President Gibraltar’s Inauguration focuses on Sustainability and Civic Engagement

Wells College put its very best foot forward in mid-October during the festivities around the inauguration of its nineteenth president, Jonathan Gibraltar. The Inauguration weekend theme was Simply Wells, encapsulating key, unique aspects of this college’s experience. President Gibraltar specifically asked that choices made about the events and activities reflect the college’s strong embrace on sustainability. Toward that end, Marian Brown, director of the Center for Sustainability, was asked to join the inauguration planning committee. The event invitations reflected our sustainability values; they were printed using vegetable-based inks on Forest Stewardship Council certified paper containing 10% post-consumer recycled content—by a local company utilizing wind power-generated electricity. The campus was decorated with seasonal flowering plants, pumpkins and gourds; single-use signage was kept to a minimum.

The weekend opened on Friday, October 14th with an afternoon of learning activities themed around sustainability and civic engagement. The keynote talk was given by Paul Rogat Loeb, editor of this fall’s Common Read book: “The Impossible Will Take A Little While: perseverance and hope in troubled times,” a compendium of inspirational writings from global leaders on the front lines of progressive change. Loeb’s talk was followed by a panel discussion, moderated by Niamh O’Leary, on the intersections between sustainability and civic engagement. Mr. Loeb joined the panel, which included President Gibraltar, director of Campus Life Meg Flaherty, politics professor Susan Tabrizi, alumna Jamila Walida Simon ‘01, and Marian Brown, for a lively discussion. The panel was followed by a poster session featuring students invited to present on internships or research projects related to sustainability and/or civic engagement. Stephen Armstrong ‘16 (right) returned to present his project to get water bottle fill stations on campus. A number of other current and past students presented their good work.

Inauguration Day, on Saturday, October 15th, opened with several community service opportunities in which the entire campus was invited to participate. This event was scheduled to coincide with Alumni Weekend, so many alumni joined in the fun. Projects included a clean-up and planting of the terrace garden in the Main Courtyard (Left: Grounds foreman Jim Button instructs the volunteer gardeners). Other volunteers, led by Scott Heinekamp, cleaned brush and marked trees along the Nature Trail (photo right).

The morning of community service activities concluded with the planting of a young red oak tree in the lawn in front of Zabriskie Hall, given to the campus by the college’s Board of Trustees in honor of President Gibraltar.

The afternoon was bright and sunny for the formal installation ceremony, which was held outdoors in the circle in front of Macmillan Hall. Delegates from many other colleges were in attendance, and representatives of the campus community: student, staff, faculty, emeriti all presented President Gibraltar with symbolic gifts. Dan Hill, representing the Heron Clan of the Cayuga Nation, reminded the audience that the land on which Wells College sits was Cayuga land; Dan played a commemorative song on a native wooden flute. The Simply Wells Inauguration weekend closed with a Farm-to-Table Community Celebration dinner to which the entire community was invited. Wells Dining and the Inns of Aurora staff pulled out all the stops, serving up delicious dishes using seasonal foods that were locally sourced as much as possible. Informational placards identified the local producers of each individual dish.
Spreading the word...

Political Science prof Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo edited the book called “Land Reforms and Natural Resource Conflicts in Africa: New Development Paradigms in the Era of Global Liberalization”. Dr. Lumumba-Kasongo presented “Politics in a World of Inequality” at the 24th World Congress of the International Political Science Association in Poznan, Poland.


Marian Brown, Sustainability Center director, presented “Renewably Powering—Empowering—a Community” and “From the Ground[s] Up” at the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education conference in Baltimore. Brown delivered “Integrating Sustainability into Curriculum” for the State of NY Sustainability Conference at SUNY New Paltz in November. In absentia, her invited presentation on “Residence Hall Recycling Support” was delivered at the conference of the NYS Association for Reduction, Reuse and Recycling.

Psychology professor Milene Morfei reviewed submissions for the Sustainability and Social Science Research Symposium to be held at the University of Michigan in May 2017.

Aurora Farmers Market interns

The Aurora Farmers Market, an on-going project of the Center for Sustainability, offers a series of student internship opportunities. Shania Dauphinais ’18 was hired to manage the market for its entire June—October season. Shania also completed a summer internship on strategies to improve the market, about which she presented during the Inauguration civic engagement poster session (photo below). Shania was joined in late summer by Elizabeth Reeve ’17, who was doing her fall Farmers Market internship (Liz presenting at right). This may mark the first time a Wells intern was partially supervised by another Wells student.

New sustainability-related courses for Spring 2017

ENVR 285 Natural Resource Management
Professor Schnurr will offer this 3-credit introduction to the field of science-based natural resource management, including both aquatic and terrestrial systems.

SUS 285 Tutorial in Sustainability
This class offers 1 credit for attending six spring events coordinated by the Center for Sustainability, doing additional research and writing an analysis of the sustainability topic addressed in each event attended.

FOOD 285 Spring Gardening
This 2-credit, second-block course, providing both classroom and hands-on knowledge about gardening, will be team-taught by professors McClusky, Muñoz, and Schnurr.

Chad Uran, sabbatic leave replacement for professor Ernie Olson, offers two courses. Dr. Uran, a White Earth Anishinaabe, is a visiting postdoctoral associate at Cornell.

FNIS 285 Language, Culture and Revitalization
American Indian languages have taken on special importance as both evidence of and a model for cultural, political, philosophical, and spiritual revitalization. The course examines several approaches to language revitalization. 3 credits.

ANTH 385 Indigenous Representations in the Media
From the moments of contact, the representation of Indigenous peoples posed problems. This course examines the strategies and consequences of representational practices within global colonial contexts.

Sustain-A-Cell Assignment

Biology professor Christina Schmidt charged her Anatomy & Physiology class with the assignment to create cell models by repurposing existing materials. Sustainability Center director Marian Brown met with the class to explain the meaning of “found materials” and where one might locate them on campus. Brown also offered GRIND gift cards as prizes for winning entries. Teams had to explain the structure and function of cell organelles and identify what found materials they used to represent each. The teams of Jessica Mebane ’20 and Caitlyn Smith ’20 was awarded both the Grand Prize and the award for the Most Creative Use of Found Objects for their lab period. The team used a wide variety of materials, including a broken-down basketball, used paper plates, dish sponge, a stale cheese ball, loofah netting, hay bale twine, materials from a bubble wrap mailing envelope, and foil bottle caps to craft their winning entry.

Learning in Unusual Ways

The Introduction to Sustainability class got an eye-opening lesson in proper recycling. Professor Marian Brown asked Facilities to drop off bags of landfill trash and recycling collected from residence halls in front of Zabriskie for her students to open and sort during class. They were surprised at some of their peers’ “mis-cycling” habits.

The Center for Sustainability hosted a Natural Dye workshop in late September in our Chemistry lab. Fabric artist Sarah Gotowka taught participants about preparing natural dyes from flowering plants, including some grown on campus. Workshop participants got to experiment by dyeing silk handkerchiefs using various natural dyebaths and techniques Ms. Gotowka demonstrated.
Ride on!

Wells is the first organization outside Tompkins County to participate in the new Finger Lakes Rideshare Coalition. This regional collaboration among educational institutions in the area: Cornell, Ithaca College, Tompkins-Cortland Community College, BOCES, and Wells—offers ridematching to students, faculty and staff. Using the Zimride by Enterprise platform with a social media component to “check out” ridershares, drivers can fill extra seats in their vehicle if they are taking a trip or running errands. Passengers can post their need for a ride home or for shopping trips. Employees may find commuting matches with other regional travelers.

Another bright idea!

Wells is the only private entity participating in a regional Request for Proposal for solar energy development issued in September by the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board. This RFP covered forty potential solar projects for two dozen municipalities - and Wells - within our five Central New York counties; the potential is for over 8 megawatts of regional solar energy production. Wells worked with a Department of Energy-funded consultant to identify possible sites on college land for solar energy systems. We should know in early 2017 whether any of the proposals offer us a cost-competitive opportunity to “go solar.” Stay tuned.

E-Waste Made Easy

Our Information Technology office has an agreement with Regional Computer Recycling & Recovery to periodically pick up and properly dispose of obsolete computers and non-working electronics (collectively called e-waste), in full compliance with federal law and New York’s Electronic Equipment Recycling and Reuse Act. In June, Wells disposed of over 630 pounds of computers and assorted electronic waste; in September, we sent another 1,400 pounds of e-waste to be recycled. RCR&R verifies that hard drives are wiped of any data and that hazardous materials derived from such e-waste is kept out of the environment.

Keeping the good stuff

We reported (above right) that the Office of Information Technology regularly and responsibly disposes of e-waste: non-functional or obsolete technology equipment. As IT upgrades office and computer lab equipment, a number of computer peripherals (keyboards, monitors, mice) become surplus that still have lots of useful life left in them. Recently, IT staffers have been placing still usable computer items in the Bargain Basement in Main, the place where students can access all manner of still usable items.

“Mugging” our newbies

No, we’re not talking about some weird hazing tradition. For the second year, we continue to partner with Student Life to issue a reusable beverage container to all new students and to new college employees. We make “newbies” aware of the location of water bottle fill stations and that they can obtain a 25¢ discount at the GRIND Café for using their mug for coffee purchases. Members of two clubs, Campus Greens and F.O.R.C.E.S., act as spotters for those using their reusable container, rewarding them with a GOTCHA card, redeemable for a free hot beverage refill into their own mug.

Photo: Alex Wheeler, Residence Hall Director, joined us in July.

Energy-saving contracts

Earlier this year, we inked two service contracts offering us significant energy savings: Campus Specialties Inc will rent MicroFridge units to interested students. These all-in-one units feature a 5 cu ft refrigerator, 0º freezer, and microwave. When the microwave is in use, cooling unit compressors shut off, saving energy. The company even delivers the unit directly to the student renter’s room. Robbins Vending now provides our vending service, delivering an improved mix of product offerings and better service. They installed modern machines meeting Energy Star energy efficiency standards.
Washoku Shock Dinner

Japanese language professor Kurt Pipa and this year’s group of Japanese exchange students from Doshisha Women’s College prepared their annual culture dinner in the kitchen next to the Faculty Parlors in Main. The Japanese students were joined by about three dozen Wells students. The cooks harvested Japanese greens and turnips grown in the Languages garden behind McGordon House and obtained parsley from the herb beds fronting Zabriskie Hall. The Center for Sustainability provided additional local, organic vegetables and eggs for dishes of the meal, which was enjoyed by all.

Sustainability Field Trip

Southern Cayuga Middle School faculty Simone Lanning and Tim Amory teamed to bring their students to Wells in early October for a daylong sustainability educational experience. Forty-five 8th graders were split into three groups rotating through three 90-minute activities. Each group of students had the opportunity to go out on the Cayuga Lake Floating Classroom to learn about the ecology of the lake by pulling up and analyzing samples of aquatic plants, and learning about threats to drinking water quality from invasive species and water pollution. Each cohort of middle schoolers spent part of their time upstairs in the Wells College Boathouse, making sculptures from natural and found materials under the guidance of their art teacher, Mr. Amory. Each group of middle schoolers also spent a third of their time in the Center for Sustainability, learning more about water issues. We set up six different learning stations in the Center classroom that Ms. Lanning’s science students rotated through.

New ways to reach out about sustainability

At the New York State Fair in August, Wells F.O.R.C.E.S. members volunteered to assemble free bird boxes for visitors to the info booth of NY Parks and Recreation, the state organization overseeing the F.O.R.C.E.S. program. In October, Wells joined over two dozen higher ed institutions for the NY Campus Crunch, a celebration of local food. The Center for Sustainability donated a bushel of local apples for participants to take and pledge to “crunch” in support.

Theatre professor Siouxi Easter asked the Sustainability Center to offer our blind drinking water taste test challenge during the Fall production of “Urinetown”, which had the theme of water rights. Campus drinking water was favored over bottled and spring water by many taste testers.

Campus Greens conducted another campus cleanup in early November, collecting way too much landfill trash and recyclable materials from campus grounds.