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ECU Faculty, Students Engage Community through 1st Annual Art Event

GREENVILLE, N.C. (Sept. 23, 2014) — Over the past year, East Carolina University faculty and students in the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Fine Arts and Communication have collaborated on a vision that culminated recently in the first annual “Art + Community” kick off event.

On Sept. 13, faculty and student volunteers gathered at the intersection of 3rd and Jarvis Streets with neighborhood residents, community leaders and local businesses in a block party intended to disseminate information about crime prevention efforts and to help create works of art to be installed in neighborhoods.

In 2012, Drs. Misun Hur and Traci Birch, assistant professors in the Department of Geography, Planning and Environment, had an idea to install works of art along the Greenville Greenway. They brought into the fold Dr. Kate LaMere, associate professor and director of the School of Art and Design, and the project morphed into what it is now.

“The vision of the partnership is to use community engagement and environmental design to reduce crime and create a sense of ownership in the neighborhoods adjacent to the ECU campus,” said LaMere.

Although the Art + Community project began as a vision of ECU faculty members, it has expanded to include sponsorship from the Greenville Police; Pitt County Arts Council at Emerge; Tar River University Neighborhood Association; University Neighborhood Association; Christy’s Euro Pub; and ECU Off-Campus Student Services.

“There are a lot of benefits,” said Hur. “Everyone is looking at it from a different perspective and see benefits from the project. Faculties find potential for students’ learning through engagement. Community sees the opportunities to build a strong sense of community and ownership. Police hope to see crime reduction in the area.”

Greenville Mayor Pro-Tem Calvin Mercer and City of Greenville Council member Marion Blackburn spoke at the kick-off event, which began at 3 p.m.

During the event, Jonathan Burger, artist-in-residence at Emerge Gallery, led participants in an art project of creating organic, floral elements out of recyclable materials that included soda cans and wooden pallets. Light poles along Jarvis Street will be cleaned and painted so the new art pieces may be attached, creating a swath of color along the street.
Approximately 100 people, including a dozen donors, attended various aspects of the kick-off event throughout the afternoon. Additional activities at the event included a bounce house for kids, chalk painting, a photo booth provided by the ECU Photo Guild, a “50 people/1 question” film production, live music provided by Christy’s Euro Pub and free samples of food from local businesses.

“It was a very successful event,” said Hur.

Looking towards the future, Hur, Birch and LaMere said they will continue the annual event, hope to expand to different neighborhoods around Greenville and Uptown Greenville, include an art making event at a “Free Boot Friday,” and perhaps create a map and walking tour of the areas that have participated in the Art + Community events. Currently, sponsors support the project, but donations and funding from the community are welcome.

For questions or more information about Art + Community, email artcommunity@ecu.edu, or contact Hur (252-328-1270 or hurmi@ecu.edu), Birch (252-328-1273 or bircht@ecu.edu) or LaMere (252-328-5180 or lamerek@ecu.edu). Additional information and photos from the first kick-off event may be viewed at https://www.facebook.com/ArtAndCommunity.

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