Dear Alumni and Friends:

“Big things are within reach” is the message of the new brand at SIUC. Despite the fiscal situation in the state of Illinois, “Big things are happening!” describes the College of Agricultural Sciences. I am completing my second year of serving as Interim Dean of the SIUC College of Agricultural Sciences. A national search is underway for a permanent Dean to start July 1, 2012.

Academically, undergraduate enrollment has increased 17% over the last 5 years, and scholarships have increased in part thanks to the Illinois Soybean Association’s Soy Scholar program, the Ag. Leadership Board endowment, and the Wills and Kuehn Estates. Graduate enrollment has also been growing, including the Ph.D. in Agricultural Sciences. Dr. Dexter Wakefield (Ag. Education) was the College’s Outstanding Tenure Track teacher and Dr. Nicole Davis (Hospitality and Tourism) was the Outstanding Non-Tenure Track teacher. Dr. Charles Ruffner (Forestry) was promoted to Professor, and Drs. John Schoonover (Forestry) and Ira Altman (Agribusiness) were promoted to Associate Professor. The American Water Resource Association was named the best student chapter for that organization nationally. Nick Suess (Agribusiness Economics Senior) was elected vice-president of Illinois PAS. Dr. Gunter (Forestry) was named Outstanding Alumni, and Ms. Marcy Heepke (Animal Science) was named Outstanding Young Alumni. Mr. Dean Dittmar was honored with the College’s Service to Agriculture Award for his work with FFA and Agricultural Education. John Caupert
(ABE Alumni) became President of the College’s Alumni Society Board of Governors. Dr. Brian Klubek (Soil Science) was the Outstanding Scholar in the College.

Research remains strong with grant funding totalling about $18 million. Top areas include soybean production and utilization, water quality, sustainable practices, local foods, wildlife habitats, biofuels, and international agriculture. Most notable are two grants from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation over the last two years totalling $7 million to study the effects of long term sustainable agricultural practices.

The college also continues to serve the community, region, nation and world with its outreach activities. We have a long and continued history of providing farmers in the Heartland region with valuable information about the most recent developments in agricultural production, and continue to assist in the development agriculture and natural resources in war torn Afghanistan. In addition to “boots on the ground,” we are very active in training National Guard Agribusiness Development Teams heading to that country. Additionally, we have established local foods programs in a local elementary school and the SIUC Dining Hall. Related to this, we are also helping the Attucks Community Garden Group start vegetable plants in our Greenhouses for their “urban farming” efforts.

Unfortunately, the College lost our first Dean, Dr. Wendell Keeper, this summer just short of his 101 birthday. However, his legacy lives on.

The College is also changing its look. Major renovations have and are occurring in the Ag. Building, including classrooms, hallways, water systems, and the breezeway courtyard. The new “green” roof has gained a lot of attention, and has produced successful crops of tomatoes, radishes, and greens. At the same time, we are in the planning stage of a new free standing building, which, in addition to the “renovated” building, will house all college programs now spread out across campus. Four of the eight buildings destroyed at the farms after the May 8, 2009 storm have also been completed.

So, as you can see...“Big Things ARE Happening” in the SIUC College of Agricultural Sciences. Enjoy this newsletter!

Sincerely,

Todd A. Winters, Ph.D.
Professor and Interim Dean
New Ag Building Progress

Shown above is the proposed new Agriculture building which will be directly in front of the current Agriculture building built in 1955. This new building will provide an opportunity to house all of the College’s majors under the same roof and have state of the art, up to date labs and classrooms for students. Included in the plans are 58 new research and teaching labs, 13 new classrooms and computer labs, five new student study/common areas, and 21 new faculty and research offices.

The finished, completely furnished building will cost approximately $77.4 million dollars. Currently this project is still in the pre-planning phase. The groundbreaking is anticipated within the next five years.

$157,500 in pre-planning funds have been generously sponsored by:

- Farm Credit Services of Illinois
- Farm-to-Table fundraiser donations on behalf of Hospitality and Tourism
- Horsemen’s Council of Illinois
- Illinois Corn Marketing Board
- Illinois Crop Improvement Association
- Illinois Farm Bureau
- Illinois Forestry Association
- Illinois Pork Producers Association
- Illinois Soybean Association
Remembering College’s Father- Dean Keepper

By Tim Crosby- University Communications

Keepper (pronounced KEP-per) earned his master’s and doctoral degrees at Cornell University and taught a dozen years at Pennsylvania State University before coming to what was then simply SIU. Arriving on campus, he found conditions that were “not entirely encouraging,” as the University was entering a period of growth and change.

The agriculture department had just five faculty members and a budget of little more than $70,000. The University had a small research farm of about 70 acres where the Engineering Building and baseball stadium now sit. Keepper, who served as chair of the department, said its faculty taught classes in converted army barracks and there was no agriculture building on campus. The University, by legislative order, couldn’t even award a degree in agriculture at that time.

“Our office facility at the time was a Sears Roebuck pre-fab house just south of the end of the current Student Center,” Keepper recalled for a previous University news release. “I remember my first official act was to move a Coca-Cola dispenser from the first floor room to the front porch to make room for a beat-up desk I had salvaged from the war-surplus depot.”

Just three years after arriving, however, Keepper helped launch the agriculture education track at the University. As the state political winds began blowing in SIU’s favor, the agriculture department left the College of Vocations and Professions and adopted the title of the Division of Rural Studies. In 1955 it would become the School of Rural Studies and, months later, The School of Agriculture.

Five years after arriving at SIU, with no ag building and no plans to build one, Keepper looked on as Gov. William G. Stratton laid the cornerstone for the new agriculture building. It opened in 1957 and continues serving students today.

Born in Hillsboro, Keepper was known for his love of Southern Illinois; both the place with its unique agriculture characteristics and its people. His efforts in promoting agriculture education enjoyed strong support among the rural communities surrounding the University.

“We felt it was our job to train young people of Southern Illinois and others from different parts of the state interested in the profession of agriculture so that they could help solve the problems facing our agricultural society,” Keepper said in 2005. “Our intent was to train them well in an up-to-date fashion so that they could compete with graduates of other universities for jobs in teaching, research, production and other fields.”

In subsequent years Keepper set about building curriculum and a platoon of high-quality faculty, insisting all new hires have doctorate degrees and be leaders in their field. The school continued to grow in both size and scope during his 24-year tenure, with his legacy leading to its current worldwide reach in countries including Brazil, Afghanistan, Russia, Pakistan and Zambia.

The College of Agriculture now has eight majors and about two dozen specialty areas for students. Faculty researchers teach and conduct hands-on laboratories, often utilizing a 2,000-acre campus farm. In 2009, college faculty had more than $17 million in active research grants.

Upon his retirement in 1974, Keepper saw one of his former students, Gilbert H. Kroening, take his place as dean of the school. Kroening, who has since retired and still lives in Carbondale, said Keepper’s openness and outgoing style convinced him to enroll in the fledgling SIU bachelor’s degree program in 1955. From that point on, he was witness to Keepper’s strong leadership and vision.

“He was the right person at the right time,” Kroening said Thursday. “The University was going through a post World War II expansion and ‘Kepp’ was brought in with the opportunity to build an ag program.”

“He was a man of determination and vision,” said Kroening, an Effingham County native who in 1959 was among the first class to earn a bachelor’s degree in agriculture at the University, and who would go on to earn his master’s degree here in 1960. “He was a strong leader but he also was humble. He never craved recognition for himself. He always did what was in the best interest of the program.”
PAS Students Excel at State

Chea Reeves, a senior majoring in Plant and Soil Sciences received first place in the Crop Production employment area. Ryan Maxwell, a Plant and Soil Science junior, placed second in the Ag Chemicals and Fertilizers area. Both will be representing Illinois at the National PAS Convention in Des Moines, Iowa in March.

Fall 2011’s discussion meet was coordinated by the Illinois Farm Bureau Young Farmers, and offered an opportunity to discuss one of three given topics with fellow participants. Each competitor is given 30 seconds for an opening statement about the drawn topic and 20 minutes for discussion within the group, and a one minute closing statement. This year’s topics included renewable energy sources and policies, agriculture’s role on health and obesity issues, and using social media to promote the agricultural industry.

Kristalynn Raymond, a senior majoring in Ag Education will represent the state at the National Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Discussion Meet held in Grand Rapids, Michigan in February 2012. She revealed what makes the discussion meet so special,

“The important thing to remember is that the discussion meet is not a debate. The goal is to get others involved in the discussion and to see how they feel or what background they have concerning the topic/issue.”

Southern Illinois University has had an active PAS for the past six years. In this time members have soared to over five state and national leadership positions. One of whom, Plant and Soil Science junior Ted Ballard of Greenfield, Illinois is presently serving as National First Vice-President. Another, Senior Nick Suess of Greenville, Illinois is this year’s Illinois PAS First Vice–President.

The state PAS holds two conferences each year. The second which will be in Springfield this spring, will have public speaking, quiz bowl, landscaping design, computers and career planning events to compete in. Students from the College are preparing for success in their respective areas.

Welcome New Hires!

We’re glad to have you here.
Thanks to the efforts of Zac Sims, Amy Wulf, and advisor Anthony Agbeh, Hospitality and Tourism students now have their own honor society. Eta Sigma Delta, the first HTA International Honor Society on campus opens its arms to all declared HTA students whose GPAs are 3.0 or better and agree to hold fast to the values of excellence, leadership, creativity, service and ethics.

With an official start in Spring 2011 and its first induction ceremony in September, there have been 11 members inducted into Eta Sigma Delta. In this short time, the club has partnered in bake sales on campus, but their main focus has been to mentor others within their major. Every other Tuesday, members host tutoring sessions for Hospitality majors having trouble with major specific classes and those looking for internships.

Amy Wulf declared, “We’re all going through the same program, if we can help someone better understand the material, whether it be an intro level class or a major class, we will.”

FarmHouse Fraternity

Imprinted with a vision to give men a new and unique opportunity to get involved on campus, build relationships through brotherhood and other social events and to network with professionals through ties with the fraternity, sophomore Adam Herwig and senior Thomas Marten initiated the beginning of COAS’s new fraternity, FarmHouse. With a quick and strong beginning this fall, the fraternity colonized December 4th and looks to charter sometime in the next year.

One of the sole focuses of FarmHouse is to reach out. Since their beginning, members have worked to serve the community through many projects including tree planting on campus, Carbondale-wide clean-ups and assisting at dinners at the Newman Center. Currently Farm House is in the planning stages of a Spring 2012 benefit for the Leukemia/Lymphoma Society.

“Most campuses take anywhere from two to five years to colonize, SIU has really been moving at an accelerated speed.” said Farmhouse International representative, Tim Hadacheck.

With a current membership of 26 men, Herwig and Marten’s desire to build an organization that would further opportunities for involvement within the College, on campus and throughout the community is booming.

The organization’s secretary, Thomas Marten is optimistic about their fraternity’s potential.

“The College of Agricultural Sciences is a premier research and education leader with over 1,000 students” Marten stated, “FarmHouse will help to serve our growing student population with opportunities in service-leadership, fellowship as well as scholastic and career development.”
Culinary Club

Started in the fall of 2010, the SIU Culinary Club has been feeding a void for many across campus for the last year and a half. Senior Liz Hoder, also known as “the food lady” on campus worked with Dr. Sylvia Smith to create an option for those on campus interested in any sector of the food industry.

“Before the club started there really was no outlet for anyone interested in food.” Liz explained. The Culinary Club's initial platform, which was “Come Eat With Us!” has grown into something greater than the sole enjoyment of food. With 25 active members, a near double from last year, the club has been making great strides.

It was a goal of Hoder to use this club as an opportunity to introduce the idea of where food comes from to many of its Chicago-based members. One of the many activities done to emphasize this has included what has become their annual pumpkin bake sale. Members used University Farms pumpkins, broke them down and cooked them into several edible delicacies. Last year as part of their experience, following the sale, members went on a farm tour.

“For many, it was their first experience on the farm,” said Hoder. “They were impressed to see the circle completed, something that is often overlooked when buying from the grocery store.”

With “cooking” being this year’s theme, the club has worked to have demonstrations at each meeting. So far these demonstrations have ranged from homemade salsa to ice cream and beer brewing. Members get together once a month for a regional cuisine night, where they cook together, while creating themed meals.

In the future, the club will be mushroom hunting at Giant City State Park and cooking what they find. Other planned events include a day of food as they tour several different St. Louis restaurants and talk to the chefs and managers about their businesses and cuisines.

Being active in the College is important to the Culinary Club. They prepared the Fall Follies Festivity Chili, and are hosting an event at the Living Learning Community at Stegall Hall in Thompson Point this Spring.

Members decide the direction of the club through their areas of interest. Currently many Human Nutrition and Dietetics students are members, so the club has focused on health conscious cooking. The Culinary Club opens its arms to anyone on campus who has an interest in food.

As Liz reminds us, “You don’t have to be a cook to be in Culinary Club, you just have to enjoy food and be willing to learn through experience.”
Dr. Ruplal Choudhary was hired in 2009 to teach agricultural and food engineering and related courses as well as to build a research program in that area. He coordinates the new Food and Process Engineering Technology specialization under the Agricultural Systems program.

Choudhary grew up in rural India surrounded by a variety of crops, including rice and peanuts, which were grown on his family’s farm. Knowing he didn’t want to become a farmer himself, he studied Agricultural Engineering and went on to receive his MS from Indian Institute of Technology. He made his first trip to the United States in 2001 for his doctoral studies in Bio-Systems Engineering at Oklahoma State. He then did his postdoctorate work in Canada for two years.

Knowing that as a food engineer, he could contribute to the advancement of technology in improving food safety and renewable energy has driven his career. Dr. Ruplal’s research team has used several innovated pretreatment processes to improve conversion of cellulose and hemicellulose in fermentable sugars for making ethanol or biodiesel. Sweet sorghum and corn stover are the two crops he’s worked with recently.

In addition to research and teaching, Dr. Choudhary is a Registered Student Organization (RSO) Advisor for BHAKTI Yoga, known as “spiritual yoga”. He meets with their organization’s ten active students and some University faculty once a week to improve their meditation and concentration abilities. He says they emphasize realizing their internal selves, as their bodies change so they can be familiar with and at one with whom they are from within. In the past BHAKTI has served as a marching band at the SIU Homecoming Parade.

While Choudhary has only been at SIU for three years, he has worked to get involved on campus and to make Southern Illinois his home. It’s the forest, orchards and friendly people who have helped to welcome he and his family into the area.

A teacher, researcher, RSO advisor and father of two, Dr. Ruplal Choudhary stays busy. The College feels honored to have him as one of our newest faculty hires!
A friendly face has been recognized throughout the halls of the College for 33 years. Chair of the Department of Plant Soil and Agricultural Systems, Dr. Brian Klubek has been researching and teaching in the College of Agriculture since 1978.

Before SIU became his home, Klubek received his Bachelor’s in Microbiology with a minor in Biochemistry from Colorado State, in Fort Collins. His Master’s is in Microbial Ecology with a minor in Soil Science from Oregon State University. He followed with his Ph.D. from Utah State University in Microbial Ecology with a minor in Soil Sciences, and did a post-doc at North Carolina State University focusing on Soil Science and Soil Microbiology (soybean inoculation studies).

Klubek, who always knew he wanted to be a teacher, started his career at SIU teaching Intro to Soil Science and Soil Microbiology. He has since added the duties of teaching Soil Morphology and Taxonomy as well as Soil Physics.

A self-proclaimed lab-rat, Klubek explained, “Teaching and research are in my blood, I could get lost in a lab easily.”

It’s this mindset that has lead him to do research in several soil science specific areas including soybean inoculation studies, pesticide decomposition, herbicide leaching, coal desulfurization, strip-mine restoration, and nitrogen-inhibitor research. Currently, he’s advising one Ph.D. student and one graduate student in their soybean inoculation research project.

Since becoming Chair (five years ago) of the College’s most research productive department ($10.3 million in research grants last year), his own research load has decreased significantly. His foci now wrap around serving his department and its students to the best of his abilities. Teaching and advising students is still a large component of his chair duties. Klubek advises every freshman and transfer student entering his department. He holds great stock in the value of advisements.

“The first thing I ask students is what they want to do when they graduate.” He said, “My number one goal is for our students to receive the training they need to be professionally successful.”

Working to ensure that their department best serves the needs of the students carries a heavy weight for Klubek. As of Fall 2012, there will be two degrees offered in the place of what was once a B.S. in Plant and Soil Science: a B.S. in Horticulture and a B.S. in Crop, Soil, and Environmental Management.

“The department needs to better identify its teaching and research strengths by the appropriate names for its majors.” Klubek explained “This will improve the recruitment and retention of new students in both horticulture and the crop/soil sciences.”

At the end of each semester, Dr. Klubek meets with each of the graduates from his department and takes notes on areas of strength and weakness from within his department’s curriculum. He takes a further interest when talking with these students in their plans after graduation and if they have been successful finding a job. Klubek uses this feedback to guide his department.

Dr. Klubek’s current graduate student, Kathleen Carmak, identified why she looks up to him.

“I really admire Dr. Klubek because he is so dedicated to his students. He wants his students to learn and succeed, and he takes the time to make sure they have the opportunities to do so.”

Such passion and devotion to his students, research and department has made Dr. Brian Klubek a fan of many who have worked with him throughout the years. Carmak stated, “He is the busiest person I know, but his door is always open and he would drop anything he is doing to help out a student.”
Illinois Soybean Association Boosts Greenhouse Project

By Greg Scott

The umbrella organization that serves the needs of all soybean farmers in the state of Illinois is making a substantial contribution, funded in part by the Illinois soybean checkoff, to Southern Illinois University Carbondale. This support will enhance educational and research opportunities for students in the College of Agricultural Sciences.

A $250,000 contribution from the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) will help build a state-of-the-art undergraduate teaching and research greenhouse facility. This new 22,000-square-foot facility replaces a 50-year-old greenhouse that is a core learning laboratory for the entire Plant and Soil Science program.

The proposed modernized greenhouse facility will improve the hands-on education that inspires innovative solutions needed for increasing the global food demand.

“The Illinois Soybean Association is an important industry partner for the College of Agricultural Sciences. It has fostered growth of our soybean program and it has created outstanding opportunities for our students and faculty,” says Todd Winters, Interim Dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences. “It is yet another example of the Illinois Soybean Association’s commitment to higher education. Support of this new facility is essential to preparing our students for the workforce.”

With the help of the Illinois Soybean Association, the soybean program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale has evolved from research in soybean production management and weed science to biotechnology, genetics, environmental sustainability, health and nutrition.

“We’re committed to continuing our support for soybean research at SIU,” says SIU Carbondale graduate Dean Campbell, a Coulterville resident and ISA District 17 director. “This investment by our soybean farmers also aims to enhance our commitment to the soybean scholarship program by providing facilities for the recipients and other students to receive the training they need for careers in crop sciences.”

In addition, the new Undergraduate Teaching and Research Greenhouse will create space to accommodate workshop and outreach initiatives for industry partners including the Illinois soybean growers. It will also encourage lifelong learning by accommodating educational programming for children, adults, and teachers at grade schools and high schools.
Dr. Eberle Retires From ABE

It was after spending two years in the Peace Corps doing agricultural extension work in Afghanistan and returning home to his family’s wheat, pea, and lentil farm in eastern Washington that Dr. Phillip Eberle found himself searching for answers. The questions raised by his experiences led him to graduate school studying Agricultural Economics at Washington State University, and earning his Ph.D. at Iowa State.

From the fall of 1983 to the spring of 2011, he has served SIU College of Agricultural Sciences as a teacher, researcher and advisor within the Agribusiness Economics Department. Teaching a number of classes, ranging from Farm Business Management to Rural Appraisal and Managerial Economics, he has enjoyed the opportunity to educate.

In addition to teaching from the classroom, Eberle’s research focuses have allowed him to assess many different economic opportunities in agriculture as well as collaborate with other departments within the College. Land and property values have been at the forefront of his research with recent emphasis on recreational leasing. Through grants from the Council on Fuel and Agricultural Research, he focused on issues affecting the dairy and wheat industries in Illinois. His dairy research focused on community acceptance of dairy farms, economies of size and economics of alternative dairy systems.

The College’s Afghanistan project has given Eberle the opportunity to return to Afghanistan and use his expertise to positively influence their agricultural development. He has gone back four times in the last six years to work with the Afghan people on improving their educational procedures, oil seed production and processing as well as water use projects from an economist perspective.

Throughout his retirement Eberle, who has been to over 20 countries around the world, plans to continue traveling with his wife. He remains active in the Illinois Society of Professional Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers and the United Nations Association-USA Board- Southern Illinois Chapter, and has expressed further interest in future international projects.

It was the balance between teaching, working with undergraduate and graduate students, and research that have made him enjoy working in the College of Agricultural Sciences.

“Overall, I’ve really enjoyed working with the students and faculty here.”

The College wishes Dr. Eberle a happy retirement!

Alumni Returns to Coach

The College of Agricultural Sciences welcomes back Karra Kirby, a Spring 2011 Animal Science graduate from Goreville, as she returns to coach the College’s Livestock Judging Team.

Before attending SIU, Karra spent two years competing with Lake Land College Judging Team, in Mattoon, Illinois. While back at SIU, she will be splitting her time between coaching and graduate school.

Filled with excitement, Karra has spent the fall working with team members, preparing them for The National Western Stockshow in Denver, Colorado and National Cattleman’s Beef Association judging contest in Nashville, Tennessee this spring. The team has been studying classes and practicing reasons two to three times each week.

“It is a great honor and privilege to be coaching a team that has so much history and that I also had the opportunity to judge on.” Kara said. “Livestock judging not only allows the team members to travel to beautiful places in the United States, but also to gain public speaking ability, leadership and a better understanding of the livestock industry.”

Karra works to teach the team members responsibility, time management and confidence. Confidence becomes a prime factor in being a competitive livestock judging team.

She reflects, “During my judging career I learned so much more than just how to judge livestock. I got the opportunity to meet amazing people and develop skills I now use every day.”

The livestock judging team is interdisciplinary, welcoming students from across majors interested in growing in self confidence, passion for livestock, and communication skills. Team members are grateful for the donations made in support the development of these life skills.

Livestock Judging Coach Karra Kirby

8th Annual Agriculture Industry Day
Friday, April 20, 2012 • 8:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. • University Farms
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

4-H and FFA Judging Contest

8:30 am Horticulture Registration
8:00 am Livestock Registration at University Bull Test
8:00 am Dairy Registration at University Dairy Farm
11:45 am Official Placings for Livestock and Dairy Contests
12:00 pm Pizza Party
1:00 pm Presentation of Awards

COAS students and clubs will showcase their programs within the college and be available for questions.

For additional information, please contact the College of Agricultural Sciences at 618.453.2469 or email rfullerton@siu.edu.