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Green is the color the College of Environmental Science and Forestry chooses to exemplify its 100 years

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By



David Lassman / The Post-Standard

Neil Murphy, State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry president, reads a display in Moon Library on the college's history prepared by the Onondaga Historical Association. This panel covers 1898-1928 and is titled *A Forestry College Finds a Home in Syracuse*.

accessory in honor of ESF."

SUNY ESF Celebrates 100 Years

Enlarge

The Post-Standard

State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) students at the college ranger school Wanakena at Cranberry Lake in the Adirondacks in 1946.

SUNY ESF Celebrates 100 Years gallery (5 photos)

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Let's hear it for the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry !

The school is 100 years old this year.

A week from today, ESF observes the occasion with a centennial celebration "Green Tie Dinner" on the campus quad next to Syracuse University.

"Nothing like this has ever been held here before," said Claire Dunn, the college's information specialist.

"We've heard rumors there may be at least one green tuxedo," Dave White of the information staff said. The dress code for the evening is "semi-formal with a touch of green," he said. "We are hoping that all attendees will wear a green outfit or

Close to 500 guests are expected. The event will be held in a tent complete with flooring, lighting, air-conditioning and waterproof sides.

ESF began as a college sponsored by the state with a legislative charter July 28, 1911. There were 52 students, two faculty members and a dean. This fall, the college expects to enroll 1,650 full-time undergraduate students, 320 full-time graduate students and 600 part-time graduate students.

There are about 140 full-time faculty members.

New York state approved its first forestry school in 1898, at Cornell University. The school closed in 1903 in a dispute with wealthy landowners in the Adirondacks over its forestry techniques. James R. Day, SU's chancellor, picked up the ball and lobbied to re-establish a forestry school at his university, which was about 40 years old at the time. He was successful, with the help of trustee Louis Marshall and "powerful state politicians" from the Syracuse area, according to a history of ESF.

A series of historical panels about the college have been prepared by Dennis Connors, curator of history at the Onondaga Historical Association, for the centennial. The panels are permanently displayed at the school's Moon Library.

This was, in the words of one historian, a "college on paper," in its early years. The state charter put the school under the wing of Syracuse University. In the first six years, it ran out of two rooms in the basement of the SU science building, Lyman Hall.

The college bought its campus from SU. It was described as a "jumble of weeds and volunteer trees" west of Mount Olympus, then a drumlin on the university campus. Hugh Baker, the college dean, envisioned a campus that faced west, overlooking Onondaga Valley with a series of buildings in the classical style. ESF's first building, Bray Hall, was occupied in 1917.

By the end of 1920, the "Forestry College," as it was known for many years, looked like a sure thing. There were 16 on the faculty, 340 students and the college already had added to its portfolio the Wanakena campus on the Oswegatchie River in the Adirondacks, for its Ranger School, and the so-called "Rockwell Springs Property," 44 acres off LaFayette Road, south of Syracuse. That plantation later was cut in half by I-81; the lower half was donated to the city for Heath Park.

Today, ESF's holdings across New York include 186 buildings and 25,000 acres of land, including seven properties donated to the college.

The school's lineup in 2011 is bolstered by 600 part-time undergraduate students, most of them juniors and seniors in Syracuse-area high schools who are taking an introductory environmental science course for college credit. .

The college's landscape architecture program is familiar to many of us outside of ESF because of the many student projects directed by professor George Curry. The department was started by professor Laurie Cox, who taught at the college 32 years. Cox, according to historian Dennis Connors, also is credited with starting the lacrosse tradition that's now such a strong part of Syracuse University's sports program.

Dennis says Cox, a former Harvard lacrosse player, organized the first team in 1916. It was made up entirely of forestry students. The seven-game season generated enough interest for Syracuse University to adopt the sport in 1917. Cox coached the team until 1931, winning four national championships during the 1920s. He was inducted into the first class of the National Lacrosse Hall of Fame in 1957.

The college was headed by deans until 1969 when Edward Palmer was named its first president. He served until 1983. The current president is Cornelius "Neil" Murphy, Jr.

No roundup of ESF history passes without mentioning Eustace B. Nifkin, a legendary and mystical figure apparently produced from the imaginations of college students in the 1940s. Eustace, over the years, has been enrolled in classes, offered as a faculty member and impersonated at student gatherings.

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