

UAH celebrates recognition

By Diana LaChance | UAH

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The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) celebrated receiving Tree Campus USA® recognition on October 1 with a short ceremony that included James Bolte, President of Toyota Manufacturing, Alabama, Inc.; Jen Svendsen, Tree Campus USA Project Manager for the Arbor Day Foundation; Denise Taylor, Coordinator of Huntsville's Operation Green Team; and Clifford Hawkins, [Alabama Forestry Commission] Coordinator of the state's Urban & Community Forestry Program, who presented a recognition plaque to UAH President Dr. Robert Altenkirch. The event was a component of the Tree Campus USA program, which is funded by Toyota and administered by the non-profit Arbor Day Foundation.

In his remarks to the audience, Dr. Altenkirch noted the university's ongoing commitment to sustainability through a variety of initiatives. "UAH has a rich tree canopy that we work to enhance annually," he said. "The effort is part of our overall efforts in sustainability from LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] certification to developing pedestrian-friendly pathways such as the greenway to the campus bike-sharing

program. Many of these efforts are coordinated through Chargers for Sustainability, a network of organizations and individuals at UAH focused on bettering campus sustainability."

The occasion was also marked by the donation of 26 trees to the university from Toyota and the Arbor Foundation, all of which were planted along the university's greenway following the ceremony. Bolte offered his "sincere congratulations" along with the trees, and praised UAH for its achievements. "We are inspired by the success of your dedicated efforts to actively engage students in tree-related sustainability initiatives, such as your campus forest cleanup day and seedling giveaway held last spring in celebration of Arbor Day," he said, adding that Toyota was "delighted to partner with the Arbor Day Foundation on the Tree Campus USA program in worthy support of the next generation of environmental leaders."

Launched in 2008 by the Arbor Day Foundation and supported by a generous grant from Toyota, Tree Campus USA is a national program that honors colleges and universities and their leaders for promoting healthy trees and engaging students and staff in the spirit of conservation. Five core standards for sustainable campus forestry must be met in return for recognition: a tree advisory committee, a campus tree-care plan, dedicated annual expenditures to their campus tree program, an Arbor Day observance and student service-learning projects.

Currently, 237 schools in 44 states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico meet these criteria. And each year, the Arbor Day Foundation and Toyota sponsor tree plantings to support forward-thinking sustainable campus communities. "Students throughout the country are looking for opportunities to give back to their campus community and become better stewards of the environment," said Matt Harris, chief executive of the Arbor Day Foundation.

"Tree Campus USA gives students that chance and sets a terrific example for other colleges and universities."

Haley Hix, UAH's Sustainability Coordinator, agrees, adding that the 26 trees planted at today's ceremony will undoubtedly bolster the university's commitment going forward. "These trees will serve as a means of offsetting our greenhouse gas emissions and will help us meet our goal of reaching 6 percent campus tree canopy coverage by 2015," she says. "But just as important, they are a reminder to our students and community that we are investing in a sustainable future."🌳

Photos by Kimberly Fuller | UAH

