009, and now three more in 2010 from some of the initial crosses she made when she arrived. The six newly registered winter wheat varieties all have much improved tolerance to Fusarium head blight along with competitive yield and quality performance traits.

One exciting outcome of the research is a new value-added market opportunity for wheat producers in Ontario. Winter durum

“As much as Tamburic-Ilincic is pleased that the winter durum variety has been registered, she notes there is much work ahead. This year and next, she and her research assistant, Michael Holworth, will continue to evaluate additional winter durum lines from Germany and Virginia Tech University’s breeding program, even preparing for diseases that may cause problems in the future. “Our program made new crosses between different durum lines with good yield and disease resistance, including resistance to stem rust strain Ug99. This strain of rust, a potential serious threat for us, originated in Uganda ten years ago and we need to be ready if it spreads to North America,” she says.

The new lines were planted in the Ontario Performance Trials in the fall of 2009 at ten locations across Ontario. The wheat research team will also be planting a demonstration of the varieties on campus and hopes to showcase them at the Southwest Crop Diagnostic Days in July, 2010.

The wheat breeding program at Ridgetown is completely financially self-sustaining (including Lily’s position) through financial support from Ontario Wheat Producers, the seed industry, and provincial and federal contractual funding. The goal is to move this program towards more permanent, secure funding.

“In the ten years since her work began, she has developed a winter wheat breeding program that has earned the utmost respect and support of the wheat industry in Ontario and internationally,” says Campus Director, Dr. Art Schaafsma.

VA05W0-31 will be the first winter durum registered in Canada. Most of the pasta we eat comes from Canadian prairie grown spring durum wheat. Durum wheat is a high value grain but difficult to grow in Ontario because of several challenges, including lack of disease resistance, lower yields and low winter hardiness. Lily’s work has overcome most of these challenges, making winter durum a new and potentially lucrative crop for Ontario farmers.

The challenges and triumphs of studying new wheat varieties are ongoing for Tamburic-Ilincic. “We will continue to respond to the current and future needs of the winter wheat industry in Ontario,” she notes.

The results of this work are a testament to the importance of research partnerships at Ridgetown Campus. It was funded by the Ontario Wheat Producers Marketing Board, the Ontario Research and Development Program, several seed companies (Pioneer, C & M seeds, SeCan) and the crop protection industry (Bayer CropScience). Matching funds came from Agriculture Canada through the CanAdapt and CanAdvance programs.
Mike Donnelly-Vanderloo, Executive Director of the Ontario Coloured Bean Growers Association notes that this project is the result of cooperation between several parties. “The federal government’s contribution, along with the investment of $500,000 from industry associations, agribusiness and producers, gives a total of $1.25 million to help the dry bean industry,” he says.

Along with Gillard, the Canadian research team will include Dr. Peter Sikkema, Ridgetown Campus weed scientist, Dr. Robert Gulden, University of Manitoba and Dr. Robert Blackshaw, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Lethbridge, Alberta. The research team acknowledges and thanks Dr. Nader Soltani, Ridgetown Campus, for his efforts in developing the initial proposal for the project.
Optimizing Growers’ Nitrogen Dollars is the Key Goal of New Infrastructure Funding

A $125,000 grant from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI) has helped Dr. Laura Van Eerd acquire the equipment she needs to undertake innovative, cutting-edge research at Ridgetown Campus.

In addition to the CFI grant, Van Eerd received $125,000 from the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation, plus many in-kind donations, to bring her total research investment to over $300,000. The money was used for a new irrigation pond, as well as lab and field equipment.

Van Eerd’s area of research expertise is plant nutrition and soil fertility in horticultural crops. One goal of her work is to develop new approaches to improving crop yield and quality by optimizing nitrogen use while minimizing its loss to the environment.

Water is critical for the nitrogen cycle, so an irrigation pond was one of the priorities for the grant money. “Access to irrigation water in horticultural production and my research is essential” says Van Eerd. “With this infrastructure, we are representative of horticultural production and we’ll have the ability to conduct irrigation efficiency research too.”

A plot-sized variable-rate liquid fertilizer applicator and lab equipment for analyzing nitrogen in soil and plant tissues also improves Ridgetown’s research capacity. Van Eerd now has the capability to do advanced soil fertility and plant nutrition research for horticulture crops. “We are one of the few in the Canadian university system with the ability to conduct field applied research and take the samples directly to our new laboratory for analysis,” she says.

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The equipment will also benefit students in the Bachelor of Bio-Resource Management program. One of the courses Van Eerd teaches is “Introductory Environmental Science” in which students take soil and plant samples to determine nitrogen content. The students will now see the whole process from sample collection to results, learning both field and analytical skills.

Van Eerd says she enjoys conducting field research that has positive implications for growers. “Discovering economical ways to make crop production more profitable makes our research worthwhile,” she says. This investment in infrastructure will enhance research capability at Ridgetown Campus.

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Field Research Technician, Mike Zink, with Dr. Laura Van Eerd. Mike will be heavily involved in numerous field experiments that will use the new field research equipment the funding provided.
Ridgetown Campus Partners with REACH in Clinton to Deliver
New Equine Training Certificate

The grand opening of Phase 1 of REACH was held on September 10, 2009. (left) The new REACH arena complex is graced by a striking landmark tower, located at the main entrance. (right) REACH horses are donated and sponsored by businesses and individuals. The REACH herd will be utilized as teaching and recreational animals.

Ridgetown Campus is excited to announce that it will be partnering with the Regional Equine and Agricultural Centre of Huron (REACH) in Clinton to deliver a new Performance Horse Handler Certificate.

The new one year (two semester) certificate was developed with significant input from the equine industry and the campus is now in the student recruitment process. Recruitment efforts are targeting grade 12 and mature students looking to work in the performance horse industry, including thoroughbred, quarter horse or standardbred racing, dressage, show jumping, breeding and other stables. The first class is scheduled to begin in September 2010, with graduates receiving a University of Guelph, Ridgetown Campus certificate.

Katie Savage, Ridgetown's Recruitment Co-ordinator, notes that two very successful fall open house events were held at REACH in Clinton and the program is attracting interested students from across the province. “The first class is limited to 40 students and we look forward to expanding programming at REACH in the future,” she says.

Interested students are encouraged to contact Katie Savage at ksavage@ridgetownc.uoguelph.ca or call 519-674-1522. Ridgetown will be holding another open house event at REACH in Clinton on Wednesday, March 17, 2010. Anyone interested should contact Katie.
a) Stable – The REACH stable will eventually house 22 REACH teaching horses (10 are at REACH now). Students will learn all aspects of stable barn management and stable economics in the program.

b) Riding and Show Arena – The Olympic-size riding area seats over 400 guests and is outstanding for teaching, recreation and special equine events.

c) Equine Reproductive Laboratory – Equipment for the new ITSI (Insemination Techniques and Systems International) Equine Reproduction Lab is being supplied by ITSI.

d) Teaching Barn – The Glengate Farms Teaching Barn will be a key teaching area for practical learning in the Performance Horse Handler program.

e) Amphitheatre – This is a terrific teaching facility for live animal demonstrations. This room is officially named the Standardbred Breeders of Ontario Association (SBOA) Amphitheatre.

f) Learning about Ridgetown’s new academic program at REACH – L-R: Doug Nash, Equine Reproduction Specialist, Jennifer Jensen, potential future student, Brantford, Jennifer’s Dad, and Katie Savage, Ridgetown Campus Recruiter at the first future student open house at REACH, October 2009.

g) Media and Computer Laboratory – The new media room is equipped with Smart Boards. This will be a great learning facility for the computer side of training.

Applications for September 2010 are welcome.
With a focus on industry and international development, eight students and two chaperones spent one week in December on a study trip to Belize, Central America, where they learned about agriculture, horticulture and international development. This is the first time a group of Ridgetown Campus students has had the opportunity to study abroad and earn an academic course credit. The trip exposed the students to Belize culture, industry, government, and development. "It was a great chance for students to broaden their understanding of the world. Many students are looking for this kind of learning experience when considering their post-secondary institution," notes Liz Meidlinger, Manager, Communications and Advancement.

The Ridgetown students were guided by Les Frayne, a semi-retired farmer who has previously taken University of Guelph students to Belize on study tours. Les is also a committed, long-time volunteer with the SHARE (Sending Help and Resources Everywhere) Agriculture Foundation which has projects in Belize. SHARE provides funding, guidance and expertise to community-based agricultural projects in developing countries around the world but with a particular focus on Central and South America. Ridgetown students saw SHARE development projects as well as citrus, banana, dairy, beef and other agricultural production while travelling the small country. Students also had the opportunity to explore Belizean culture and learn about a variety of different uses for plants through botanical tours. Katie Savage, Ridgetown's Recruitment Co-ordinator, previously made the trip during her undergraduate studies at Guelph, and later as a SHARE volunteer. She co-ordinated the academic course with Les.

Belize is an attractive destination for study as English is the official language, travel throughout the country is very safe, and students can see many different types of landscapes and agriculture in a short amount of time.

Each student was responsible for a posting to the Belize Blog so that staff, family and friends could follow their travels along the way. Here is an excerpt of Ben Cullen’s blog – Ben is a first year student in the Agriculture Diploma program. >
Learning About a New Culture

a) The guesthouse in San Miguel Mayan village that the group called home for two days. Each of the students ate their meals in the homes of different people in the community and were immersed in the Mayan way of life.

b) Students visited the Mayan ruins of Xunantunich and learned about the history and culture of the ancient Mayans.

c) Lots of smiles from the Belizean school children at Los Tombos Public School when our group of 10 arrived with school supplies.

Learning New Production Practices through Agricultural and Horticultural Tour Stops

d) Kayla Bishop and Samantha Klaver – learning about banana production at a plantation in southern Belize.

e) Leanne Bourque, learning about various uses for Belizean plants; this variety of palm leaf is used to build thatched rooftops, like the one the group slept under in the Mayan village.

f) A sample of citrus pulp, which is fed to the dairy cattle at a Mennonite dairy farm in Spanish Lookout. The dairy operation has four wooden stalls in its milking parlour and milks 35 cows.

International Development – The Opportunity to Help Others

g) Les Frayne, the tour guide on the trip, donated a sewing machine to a women’s group in Los Flores. These women will now be able to sew articles of clothing and items to sell to make extra income to help support their families.

h) Five refugee farmers from El Salvador, whose farmland we toured in Armenia. These farmers have been hand clearing their 15-acre plots of land in the rainforest with machetes so they can plant pasture fields to raise cattle donated to them by SHARE.

“Belize has taught me not to think of the potential to make Caye Caulker like Miami, or to make a Milpa farm resemble the large-scale and mechanized style of agriculture we practice at home. Perhaps I have learned that a country run without personal lines of credit or regular bank lending learns to build what the rest of us couldn’t do even if we had all the money in the world, they learn to build for what their needs really are. We don’t need six swimming pools and a water ski to have a good time, a brand new pickup truck to bring the feed home for the cows or a sweet new pair of shoes to put on our feet when rubber boots will probably get us there in the same time, at the same level of comfort.

Contemplating this, I reflected on what Eloy [a SHARE contact in Belize] told us earlier in the week: that people come to Belize to have their big dreams shrunk down to size. While it sounded cynical at the time, everything from the fall of the once great Mayan empire to the contentedness of a well fed farmer living in a hut started coming together. Belize is a small country that houses great contrast, but if you have the chance to visit prepare yourself not to be amazed. If you can set conventional expectations aside you might find yourself better astonished than if you were to visit the biggest, greatest and most ‘advanced’ country of all time.”

To read more Belize student blogs, visit: www.ridgetowncampus.blogspot.com
For the past 15 years, industry experts, agribusiness professionals and producers have been coming to Ridgetown for new information and demonstrations delivered in an informal format by Ridgetown and Guelph researchers and OMAFRA field experts. Participants bring their sunscreen and hats for the annual outdoor event.
Crop Diagnostic Days, a two day event, bring over 400 people to Ridgetown Campus each July to learn about the latest crop production issues and to develop their practical skills and understanding of production agriculture. The program includes twelve learning stops delivered in the field on a rotational schedule. “It’s a full day for everyone involved,” says Tracey Baute, OMAFRA Field Crop Entomologist and program co-ordinator, “but it’s a great learning and networking opportunity.”

Topics include everything from fungicide applications to insect identification workshops, to cereal physiology, to nitrogen and corn root development, to new technology equipment in the field. “Each year, the Southwest Soil and Crop Improvement Association, a partner in this venture, helps us determine the relevant topics that need to be addressed by the researchers,” says Baute.

“The event provides a great venue to directly share new research knowledge with the client. It’s information they can utilize in their agribusiness and farm operations right away,” says Art Schaafsma, Ridgetown Campus Director. “Industry also plays a key role in providing sponsorship to the Southwest Crop Diagnostics program and we couldn’t do the event without their commitment.”

In its 15 years of delivery, the annual Crop Diagnostics Days event has had over 6,000 participants.

“Diagnostic Days is a terrific extension program with University of Guelph, Ridgetown Campus and OMAFRA staff delivering up-to-date crop knowledge to Ontario agribusiness and producers. It’s a great example of an on-going partnership among OMAFRA staff and the University of Guelph. Congratulations on your 15th anniversary!”

Honourable Carol Mitchell,
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Clarence Swanton, Weed Scientist, University of Guelph, and Greg Stewart, OMAFRA Corn Specialist, discussing nitrogen’s impact on corn roots.

Chris Gillard, Crop Researcher, Ridgetown Campus, with Regina Rieckenberg, Valent Canada, Guelph. Chris’ presentation focused on desiccants in dry beans.

David Hooker (left), Crop Researcher, Ridgetown Campus with Peter Johnson, OMAFRA Cereals Specialist, prepare for one of 12 presentations they will give throughout the day.
2010 Westag Alumni Curling Bonspiel
Another Fun Event for Alumni Friends

Twelve teams competed at this year’s Westag Alumni Bonspiel. The ice was good, the food was great and the fellowship was fantastic!

Dave McMurren ’62 and his team were the winners of the first draw, helping Dave continue his “no lost tournaments since Christmas” streak. The 2nd draw was won by Duane Morden ’82.

Special thanks to everyone who participated and to all the prize donors who made great contributions to the event. Keep up the good work Les!

No Wins But Lots of Enthusiasm
Tournament organizer Les Hogg ’59 (second from left) and his team had lots of enthusiasm but no wins at the Bonspiel. His Westag team-mates were: Dave Pugh ’62, Walter McIlwain ’68, and Jim Goodhand ’59.

Alumni Association Provides $5,000 for New Furniture in Agronomy Building Alumni Lounge

With record enrollment in September 2009 that included a large number of mature ‘commuter’ students, the campus had a real need for new furniture for students to use for studying and relaxing between classes. Commuter students don’t have a ‘rez’ room and really need a spot where they can spend free time. The Westag Alumni Lounge in the Agronomy Building is the perfect place.

“It was a great investment of alumni dollars,” says Joanne Thomson, Alumni Association President. “The room is often filled to capacity with 25 or more students working on projects, studying, getting course help from a friend, or just eating lunch.”

A number of various size study tables, along with comfortable chairs were purchased to enhance the Alumni Lounge’s usefulness.

REGISTER NOW!
6th Annual Alumni Golf Tournament
August 21, 2010
To register or to get more information, please contact Janet Nauta or visit the Ridgetown website at www.ridgetownc.uoguelph.ca
Registration deadline: August 13, 2010

Dan Reid (’86) is the owner of Reid Aquatics, a pool & spa service. He is also the lead snowmaker at Blue Mountain Resorts. He lives with his wife and daughter in Heathcote, where he enjoys mountain biking, skiing and snowboarding as often as possible.

Anna Van de Gevel (’02) married Brad Cooper (’01) September 27, 2003. Their first child, Sarah was born Dec. 21, 2005 with daughter Megan following on Feb. 5, 2008. They currently reside on their farm near Thamesford.

Phil Richards (’67) and his wife Janet were recently recognized as the 2009 Chatham-Kent Agriculturalists of the Year. They are both very involved in local and provincial farm organizations.

Getting A Little Academic Advice from a Classmate – Mature students Monique Larocque (left) and Fern Caron (right) discuss course material before heading off to their afternoon class.

Enjoying Study Time – Big comfy chairs are a great place to catch up on course readings.

No Wins But Lots of Enthusiasm
Tournament organizer Les Hogg ’59 (second from left) and his team had lots of enthusiasm but no wins at the Bonspiel. His Westag team-mates were: Dave Pugh ’62, Walter McIlwain ’68, and Jim Goodhand ’59.

alumni corner
Share your news with other graduates! Send an e-mail to roots@ridgetownc.uoguelph.ca or visit the Alumni and Friends section of the Ridgetown website at www.ridgetownc.uoguelph.ca
Before the alumni banquet, this amazing group of alumni enjoyed an afternoon 50th Anniversary Class Reception, catching up on faces and telling stories from the past! They took a few moments to pause from their celebrations for this great group picture.

The Class of 1959 also celebrated their 50th anniversary by giving something back to Ridgetown. In a fundraising effort led by Allister Cameron, the group raised over $3,500 for the Westag Building Priority Fund.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the Class of 1959’s anniversary success.

Left to right: (Front) Norman Smibert, Bill Crawford, Charles O’Shea, Fred Lewis (Middle) Gerald Galbraith, David Smith, Allister Cameron, Neil Lockyer, Les Hogg (Back) Ben Jensen, Joseph van Der Pelt, John Bilyea, Warner Taylor, Jim Goodhand, Allister Cameron.

In Memoriam

Our sincere sympathies are extended to the family and friends of each of these special people.

Alumni
Calvin Shepley ’54
April 3, 2008
Clarence Smids ’79
August 9, 2009
Bill Stevens ’60
September 8, 2009

Gwen (Leslie) Kivell ’69
October 16, 2009
Stephen Boere ’87
January 7, 2009
Wayne Manley ’58
January 1, 2010

Friends
Dr. Ron Pitblado,
Former Associate Director Academics and Researcher
November 11, 2009

Opportunity to Honour Your Classmate with a Memorial Gift

If you would like to honour any of your classmates by making a memorial donation to Ridgetown Campus, please contact Janet Nauta, Alumni Services at 519-674-1504, or go to: www.ridgetownc.uoguelph.ca/alumni
Field Research Program

Offers 60-70 Annual Summer Jobs for University and College Students

It takes a lot of extra hands to carefully plant, spray, hoe, harvest and collect data from the research plots stretching from Cedar Springs to Exeter and beyond.

In 2009, many students were hired to work with researchers for the summer. Along with enhancing their education by gaining practical knowledge, the work of these students is vital in helping researchers complete their field trials.

The students hired come from diversified academic backgrounds, and often work in research for several summers while completing their post-secondary education.

Some of the students hired in the research program are enrolled in Ridgetown Campus academic programs.

Matt Soos and Laura Oattes are Bachelor of Bio-Resource Management students. They spent their summer working for Ron Fleming on an anaerobic digester project. It was their job to “feed”, monitor and maintain the research equipment. “Every day, we added silage and liquid manure to the digester,” says Matt. “We then monitored the pH and temperature of the contents and measured the methane output with a gas analyzer.”

Both students felt the job was a good way to practically apply what they were learning in class. “This work really applied the concepts of the green energy component of our Environmental Science course,” Laura says. From Fleming’s point of view, their work was invaluable to him. Some studies from Germany have suggested that digesters work better if material is added more often. Fleming and his technician, Mac MacAlpine, decided to test this theory by feeding the digester seven days a week instead of their usual five.

“Mac and I wouldn’t have been able to keep up this schedule all summer without the students coming in on week-ends to help us,” he admits.
With over 350 acres of field research at Ridgetown, 30 acres at Cedar Springs and 150 acres at the Exeter site, plus a number of farm research co-operators, the research team counts on the youth, ambition and high energy of summer students to help manage thousands of trials.

Chris Hunt, a 2009 Horticulture graduate, learned a lot about weeds this summer. His Weed Science course ended up being very beneficial in his work for researcher Darren Robinson and technicians Chris McNaughton and Dave Bilyea. “I helped collect and plant the weeds for the campus weed identification garden,” he says. Not being from a farm, Chris also got his first taste of what is involved in field production. “Doing farm labour and learning the timing of production activities was really interesting. I did jobs ranging from picking blueberries to hoeing.”

The research technicians are thankful to have the help of students in the summer. “The quality and quantity of our research would suffer without the students,” says Chris McNaughton. “Having students allows us to increase the number of test plots and lets us focus on the actual research results.”

Environmental Management diploma student Joe Wszol brought a lot of past farm experience to his summer research assistant position. His family grows horticultural crops and his previous pesticide training has been put to good use by technician Todd Phibbs. “I did a lot of spraying in field crops to support Art Schaafsma’s pest management research projects,” Joe says. “It’s taught me a lot about crop protection products and pests like soybean aphids.”

Joe says that the researchers turned the job into a real learning experience. “They don’t just say ‘Do it’, they tell us why we are doing it and how our work is important to the project. Everyone on our crew loves the job.”
Alumni Celebrations a Big Success

Snapshots from the 2009 Alumni Banquet and Special 25, 40 and 50-year Anniversary Receptions.

Mark Your Calendar!
The 2010 Alumni Banquet for grads from years ending in a “0” or “5” will be held on: November 20, 2010.
Tomato products such as ketchup and pasta sauce may some day be healthier for you. A Ridgetown Campus researcher is working to increase the amount of the antioxidant lycopene in new tomato varieties.
Ridgetown has approximately 350 acres of land on campus used for agronomic research plots. Divide that among the Ridgetown scientists and the amount of land available often falls short of researcher needs. Yet year after year, Ridgetown researchers conduct numerous studies that provide relevant results for farmers across the province. How do they do it? The answer may be as close as your next-door neighbour.

The key to the success of many research projects is the co-operation of farmers across southern Ontario. These farmers, appropriately called farm co-operators, agree to let Ridgetown scientists conduct research studies on their farm land. Several alumni are part of this program.

Rob Smyth, a 1980 alumnus, knows first-hand how important it is for researchers to have off-campus plots. He worked as a research technician at Ridgetown for seven years after graduating. “Having worked in research, you realize that getting a broad range of data is essential to getting results that are applicable to many people,” he says.

Laura Van Eerd, who has a field trial on Smyth’s land near Chatham to study the possible benefits of planting a cover crop in seed corn, often relies on word of mouth to help her find suitable farms for her research. “I need to work on farms with various soil types and rainfall patterns. The OMAFRA staff on campus are very helpful in suggesting people who might be interested in hosting research trial plots.”

Smyth decided to volunteer this year after hearing Van Eerd give a presentation at a farm meeting. “We [farmers] could try and do our own on-farm research, but that is very difficult. It’s hard to keep the variables consistent and get reliable results that mean something,” he says. “Working with Ridgetown ensures that farmers get credible results.”

Steve Fonger, a 1987 grad from Kerwood, can’t remember a time when he hasn’t had research plots on his farm. This year, he is providing land to Peter Sikkema for a horsetail weed control plot. “Ridgetown does all the work. They just flag off an area and tell me not to spray there,” Fonger says.

He admits that it sometimes takes a bit of effort to avoid that area – this year’s plot is in the middle of his field – but it’s not a huge inconvenience. “I’ve always benefited from past farmers that have been willing to make small sacrifices to help with research, so I don’t mind doing my part too,” he says.

Sikkema appreciates the help of Fonger and other co-operators. His work focuses on weed control, and many of the targeted species are not on campus. “I think I would be in everyone’s bad books if I introduced more weeds on campus to conduct my research,” he jokes.

Each year, he finds about 20 farmers with difficult weed problems where he can examine weed management strategies. Sikkema says he goes wherever is necessary to find weeds and he has plots from Amherstburg to London. “I couldn’t do my research without them,” he says of the co-operators.

Although the final results that come from research at Ridgetown may benefit many farmers, Steve Fonger admits that he also enjoys some farm benefits from being a co-operator. “I can call any number of researchers and they know who I am and I can ask them questions,” he says. He also encourages others to participate in field research. “You learn a lot and it definitely puts you in the information loop – it’s worth the effort to get involved.”

For Mike Sleegers, class of 1990, being involved in a research project was easy. “I just needed to supply manure and water – Ridgetown did the rest,” he says. There is no shortage of manure at the Sleeger farm; he and his father milk 70 cows.

Research technician, Mac MacAlpine, views their participation a little differently. He and Ron Fleming were studying manure run-off on slopes and needed test locations that met specific criteria. The land needed to be clay loam, there had to be hilly areas, and there had to be access to water. The Sleegers’ farm in Belmont fit the bill perfectly.

“Mike may say it was easy, but they were very accommodating to us,” says MacAlpine. “We used their pond for water and they even let us lease their generator for a while when ours broke down. Thanks to them, we were able to get valuable information to help livestock farmers with nutrient management planning.”

Mike Sleegers
Class of 1990
Dr. Ron Pitblado, a celebrated teacher and researcher lost his battle with cancer on November 11, 2009.

“Ron’s distinguished 34-year career is unparalleled. His unstoppable passion to investigate new possibilities for agriculture, particularly for Ontario’s fruit and vegetable industry, defined his extensive teaching, research, and extension career,” says Campus Director, Art Schaafsma.

In 1974, Dr. Clay Switzer, former dean of the Ontario Agriculture College (OAC), recommended Ron for a position at Ridgetown Campus and he began work as a vegetable pest management lecturer and researcher. His tremendous excitement for the development of insect and disease strategies for horticultural crops eventually lead him to teach thousands of students and to travel the globe investigating opportunities and sharing his knowledge.

Ron considered his greatest achievement the opportunity to provide agricultural producers and agriculture diploma students with meaningful straight answers to their farming questions. He found it very rewarding to first meet students in the classroom, and later work with them as Ontario producers. Ron never used a prepared note in the classroom but shared his experience teaching countless diploma courses, always hoping that students would share his interest in seeking new ideas.

Ron’s research achievements include the development of TOM-CAST, a weather timed pesticide spray program used throughout the world in processing tomato production. The writing and delivery of countless scientific papers and publications was only seen as successful to him if it was useful for growers. Ron helped to develop the Ontario Weather Network (OWN), a project to assist growers with the timely application of irrigation and pest management products in several crops. During his celebrated research career he skillfully tested hundreds of herbicides, insecticides and fungicides for their pest management potential.

Sharing his understanding of mushroom production, Ridgetown Campus boasted the only mushroom education facility in Canada; when he wasn’t teaching students at Ridgetown, Ron taught mushroom production to countless farmers around the globe.

Also gifted with management and administration talent, Ron welcomed several leadership positions including Horticulture Section Head, Associate Director Academics, and Acting Campus Director during his time at Ridgetown. He worked tirelessly to help colleagues with their teaching methods and addressed opportunities for enhancing learning.

No matter what the task, Ron worked diligently, with passion and with an endless joyful song in his heart while he strived to make a difference in everything he did. When once asked what was the greatest gift he ever received, he quickly replied, “That’s easy …the gift of wonder!”

Ontario agriculture, OAC and Ridgetown Campus have lost a true friend.

Ron retired from Ridgetown Campus in 2007. He is a native of St. Catharines, ON and is survived by his wife Diane and two sons, David and Doug, and their families.

Memorial Gifts

Anyone wishing to make a Memorial Gift to honour Ron is invited to contact the Ridgetown Campus Agri-Food Foundation:
Liz Meidlinger, 519-674-1587 or lmeidlin@ridgetownc.uoguelph.ca or go to:
www.ridgetownc.uoguelph.ca/alumni/giving_donate.cfm
A very keen interest in renewable energy has led a recent Agriculture Diploma graduate back to Ridgetown Campus – this time as an employee.

Mark Uher, from Blenheim Ontario, graduated with a diploma in Agriculture in 2008. He was intrigued by the potential for alternative energy, so he enrolled in the Renewable Energy Technology certificate program at Selkirk College in Nelson, B.C.

Mark is now combining his love of agriculture and knowledge of renewable energy working at the on-campus farm-scale biodiesel demonstration plant – the first project of the Centre for Agricultural Renewable Energy and Sustainability (CARES) initiative.

The plant had its first test run in October, and as of January, 2010, it had produced 16,000 litres of biodiesel. The long-term goal is to produce 18,000 litres of fuel per week.

Mark says the main objective of the project is to show that it can be economically viable to make on-farm biodiesel. “The purpose isn’t to corner the market on biodiesel in southwestern Ontario,” he says. “We want to show farmers how to do it themselves.”

Currently, they are using used restaurant oil to produce the fuel; research into using different oils – including palm and cocoa bean – is also planned. “One of the trickier aspects is getting a reliable, economical source of feedstock,” Mark notes.

Mark jokes that they are not just on the cutting edge of technology with this biodiesel plant, they are on ‘the bleeding edge’. “We suffer the initial challenges of planning and production to make it easier for farmers to do it themselves in the future,” he says. Every part of the process, including the struggles and pitfalls, is being documented so farmers will know what to expect from beginning to end.

With a strong agricultural and energy background, Mark notes that this work is still a constant learning experience for him. The plant is also creating learning experience for students. The campus’ Environmental Club and environmental classes have come to check-out the new equipment and students participating in an up-coming Careers in Green Energy event at Ridgetown hope to tour the plant.

Alumni or other groups interested in touring the demonstration facility should contact Dr. Rob Nicol, Ridgetown Researcher at 519-674-1641.