Restoring Biodiversity on the Sumter Campus

Budgets are tight everywhere these days and college campuses are no exception. For the past few years, the focus at USC Sumter has been on student enrichment, technology enhancements and recruitment, with little funding remaining for other endeavors such as landscaping improvements.

In 2012, a number of faculty and staff offered an interesting solution to USC Sumter’s quest for a better looking campus, and this solution has turned into a long term improvement plan and teachable moment, especially for students in an Environmental Biology class taught by Naturalist Austin Jenkins.

“The University made an important investment up front in purchasing a few native plants and it will pay off tremendously in the future,” Jenkins said of the plan. The overall effort is an affordable one. Students provide the labor while learning propagation techniques and drawing up restoration plans for the campus. After these initial plants are in the ground, seed and vegetative propagation will yield plants for the rest of the campus.

“Native plants are not only aesthetically pleasing, but are ecologically the right thing to do,” Jenkins added. He explains to the students the importance of restoring native plants to the area so that the proper wildlife and vegetation will return with them. “Roughly half of the United States has been altered by suburban lawns, which hold very few species. If we are going to restore biodiversity, these places are a valid place to start,” said Jenkins.

Dr. Jenkins says he has received some wonderful ideas from the student plans. So far, the only problem with the restoration project has been patience. “This is not a traditional landscaping makeover like our society is now used to seeing. Instead, it will take time, but in the end it will be ecologically beneficial, aesthetically pleasing, and much more affordable than traditional means.”