Program reaches children on their turf

It’s a late-February afternoon and there’s a light breeze blowing across the playground of the Live Oak Community park. The sun is out, thermometer says 70. Feels like a short-sleeves day, like spring … and yet this place, well, this place looks forlorn. Swings sway empty in the breeze, the carousel sits motionless.

The eye wanders, but in a couple of blinks, children begin to appear. Individually and in pairs, they enter the park from multiple compass points, drawn by the sight of a guy in a white SUV slowly cruising the neighborhood like the Good Humor man.

Behind the wheel is LaGrange student Grant Miller ’07. Riding shotgun is Ashley Fitzpatrick ’08. They arrive at the playground with a small bag of snacks, a couple of balls and compassionate hearts.

These LaGrange students and others come to the park each Monday to participate in a program called the “Bus Project,” which is somewhat of a misnomer since there isn’t a bus in the park today.

“It’s been a hassle trying to find a driver for the bus,” Grant says, explaining that they’re currently searching for someone to fill that role.

Bus or not, the project’s objectives have remained constant since the program was established in 2001.

“The idea is to take a mentoring program out to where the kids live,” Grant says. “Instead of going to see them at their schools or somewhere, we give them a place to hang out and get positive influences and some help with after-school work and that kind of thing.”

Deidre to help her work through some behavioral issues at school.

Grant says he became involved with the project in 2003, his first year on the Hill. He’s headed it since 2004. For Ashley, who is slated to take over in the fall, this is her first year working with the Bus Project, but she’s already witnessed the significance it carries for the children.

“I really saw what type of impact this has my first time out here when the kids were saying, ‘Don’t leave, don’t leave. Please stay longer—just 10 more minutes,’” she says.

Grant agrees. “I hate to leave here because they get upset when we go. They want us to stay all afternoon.”

During his four years working in the program, Grant says he’s seen some positive changes in many of the children. One little girl, Deidre, particularly stands out.

“Deidre (pseudonym) was in the first grade when she started coming here,” he remembers. “The day I met her I said, ‘How was your day at school?’”

Her response contained a four-letter invective that was startling, especially coming from a 6-year-old.

Undaunted, he continued trying to reach out to the child, and eventually, he made a connection and gradually developed a close enough relationship with Deidre to help her work through some behavioral issues at school.

Grant says, “When I see her now, she runs up and gives me a big hug. It ended up working out pretty well. She’s growing up and is well behaved.” He smiles, then adds, “for the most part.”

Though the Bus Project experience has been rewarding, it hasn’t always been easy.

“It’s a huge commitment to come here every Monday,” Grant says. “There are a lot of days that I don’t feel well or I’ve got a test to study for or I’ve got SGA stuff to do—days when I say, ‘I just don’t want to go today.’

“But it’s those times specifically, the days that I don’t want to go, that I come out here and end up having the best time.”

Delta Tau Delta earns high honor

The Zeta Beta Chapter of Delta Tau Delta was presented the Hugh Shields Award of Excellence for the second consecutive year at the fraternity’s southern division meetings held in Atlanta this February. The award is the highest honor the national fraternity bestows on a local chapter, with only 10 earning the honor each year. At left, current and former officers of the local chapter display the winning flag. From left, they are former President Stuart Miller ’07, former Vice President John Hurston ’07, current Vice President Bill Stikes ’07 and current President Ryan Howard ’08. The chapter also was named to the Court of Honor.
Famed scientist pays a visit

Proposing an alliance between science and religion to save creation, two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning scientist Dr. Edward O. Wilson spoke with campus constituents during a mid-April visit. He argued that the two camps must set aside their differences to preserve life on this planet.

“Religion and science are the two most powerful forces in the world today,” he told the audience gathered for the Friends of the LaGrange College Library dinner on April 12. “If they could be united, the problem would soon be solved.”

Such is the premise of Dr. Wilson’s latest book, “The Creation,” and he presented to a student each spring at the College’s Honors Convocation. Design

Following his student lecture, Dr. Wilson, far right, visits with Professor of Biology Dr. William Paschal, left, and Avery Robertson ‘08.

First on Dr. Wilson’s LaGrange agenda was his address at the annual Friends of the LaGrange College Library dinner. Above, he talks with President Stuart Gulley, left, and Dr. Charles Hudson H’80, right, before the event.

The echo of a lone gunman’s rampage at Virginia Tech University reverberated across America’s college campuses in April. At LaGrange College, shockwaves from the tragedy rocked the Hill when the campus community learned that one of those killed in the massacre was the son of a LaGrange professor.

Jamie Bishop, who was teaching German at Virginia Tech, was the son of LaGrange College Writer-in-Residence Michael Bishop.

“That tragic and senseless loss of life is a reminder that much in life is random and cannot be fully anticipated, let alone understood,” said President Stuart Gulley in an e-mail message to faculty, staff and students the following morning.

That evening, the campus community gathered in the Chapel during a Service of Shared Grief and Shared Hope. Reading responsively, the overflow crowd said, “May we not become paralyzed by fear or anxiety as a community because of this, but help us to continue to live fully and cautiously.”

Colleagues of Bishop’s in the English Department spearheaded an effort to create the Jamie Bishop Annual Award in Graphic Design, which will be presented to a student each spring at the College’s Honors Convocation. Design

Those wishing to make a gift to the award fund can send it to LaGrange College Advancement Services, 601 Broad St., LaGrange, GA 30204 or visit www.lagrange.edu/give.

In response to the incident, College administrators immediately began a review of the campus safety and security plan. Joined by local law enforcement personnel, the group is examining new action plans based on insights gained from the tragedy.

present rate, his estimate is that half the species of plants and animals on earth either could be gone or headed to early extinction by the end of this century.

The resulting cost will be great.

“Why? future generations are going to ask. Why did you diminish our own lives?” he said.

But far from a “gloom and doom” message, his remarks sounded an optimistic note as he talked of ways to address the issue.

“This is a problem that can be solved,” he declared. “At the end of the day we will realize that the cost is not high and we can do it.

“It’s the right thing to do.”

In a self-deprecating manner, Dr. Wilson talked about his love of entomology that began when he was a child.

“Most kids have a bug period,” he said. “I never grew out of mine.”

He encouraged students to observe the world around them and offered an alternative slogan for today’s parents and educators: “Leave no child indoors.”

Dr. Wilson’s most recent Pulitzer Prize came for “The Ants” in 1991. He also earned the award for “On Human Nature” in 1979.

Often described as “the father of the modern environmental movement,” the Harvard professor of biology also was named by Time magazine as one of “America’s 25 Most Influential People.”
Dedication launches Benson book

The publication of a book decades in the making was celebrated on campus May 4. Sponsored jointly by the College and the Troup County Historical Society, a dedication marked the unveiling of Louise “Biddy” Barfield Hammett’s “I Must Sing! The Era With Carrie Fall Benson.”

The volume examines the life and times of the College’s first librarian, also a noted poet and playwright. Before her death in 1949, Benson won numerous literary awards and saw more than 37 of her plays produced throughout the Southeast.

“It’s important for us to know who the history makers of our culture were,” Hammett said. “But how much more important to hear a talent that God gave.”

Driven by her strong belief that Benson deserves recognition as a Southern literary figure, Hammett spent more than 20 years researching the writer’s life, uncovering bits and pieces of her past, poems and plays as she went.

Though all of Benson’s works were originally thought to have been burned, Hammett first uncovered some of them in the writer’s old home, not far from the College. That discovery inspired a search that unearthed others in the Banks Library basement.

Soon, Hammett had a trunk full of manuscripts, letters and pictures.

“My family has been living with Miss Carrie Fall’s things since 1986,” she told guests at the event.

Beyond granting a look at Benson’s literary talents, the book also provides a glimpse into that period of history and into Benson’s colorful life.

“Carrie Fall Benson was not a poet laureate—though she could have been—or a Pulitzer Prize winner,” Hammett said, “but she certainly would have won the prize for the wittiest person around these parts.”

To order the book, visit www.lagrange.edu/bookstore and click on “books by LC authors” or call 888-353-4499.

Teaching awards presented

Two faculty members were recognized for teaching excellence at the College’s April 27 Honors Convocation, held at First United Methodist Church. Associate Professor of Psychology Dr. Heather Haas earned both the John R. Hines, Jr., Undergraduate Research Award and the Vulcan Materials Teaching Excellence Award, while Assistant Professor of Business Jenny Hampton was presented the United Methodist Church Teaching Award. Pausing after the ceremony, from left, are Dr. Haas, President Stuart Gulley, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean Dr. Jay Simmons and Hampton.
College officials welcome proud new citizens

The courtroom is surprisingly large, but looks the way you would expect a federal courtroom to look: imposing. The Great Seal looms high over the judge’s bench, which looms high over the gallery. There’s a big American flag in the corner, and portraits of stern-faced judges from days long past adorn the walls.

After a time, the proceeding starts—and it begins with an unexpected performance that lets a little of the austere air out of the place. Through an open door, the Cedar Grove High School Junior ROTC marches in to present the colors, followed by a smiling lady in a white dress who gesticulates dramatically while she sings the National Anthem in a rousing acappella.

Today, Courtroom 2306, high up on the top floor of the United States District Court in Atlanta, is packed wall-to-wall with people, 143 of whom are about to become newly minted Americans. On the bench for this March 23 Naturalization Ceremony is U.S. District Judge and LaGrange Trustee Richard W. Story ’75, and seated below him is the occasion’s keynote speaker, College President Stuart Gulley.

The gathered audience is a motley group: family and friends of the 143, two visiting high school classes and representatives of various civic organizations, including three Sons of the American Revolution who are wearing replica Revolutionary War uniforms, authentic-looking down to the buckles on their shoes.

Before administering the oath, Judge Story asks that the soon-to-be Americans stand up and state their names and countries of origin. “This part of the ceremony is the most meaningful to me,” he says, “to see the breadth of the citizens who are coming here.”

One by one they stand and speak the requested information, some with heavy accents, some in perfect English—most a little nervous.

After the roll call, Judge Story administers the oath, a short but serious pledge of patriotic fidelity that includes a promise to bear arms in defense of the United States if asked.

Next, Dr. Gulley is introduced. He speaks to the new Americans of rights, privileges and responsibilities, and he emphasizes the importance of education.

“Whatever your age and station in life, be a lifelong learner,” he says, and then explains that those with higher educational attainment are usually healthier, happier and wealthier.

He also stresses service, saying, “You can help make a difference in the life of another. To be a land of hope and opportunity for all, we must extend a hand to those suffering and in need.”

Near the end of his address, Dr. Gulley draws a big laugh when he tells the audience that he was actually born on the fourth of July. “I’m a real live Yankee Doodle Dandy,” he says.

After the ceremony, there are handshakes, hugs, laughter—and tears. Many, like Mai Tuyet Ngo, have traveled a great distance physically and metaphorically to arrive at this point.

Ngo, a slender, graceful young woman, who escaped Vietnam by boat as a small child, says in a whispered voice, “I’m speechless. I’m so happy that now I can vote and travel.”

Another of the new citizens, Momodu Adam Bah, a big man, sports a big grin in the lobby outside the courtroom. The truck driver from Rwanda says, “This means a lot more to me than anything else I’ve ever achieved in life. I came here to make a better life for myself and my family.”

And afterwards, after the last lingering new American has grasped the last extended hand, hugged the last neck and enjoyed the last fleeting moment of the occasion, Judge Story offers these words: “Naturalization ceremonies are one of the most enjoyable responsibilities of my job. … Many have faced adversity to reach this point. I am always reminded of my good fortune in having been born in this country and receiving my citizenship as a gift.”