SNRI Celebrates Tenth Anniversary

The beginnings of our institute coincide very closely with the groundbreaking ceremonies for UC Merced, also known as Founders Day. The 10th anniversary of Founders Day is being celebrated Oct. 25 through 27.

Sam Traina began as SNRI’s first director in the summer of 2002, and over the next year four other faculty accepted offers to join him—Roger Bales, Martha Conklin, Tom Harmon and Peggy O’Day, followed by Henry Forman, Valerie Leppert and Roland Winston. They became the nucleus of SNRI and established the research program suggested by a task force on academic focal points for the new university.

In a recent interview for SNRI’s archives, now acting Provost Traina recalled “I spent a lot of the early timeframe in meetings with the National Park Service, meetings with state agencies and NGOs, and just talked about what the vision was for the institute and the kind of things we would be doing.” Managing expectations was tough, as there were many more ideas for SNRI’s focus than resources available. To raise awareness, Traina obtained “UC SNRI” for his car’s license plate so he could “wave the flag of the university’s institute everywhere I went then.”

SNRI will have booths on Oct. 25 on campus and later downtown at Market on Main, while holding its new Directors Council meeting that afternoon in the Mondo Building. Also coinciding with Founders Day is the release of a short video produced for the UC system and featuring Roger Bales talking about a sustainable water supply for California.

The video is part of the Onward California campaign to demonstrate how the UC system positively impacts the lives of Californians every day. It can be seen at onwardcalifornia.com or snri.ucmerced.edu.

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Sierra Nevada Research Institute
UC Merced
(209) 228-7674
snri.ucmerced.edu
New Format for SNRI Annual Report

A new design is featured in the FY11-12 Annual Report for the Sierra Nevada Research Institute. Its content focuses on impact the institute’s research and outreach has on the community, public policy and the world. The report also has a number of profiles of new additions to SNRI faculty and staff in the past 12 months. The Institute's annual report is now available online at snri.ucmerced.edu.

Gerardo Diaz is New SNRI Affiliated Faculty Member

Gerardo Diaz, associate professor of engineering, is the newest faculty member to affiliate with SNRI. Dr. Diaz joined UC Merced in 2005, and is the chair of the Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mathematics Graduate Group. He is joining two other SNRI faculty members, Yihsu Chen and Wolfgang Rogge, to work on plasma gasification funded recently by a grant from the California Energy Commission.
Six September Grants for SNRI Faculty

The Office of Research is reporting a half-dozen awards totaling more than $2 million to affiliated faculty members. Roger Bales is principle investigator (P.I.) on two of them, both from the USDA Forest Service. One involves watershed function and effects from forest restoration on the Kings River Experimental Watershed and Critical Zone Observatory. The other examines variable thinning using historical stand structure data to create fire-resilient forests and enhance ecosystem services in a changing climate.

Michael Dawson is P.I. and Michael Beman Co-I. on a grant from the National Science Foundation's Dimensions program for collaborative research. They and associates will answer whether parallel patterns arise from parallel processes. Kathleen Hull is P.I. for a National Park Service grant for documentation and analysis of Native American artifacts in NPS collections from El Portal and

Andrea Joyce is P.I. for a UC Mexus grant to develop behavioral insights to understand genetic isolation in a maize pest. Peggy O’Day is P.I. for a National Science Foundation award in the collaborative research program to quantify the reactive surface area of environmental solids.

Overall, UC Merced faculty had $2.6 million in research awards in September. The campus total for the most recent fiscal year for research grants was $22 million.
Three Key Appointments Of SNRI Staff

Coty Ventura is the new management services officer for SNRI. She began her new duties in September, having served for more than two years as the institute’s administrative specialist. Coty also served UC Merced in undergraduate education, at the Faculty Service Center and Facilities Management. Steve Shackelton and Chris Swarth have been named co-directors of the university’s Vernal Pool Reserve, which is supported by SNRI. Shackelton retired as chief ranger of the National Park Service in June. He previously served in the same position for Yosemite National Park and played a key role in the establishment of the National Parks Institute, now a part of SNRI. Swarth is the Director of Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary in Maryland, a position he has held since 1989. Shackelton began his new duties this month, Swarth will join SNRI in January. They will participate in the formal application process to the University of California Natural Reserve System, which is expected to take a year.

Soil Explored In 10/9 Campus Showing

Symphony of the Soil is a new film by Bay Area producer Deborah Koons Garcia that delves into the essential nature of soil and its interaction with water, air, plants and animals. The health of soil tells us a lot about a range of environmental issues. Shot on four continents, Symphony of the Soil will be presented at 5:30 on Nov. 9 in Lakireddy Auditorium. SNRI’s Steve Hart is on a panel discussion that follows the film.

Marketing Brochure Now Available

A 16-page overview of the research and outreach programs of the institute has just gone to press. Initiated by Director of Development Armando Quintero, the pamphlet features high quality photos and presents the areas of expertise in faculty research and their relevance to the needs of the region, state and world. It also highlights the youth programs that articulate into SNRI through the Yosemite Field Station—Adventure, Risk, Challenge and the Yosemite Leadership Program. The slim volume can be used in recruiting prospective graduate students, faculty and supporters of SNRI’s mission. Copies are available from the SNRI office.