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Improvement projects beautify OU campus

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

Oakland University is enhancing and beautifying its campus this summer and early fall with a variety of improvement projects.

Projects include replacing and planting trees and flowers, redesigning the Hamlin Hall traffic circle and creating the Varner Memorial Garden.

At the campus' main entrance off Squirrel Road and University Drive, approximately 36 red oak trees are not adapting well to the soil. Mature Norway maple trees will replace them this fall.

"Besides the fact that the oak trees aren't faring well, they're also slow growing," said Rusty Postlewait, associate vice president of facilities management. "The Norway maple trees are more adaptable and we know they grow well in our campus environment. The replacement trees will enhance our entrance a lot sooner."

About 40 other elm and maple trees will be planted throughout the summer at locations across the campus. The tree-planting projects together are expected to cost between \$50,000 and \$60,000, which the university will pay for with funds from storm damage insurance, Postlewait said.

Construction already has begun on a redesigned traffic circle in front of Hamlin Hall to create a more visually pleasing, park-like gathering place for pedestrians. The circular drive is used as a parking and drop-off/pick-up point between Hamlin Hall, Hill House, Van Wagoner House and Vandenberg Hall.

A grassy area with additional landscaping, brick sidewalks, park benches and a reduced, semicircular drive for vehicles will replace the current drive and gravel island. The decorative rocks currently in the circle will remain.

"We considered safety, manageability, noise level and aesthetic issues," said Mary Beth Snyder, vice president of student affairs. "After careful consideration, we came up with a student-endorsed way to make a more attractive front door to those buildings."

Residence hall reserves are funding the improvement costs, which are about \$247,000. Construction will be completed before fall classes begin September 4.

The Varner Memorial Garden will make the entrance to Varner Hall facing the Dodge Hall of Engineering more inviting with improved landscaping and seating.

The garden, created in memory of the late Woody Varner, OU's first chancellor, will be completed in two phases. The first phase includes planting and landscaping, which will start in mid-August and be completed by the end of September. The second phase, which begins next summer, includes installation of mixed concrete and brick paving and improved concrete seating. The \$140,000 project will be paid for from the general fund.

The staff of University Services also did its part to beautify the campus by planting flowers on the north side of the Public Safety Services building on June 8.

"We have picnic tables out there but the grass doesn't grow well because of the shade," said Laurel McDaniel, director of university services. "We also hadn't seen enough flowers on campus. I asked the grounds maintenance department if they were amenable to us planting our own area, and they said 'sure.' They supplied the plants and gave us an idea of how to plant them."

About twenty employees pitched in during their work shifts to plant rhododendrons, impatiens, mountain laurel and ferns. Grounds maintenance workers also placed two large decorative rocks at the site.

"We go out every day and take care of the plants," McDaniel said. "It's really made a difference. We're giving something but we're also getting something - it's a win-win situation. We're just trying to create some energy. Working on a project like this helps us get our jobs done easier."

SUMMARY

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