



Exceptional GARDENING

The Savannah High School Greenhouse Program

The Savannah High School Greenhouse Program is a growing initiative that started within the Chatham County Public Schools system. The program, first developed four years ago by Transition Specialist Margo Greene and Job Coach Willie Mobley, began as series of gardening projects for those within the Department of Exceptional Students.

The curriculum at Savannah High School is an enhanced one for these students, and provides exposure to agriculture classes in unconventional class formations. It is during these classes that students learn simple farming techniques with produce and plant life production throughout their school year. Currently, the class has access to a 200-square foot greenhouse and in-ground planting on the school's premises and with continued growth, more space will be needed.

The local business community has demonstrated its commitment to the gardeners of tomorrow with their active involvement. Previous sponsors Oelschig's Nursery, Bamboo Gardens & Coastal Gardens and Harambee House Farms, graciously contributed agricultural expertise to the program. These companies have also opened their doors to students for additional hands-on training in professional gardening environments.

But the work has only begun. Mobley hopes to expand the Greenhouse Program within a new urban context for additional exposure, community involvement, new training opportunities and additional participation with multiple education programs. To take the initiative to that next level, the school selected Design for Ability, a novel apprenticeship program, to become the new platform to expand its vocational training.

An Intelligent Design: Design for Ability

Design for Ability is a new educational organization that offers youth with exceptional needs an apprenticeship experience and hands-on training within green sectors of the agriculture, construction, and artisan industries.

Program Director, and SCAD Design for Sustainability alumna, Meagan Hodge, believes in pursuing job-based learning techniques that give students the opportunity to earn a monetary stipend for their project involvement. She has identified for-profit and non-profit businesses to partner with that donate time, design knowledge, materials and labor to assist program participants during classes. The previous participating companies, Wooden Sheep, Southern Pine and RK Construction, have enabled these students to expand their job and life-skill training by acting as program mentors.

One of the program benefits is that students and local community are involved in growing food and developing healthier eating habits together. By the end, the student participants will be able to design and build multiple above-ground beds, incorporate experimental soil techniques and start on-site composting. These added facilities will encourage individuals from the community to visit and teach, not only the students, but also the surrounding neighborhood about gardening, nutrition and sustainable building systems while exploring new job training tactics. Hodge also plans to open the site to other schools and organizations for tours and workshops, with the hope that they will take this model and reproduce it in their neighborhoods.

Design for Ability's newest project, is the construction of an on-site greenhouse with materials completely derived from the construction waste stream. This structure will serve as an excellent example of material re-use, and show the value of utilizing the amazing supply of historic building materials available in the greater Savannah area. Through this project, the students will be involved in every step of the building process, from salvaging the material, de-nailing lumber, material inventory, site preparation and construction of the greenhouse. The design, which is derived from Meagan Hodge's final Masters project will provide another learning opportunity, as it will showcase progressive building systems such as passive cooling and heating, photovoltaic energy production and rain-water harvesting.

How, you might ask, are they getting all of this done? Once again, partnering with local companies for the greater good of the community.

Using What's Already There with Emergent Structures

Emergent Structures is another local non-profit, with a mission to increase the value and accessibility of building material waste streams through facilitation, collaboration, education, and advocacy. The non-profit identifies valuable construction waste, and through open collaboration, they funnel it right back into community projects that might be looking for lumber, windows, doors, etc. They are major "bottom feeders," and proud of it.

When the Savannah High School program needed a larger greenhouse and location for Design for Ability's design-build classroom concept, Emergent Structure saw an opportunity. They have taken the reins on organizing the new location, fundraising efforts, material reclamation efforts, and mobilizing the resources of their experienced board and external partners.

One such partner is the Savannah Technical College, whose Historic Preservation and Restoration Technology academic program is led by Director/Instructor Steve Hartley, an Emergent Structures' board member. Two of his classes are assisting with material restoration, green building design and installation of the greenhouse. The Historic Preservation Class 1280: Doors, Windows and Roofing, is restoring all salvaged windows with accurate lead paint removal, re-glazing glass panes and re-painting all windows. The Introduction to Green Building Class 1001 has already deconstructed a local residential home, saving valuable yellow pine and red cedar shiplap for the new greenhouse's construction. They will also be helping create the final structural designs, with an emphasis on maximizing solar gain, rain water collection and the use of efficient building systems.

Additionally, two local for-profit companies, Southern Pine Company of Georgia and RK Construction, will be donating materials and hardware, on-site labor and design advice to the greenhouse project. The founder of both companies, Ramsey Khalidi, has been partnering with Design for Ability over the last year and educating the students on the proper deconstruction techniques needed to maximize material reclamation.

This project is truly a cross-collaboration, a union of Savannah's diverse building industry, its educational sector, and its talented practitioners giving back to the community and they are not stopping until they get things done!

"Many things grow in the garden that were never sown there."

- Thomas Fuller, Gnomologia, 1732



Want to get your hand dirty too?

Over the next few months, Emergent Structures and Design for Ability will be organizing several volunteer opportunities and fundraising events, with initial sponsorship from the IKEA distribution center in Port Wentworth and Hardin Construction.

So stay tuned for postings of participation opportunities!

The Result: A New Greenhouse Effect

The ultimate goal is to have different members of the community visit the Design for Ability's site and teach students, individuals and neighbors about gardening, nutritional cooking techniques, sustainable building systems and effective job training skills. They hope to open the site to other schools and organizations for tours as a model for what could be done in other local communities.

To Learn More....

Emergent Structures www.emergentstructures.org
Scott Boylston: scottb@emergentstructures.com

Design for Ability www.designforability.org
Meagan Hodge: meagan@designforability.org

Project Partners



DESIGN *for* ABILITY



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 SAVANNAH TECHNICAL COLLEGE