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**From the Interim Director**

The holiday season is again upon us and as I write this we are preparing for the annual festivities. WFREC has been involved in several activities since the last newsletter. Probably the most important of these was interviewing candidates for the center director position. We interviewed three candidates during October and the position was offered to and accepted by Dr. Wes Wood. Dr. Wood is Professor of Soil Science in the Department of Agronomy and Soils at Auburn University. He is also coordinator for the Interdisciplinary Environmental Science undergraduate major at Auburn. Dr. Wood conducts research on carbon and nutrient cycling in managed and natural ecosystems. He also teaches classes in nutrient management, soils and environmental quality and sustainability. He has extensive experience working overseas on various soils related projects. Wes will begin as center director on February 1, 2014 and we look forward to his arrival.



During October WFREC hosted a visit from Santa Rosa Leadership Class 27. The group toured the Jay Research Facility and learned about agriculture in northwest Florida. Many of the attendees were unfamiliar with peanut and cotton production systems. The WFREC stop provided them with information on production practices for these and other crops grown in this region of Florida.

As part of Farm-to-City Week, a national program to increase awareness of how the rural and urban citizens are interconnected, WFREC participated for the fourth year in providing food to low income families in Santa Rosa County. Over 400 families were provided food items on the Tuesday prior to Thanksgiving. Cabbage and collard greens were grown at the Jay Facility for the program. We had over 100 area high school and middle school students participate in harvesting and washing of the vegetables and packaging sweet potatoes donated by growers.

Three students graduated from the UF-Milton teaching program on December 13. A reception for family and friends of the graduates was held following the graduation ceremony. This brings to over 200 the number of graduates from the Milton program. Student enrollment continues to grow and is an indication of the quality instruction we offer and the outstanding efforts of those involved in student recruiting and advising. More on the graduation ceremony can be found elsewhere in this Newsletter.

The WFREC faculty and staff wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Barry Brecke  
Interim Director



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## New Center Director

**A** new center director has been appointed. Dr. Wes Wood will be joining the WFREC team on February 1st. Since 1990 Dr. Wood has been a professor of soil science at Auburn University, where he also coordinates the environmental science undergraduate major. As well as teaching, he conducts research and participates in extension-type activities despite not having a formal extension appointment.

Jack Payne, senior vice president for agriculture and natural resources at UF in Gainesville, said the university is fortunate to have someone of Wood's talents. "Dr. Wood is an accomplished scientist, with a great love of agriculture and the environment," Payne said. "I know he will do an outstanding job for IFAS."

Faculty and staff are already communicating with Dr. Wood on a regular basis, and he and his wife recently visited the area to attend our Christmas luncheon and to look at possible homes. When asked about his new position, Dr. Wood expressed his happiness to be on board and says he's excited to get down here and get to work. Faculty and staff have expressed similar excitement about Dr. Wood joining the team and feel he will be a leader who can motivate us to do great things and lead WFREC in an exciting direction.

Dr. Barry Brecke has been acting as interim center director for the last year and a half. The faculty and staff are appreciative of the hard work and dedication he's shown while in the position.



## Employee Happenings

On October 7<sup>th</sup> **Shevonne Brown** joined the WFREC team as academic program secretary. You can find her smiling face at the front desk in the Milton office.

On November 8<sup>th</sup> **Mike Dozier** received a promotion to senior lab technician for Dr. Ramon Leon, weed scientist. Mike has been with WFREC for twenty-five years as maintenance mechanic. When asked about the new addition to his team, Dr. Leon had this to say:

The weed science research program of WFREC is very happy to have Mike Dozier on board. His extensive experience in crop management and conducting field experiments will make our research program stronger. Mike's creativity and great problem solving capacity has already prompted new ideas to improve our generation of weed management solutions in row crops and turfgrass settings and will allow us to develop more challenging and important projects. We welcome him and thank him for accepting this new professional challenge in which we are sure he will excel. "

On December 5<sup>th</sup> **Sean Claypool** left WFREC to make a move to Tallahassee where his wife received a job promotion. During his farewell luncheon, he received a 5-year pin for his dedicated service and longevity. He will be greatly missed.



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## Mensuration Course Offered This Spring

**M**ensuration is a forestry course (FOR 3430C) that only appears on the schedule every couple of years, and is being offered in Milton during the Spring 2014 semester. In Forest Mensuration, students learn how to measure trees, timber, and forest stands, and thus provide quantitative information necessary for forest management and planning. In many respects



forest mensuration provides the foundation of all practical works in the woods. The knowledge and skills gained in forest mensuration are also essential to understanding other courses such as silviculture, forest ecology, and natural resource conservation. Timber cruising, scaling, and valuation of logs and standing timber are also highly desired skills and greatly enhance one's chances of employment in state and federal forest service agencies and in the forest industry.

This course is required by the Florida Forest Service for certain positions (mostly the forester positions), but it is not required by other state agencies. Most forest industry jobs would strongly prefer (or may even require) that an employee have this course prior to employment.

If this sounds like something you might be interested in taking, call Shevonne Brown, the academic program secretary, at (850) 983-7125 or send her an email to [shevonnea-brown@ufl.edu](mailto:shevonnea-brown@ufl.edu).

## UF Milton Campus Student Club Message

by Kevin Smith, Student Club President

**T**o say the students are ready for a break would be an understatement. I have watched and participated with the Milton University of Florida students who have spent endless hours writing papers, doing homework, preparing for quizzes, and studying for exams. I must say that these young and not so "young" students are dedicated to their education. They impress me with their steadfast demeanor, not to mention their sense of humor to help dissipate the tension.

We are now gearing up for our plant sale at the Emerald Coast Flower and Garden Festival. In April, we will join vendors from across the southeast on the Pensacola State College Milton Campus to sell plants and trees. Money made from selling plants and trees from our greenhouses allows the Milton UF students to purchase equipment and supplies for study labs and pays for field trips for academic and non-academic excursions.

We would like to congratulate Paula Smith, Kenneth McDonald and Daniel Leonard for achieving what we all are striving for, to receive a Bachelor's degree from the University of Florida. We will miss them, and we wish them the best in their future careers.

## Scholarship Awards

In October Friends of the Garden awarded \$250 scholarships to the following students: **Leandre Dawes, Philip Garrett, Steven Lawhorn, Paula Smith, Alex Steed** and **Courtney Tyson**.

Also in October, the Santa Rosa Master Gardeners awarded \$500 scholarships to **Cody English** and **Kevin Smith**.

Shevonne Brown, our academic program secretary, would like to encourage students to apply for scholarships. Here are some links to get you started: <http://sfrc.ufl.edu/opportunities/scholarships/> and <http://cals.ufl.edu/students/scholarships-awards.php> (undergraduate drop down menu, fill out app).



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**Graduate Spotlight - Kenneth McDonald**

**K**enneth “Kenny” McDonald graduated from the Natural Resource Conservation program December 13th. Kenny has always enjoyed being outdoors. After high school, when it came time to consider a college degree, Kenny was encouraged to study something he enjoyed so he would get paid to do something he loved. He knew forestry was what he wanted to pursue, but had a difficult time finding the right program. After some frustration, he eventually found his way to the NRC (Natural Resource Conservation) program at Milton UF. He admits that while he enjoyed each aspect of the degree and the valuable knowledge he learned, it was challenging work.



Now that he has completed his degree, Kenny says it is a rewarding feeling to look back at the acquired knowledge and he looks forward to landing a job in the field of natural resources and conservation. His ultimate desire is to have a career in the field of waterfowl study and management, although he says any job dealing with forests, land, or wildlife would be exciting. Kenny hopes that his dedication and hard work to the NRC program will show potential employers that he has the ability to commit to something and achieve it.

**Graduate Spotlight - Paula Smith**

**P**aula Smith also graduated from the Natural Resource Conservation program December 13th. Paula’s love for the outdoors began as a child growing up on a farm. Her father also worked for the Civilian Conservation Corp and she learned quite a bit about nature through him. Her college career began later in life and she started taking classes at Pensacola State College with the intention of studying biology. As fate would have it, she saw an informational poster on the PSC campus for the University of Florida Milton programs and she spoke with the recruiter who turned her toward the NRC program.



Paula has applied for two minors to accompany her degree: wildlife ecology and soil science. And now that she’s graduated she would like to find a position in the area as a soil technician.



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**“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”**

**Nelson Mandela**

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**Farm to City Week 2013**

**R**obin Vickers is the events coordinator for the University of Florida, West Florida Research and Education Center in Milton/Jay. In 2009 she was challenged by the University of Florida to incorporate National Farm to City Week into the events curriculum. She wanted a project that would make a positive impact on the community while bringing about a better understanding between rural and urban people by increasing their knowledge and appreciation for agriculture.



After several meetings with local farmers and community members, she thought the idea of a Thanksgiving food distribution (some locally grown produce) would be a great way to promote agriculture and increase awareness about the importance of agriculture to consumers and the general public.

If you had asked her four years ago how many families in Santa Rosa County were in dire need of a complete thanksgiving meal, she would have told you, first, that she had never given it much thought and then she would have guessed maybe 50 families. Unfortunately, she was nowhere close to the number of families in need.



She met with the Bay Area Food Bank to discuss the idea for a Thanksgiving food distribution and asked for their help. The Bay Area Food bank graciously agreed to work with us to make it happen. So far WFREC has been able to distribute a little over 50,000 pounds of food to local families. The community support has been overwhelming.

National Farm to City Week 2013 was November 22-28 and Robin is proud to announce that this year on November 26th the University of Florida - West Florida Research and Education Center, Bay Area Food Bank, Leonard & Susan Kichler Farm and Sirmon Farms distributed 26,589 lbs of food to families in need this Thanksgiving holiday. Also, the Santa Rosa County Extension Service was there and demonstrated how to prepare and cook the produce as well as hand out peanut butter.

There is no better time to honor our local farmers, ranchers, and producers. Without them, the safe, abundant and affordable food we put on our tables year round would not be possible. Generation after generation, their hard work and willingness to embrace new ideas has provided our nation with the food we need.



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## WFREC Happenings from the Past Three Months

On **October 17th** **Santa Rosa Leadership Class 27** had their annual Agribusiness Tour, which included the Jay Research facility, as well as other farms and businesses in Santa Rosa County (photo to the right).



**October 25th** was the **Fall Partner Appreciation Luncheon**. This lunch was held to show appreciation to the Extension agents and WFREC faculty and staff for their hard work during the events that occurred over the last few months.

On **November 21st** Hannah Hunsberger gave her **graduate presentation** on distribution and habitat use of Florida endemic solitary bee (*Hesperapis oraria*) and host plant (*Balduina angustifolia*) to faculty, staff and students of WFREC. She successfully defended her Master's thesis and received her degree this semester. She'll be staying on as an OPS employee until late spring when she plans to move to Idaho.

On **December 2nd** four UF Milton students gave their **undergraduate internship presentations** to a small crowd of faculty, staff, students and family (see article on page 7).

**December 13th** was **Fall Graduation**. There were two graduates this semester: Kenny McDonald and Paula Smith. Daniel Leonard walked for graduation on Friday, but will complete his program Spring of 2014 (photo below). (Graduate Spotlights are on page 4.)



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### Calendar of Events

January 6	<b>Spring semester classes start</b>
January 6-10	<b>Drop/Add</b>
January 17	<b>Fee payments due</b> for Spring semester
January 31	<b>Degree applications due</b>
February 18	<b>Florida Turfgrass Association Meeting</b> , Milton campus
March 1	<b>Applications due</b> for Summer/Fall 2014 semesters
April 11	<b>Last Day</b> for students to drop or withdrawal for the semester with a "W"
April 26—May 2	<b>Final Exams</b>



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**Internship Presentations – December 2, 2013**

**O**n December 2<sup>nd</sup> four students (Philip Garrett, Micah Byars, Troy Luckenbill and Julie Wood) gave presentations on their recent internship experiences. In attendance were 30-35 faculty, staff, students, family members and employers. Each student earned 1-3 credit hours for these internships as practical work experience.

**Philip Garrett** has worked as an intern with Northwest Florida Water Management for the last three years. During his internship he has been involved in many aspects of conservation, preservation and maintenance of water management lands, including spraying boundary lines, equipment upkeep, reforestation, timber inventory, and his favorite activity: prescribed burning. He feels his work experience with NFWM has helped him acquire a desired position with the Blackwater State Forest.



**Micah Byars** spent his internship working with the Blackwater State Forest Service in Santa Rosa and Okaloosa counties. His responsibilities included timber cruising, timber sale prep, spraying invasive plant species, taking seedling survival counts and sending live fuel moisture sampling data to the state for analysis. He is continuing his internship with the forest service and says he enjoys spraying invasive plant species because it allows him to visit more of the forest areas than any other activity.

**Troy Luckenbill** worked as an intern for Pensacola Country Club. His responsibilities were broken down into morning tasks, afternoon tasks and special projects. Morning tasks included course set-up; mowing greens, fairways and rough; topdressing greens and mowing the tee boxes. Afternoon tasks included spraying or weed-eating weedy areas, mowing rough, trimming tree limbs and filling tee divots. Special projects could include anything from helping to re-sod an area of nematode disturbance to pulling a vehicle out of a bunker after a drunk driver lost her way and ended up on the golf course. Troy enjoyed his internship and loved being able to work outside and play golf for free on occasion.



**Julie Wood**, an undergraduate student in the NRC program at the Milton campus, was able to spend her internship working for Drs. Thetford and Miller on a project involving the Perdido Key beach mouse. Julie's objective was to compare the use of restored dunes, natural dunes and open sand gaps by the endangered Perdido Key beach mouse on Gulf Islands National Seashore. She accomplished this using tracking tubes at four sampling sites during two moon phases in the summer months of 2013. These sites were also surveyed in 2012 by Margo Stoddard, a graduate student working with Dr. Branch and Dr. Miller. Julie's internship also included assessing whether plant cover and types play a role in beach mouse foraging. Julie's tracking tube survey this year showed an increase in beach mouse occupancy on restored sites compared to last year. Another aspect of Julie's internship was learning how to take raw field data and perform statistical analyses which will be used as part of a broader long-term study on the beach mouse. Julie's favorite part of her internship was the teamwork involved in the project and knowing that her work was making a difference. The most difficult part of her project was dealing with harsh weather conditions.



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