



Sandhills students Linda Anderson and Dan Gobush working on the college's annual garden, which they co-designed.

Hands-on experience

Graduates of the two-year horticultural program at Sandhills Community College now work at the White House and Monticello. Others have started their own businesses.

by Sandra Ladendorf

Hands-on experience. That's what the two-year Landscape Gardening program at Sandhills Community College in Carthage, N.C., emphasizes.

Jeff Etheridge, who already has a business degree, came to learn how to design his own supply nursery.

David Ingram intends to become a golf course architect.

Scott McCullough decided horticulture was the field for him while building a greenhouse in California.

Cathy Blair used to be a manager at McDonalds.

Linda Daniel, a Duke University grad, worked as a journalist and in hortitherapy.

Sandra Ladendorf is a freelance writer based in Chapel Hill, N.C.

Linda Anderson, with a degree in botany from the University of North Carolina, has been working in the landscape industry.

They chose Sandhills to receive practical, marketable, landscape gardening experience, leading to a career in the field.

Some came right out of high school. Many have college experience, including advanced degrees.

The educator

The pragmatic program at Sandhills College was developed in 1968 by Fred Garrett, a graduate of the University of Florida and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (master's degree in horticulture, 1966).

His first job was at the Norfolk Bo-

tanic Garden, which Garrett describes as a lovely city park, but not a botanical garden. As headmaster of the school of horticulture, Garrett found a new niche.

"I had never considered myself an educator," he says, "but I found I enjoyed telling others what I knew."

He has spent the next 20 years as an educator.

While at Norfolk, he befriended Fred Heutte, the recently-retired director of parks in that city. Heutte had ties to the Sandhills area of North Carolina and was working with Sandhills Community College to initiate a horticultural program there.

In 1968 Fred Garrett was offered the job of developing a two-year horticultural curriculum for the college.

After accepting, Garrett paid visits



Fred Garrett (bottom) directs one of Sandhill's students in the proper methods of pruning.

to the School of Horticulture sponsored by the Niagara Falls Parks Commission and to Wisley in England. He then developed his European-style curriculum, which is reworked every two to three years. In 1984, a course on garden center operations was added.

Unlike the ornamental horticulture programs in North Carolina, this unique curriculum has the official title of Landscape Gardening Program, approved by the state in 1984.

Humble beginnings

At Sandhills, Garrett began in a regular classroom with a handful of students. Two years later his depart-

ment moved into the present facilities which include classrooms, offices, greenhouses, library, and even a small apartment for a student/manager who supervises the greenhouses and other operations during off hours.

Heutte Hall, not formal or fancy, is functional. "I designed the building on a brown paper lunch bag," says Garrett.

Today the landscape gardening center is surrounded by students' projects. Attractive beds have been built and planted, paved walks designed and constructed, large trees moved into place, and irrigation systems planned and installed.

The staff can always come up with

another challenge for the students. One major project now under construction is the Sir Walter Raleigh Historical Garden. The idea for this garden evolved from the 400th anniversary celebrations North Carolina staged to commemorate the attempted colonization of Roanoke Island in 1584. One-and-a-half acres were leveled for the project, which is to be an historic replica of an Elizabethan garden. Like the golf course area, the vegetable garden or the large, informal Ebersole holly collection, this totally formal garden will offer valuable and different construction and maintenance experience to the students.

Dirty hands

Varied experience in all phases of landscape gardening is Garrett's goal for his students. They dig the necessary ditches, mix the soil for the greenhouse, work with turf, nursery culture, perennial beds, bedding plants and greenhouses, and prune trees while hanging high above the ground on safety ropes.

The staff can always come up with another challenge for the students.

"I think we're very good pruners," says Martha Simon, a 1985 graduate. "I like the hands-on labs. It's all right there, where we do all the work."

Simon, whose father owns Blue-mountain Nurseries in Monkton, Md.—a wholesale grass and perennial nursery—started college at the University of Maryland and then went to Sandhills. "I've never regretted the decision. As a woman, I would encourage any other woman to go to Sandhills. We learn how to operate greenhouses, drive tractors, and use soil mixers. Most horticultural courses don't teach those things. Since most employers are still a little sexist, a woman is a step ahead if she can handle all the equipment.

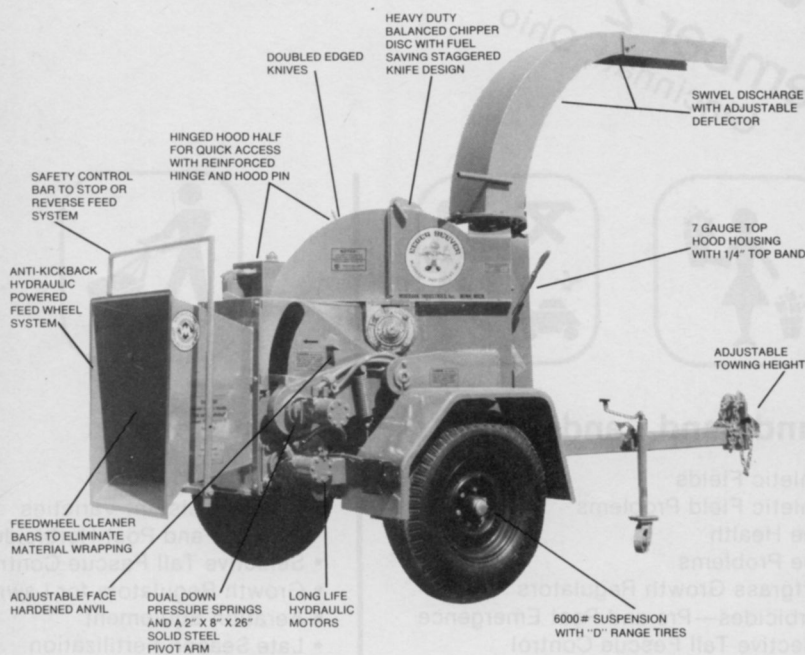
"I also like the intimacy, the close working relationship with the instructors, the teamwork, the valuable contacts."

Contacts are important to Garrett, too. His alumni network stretches around the country. "Every class has five or six students who get into interesting places and do well. This helps with student recruitment today," he says.



Students Blain Ritter and Jeff Etheridge work on the back retaining wall for the Sir Walter Raleigh Garden.

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For example, Dale Haney, '72, is responsible for the house plants at the White House. A more recent graduate, Tom Geer, is working on the grounds there today. The horticulturist at Old Salem in Winston-Salem is graduate Phil Page. Peter Hatch first worked there, and then he was asked to move to Monticello. The list goes on and on.

Garrett is also proud of the entrepreneurs among his students. Graduate Ronnie Williams has a thriving business in irrigation installation. Another young man, Pete Gulley, began a local garden center with \$150 and now owns a whole block of land in Southern Pines.

"I think this is one of the last fields for young people to get into," Garrett says. "They can take a small amount of money, work hard, and build a clientele—in greenhouse operations, maintenance or garden centers."

He points out that, interestingly enough, starting salaries for his graduates are the same as for graduates of the four-year program at North Carolina State University. "If students want to teach or do research, they must have a four-year degree," Garrett said, "but for jobs in the field, their performance and production here are excellent credentials."

Realizing potential

The emphasis is on work experience. Each student has two areas to maintain—one in the greenhouse, the other outdoors. All this maintenance work is graded regularly.

In addition to classroom and work experience, the students take several trips during their two years at the college, visiting both nurseries and outstanding public and private gardens on the East Coast.

Both Simon and Hoehne want more Southern gardens included in these tours. "I think we're just beginning to realize the potential we have for gardening in the South," says Simon.

Garrett's many contacts at great gardens and nurseries around the country also help when the time comes for each student to spend the final quarter of the 24-month program working in his or her chosen field.

Some might go to the North Carolina Botanical Garden. Others are employed at places like the Mellon Estate in Virginia, Dunbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., and the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, N.C.

"Any student could say to Fred Garrett, 'I want to work in Timbuktu,' and in half an hour, he would have someone on the phone and have a job lined up there," Hoehne says. **WT&T**