

July 2007						
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# INSIDE VT WOOD

## Reminder...

Remember to submit department news items by Friday 3 p.m. of each week to Will Pfeil at [wpfeil@vt.edu](mailto:wpfeil@vt.edu) for inclusion in Inside VT WOOD each Monday morning. All past issues of Inside VT Wood reside on our department website under the publications link.

## Red Alert

Our weekly communication schedule will resume August 13, 2007.

- Kenny Albert and David Jones will be on annual leave July 16-31. Plan accordingly for use of the metal and wood labs at Brooks these two weeks during their absence.

## News From Paul Winistorfer

- Wood Week 2007 is in final planning stages for the week of September 3-8, 2007. We have created a weblink of Wood Week activities at [www.woodscience.vt.edu/woodweek](http://www.woodscience.vt.edu/woodweek) Check out the schedule and activities. We need your help in promoting our Career Awareness Fair to prospective industry and association partners. Please direct your industry and association colleagues to the weblink for all information about the Career Fair, including registration, set-up and lodging information. Will Pfeil has created our first Wood Week logo shown here. We'll use the logo in promoting the activities of the week.
- I met again with our Southside partners last week on educational programming partnership for Southside. We have monies from a grant application to hire a new faculty member in our department who will reside in Southside and engage those partners on a continual basis. We will be developing the position description immediately and moving forward with a search. We are building a strong foundation among the partners there and we expect to be delivering programming beginning in August 2008. A regional 'conference' is in the works for late September or October in Southside where we will bring in the very best examples of WoodLINKS programs from around the U.S. as benchmark examples.
- The department is hosting the Youth Conservation Camp on Tuesday July 10 at the Brooks Center. 50 high school students and 12 camp counselors will spend time on tour stops being hosted by Scott Rennekar, Dan Hindman, Ralph Rupert, and Brian Bond.
- The department placed a full page advertisement in 'Tech Fundamentals' the special summer edition of the Collegiate Times that is mailed in the summer to all incoming freshmen and transfer students to Virginia Tech. We used our new department poster for this advertisement.



- I will be presiding over WoodLINKS events at the upcoming AWFS (Association of Woodworking and Furniture Suppliers ([www.awfs.org](http://www.awfs.org)) show in Las Vegas July 18-21. WoodLINKS is holding a 'press night' on Wednesday July 18th to make awards and recognize our many industry, association and personal donors to the program.
- I will be on annual leave July 23 – August 5 and away from the office. Please see Audrey Zink-Sharp for any assistance you need.

## Southside Partners Meet on Educational Programming

By Paul Winistorfer

Ted Bennett, Director of the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center and Amy Lammerts Director, Program Development, Marketing and Communications (<http://www.svheducation.org/>) hosted a meeting on July 3 to continue discussion and action on the 'Southside Forest Products Competitiveness Initiative' with regional partners.



*From Left to Right*

*Front Row:*

**Jeff Arnold**, Workforce Development Danville Community College

**Johnny Rogers**, owner, Dominion Woodworking

**Amy Lammerts**, Director, Program Development, Marketing and Communications

**Nettie Simon-Owens**, Director, Workforce Development Higher Education Center

**Natalie Coronas**, Mecklenburg County Public Schools

**Ted Bennett**, Director of the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center

*Back Row:*

**Barry Thompson**, Master Cabinet Maker

**Dr. Paul Winistorfer**, Department Head Wood Science and Forest Products Virginia Tech

**Jennifer Stevens**, Research and Development Specialist, Higher Education Center

**Gerald Sexton**, Advanced Wood Products Laboratory, Danville Community College

**Brad Bryant**, Career and Technical Education Coordinator Pittsylvania County Public Schools

**Greg Mason**, Career and Technical Education Coordinator Danville City Schools

## Researchers to study poplar tree as model biomass crop

By Michael Sutphin

BLACKSBURG, Va., July 2, 2007 -- Virginia Tech researchers have received \$1.2 million to study protein-protein interactions associated with biomass production in poplar wood. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) jointly selected the Virginia Tech project and 10 others for awards totaling \$8.3 million for biofuel research that may increase the availability and use of alternative fuels.

“Poplar is a model biomass crop,” said Eric Beers, associate professor of horticulture in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the project’s principal investigator. “If we can identify the protein-protein interaction networks associated with its woody tissues, it will give us a more detailed understanding of how plants produce their biomass – their genomics and the molecular biology of biomass production. This will ultimately contribute to strategies for improving biomass crops.”

Proteins are the molecular machines required for the production of plant cell walls. To function, proteins must interact with other proteins, but researchers know little about the protein-protein interactions that occur during the process of wood formation. Protein identification and quantification research at Virginia Tech has been enhanced by new mass spectrometry equipment purchased with funds from the Commonwealth Research Initiative.

“This is basic research that could conceivably make the use of poplar wood as a biomass crop more amenable to large-scale production and economically feasible,” Beers said.

Amy Brunner, associate professor of forestry in the College of Natural Resources, will use her expertise in poplar genomics to study a subset of the protein interactions directly in poplar trees and to incorporate results with what scientists know about gene expression and gene function within poplar wood. She has already identified approximately 250 poplar genes specifically associated with wood formation that will be the focus of this project. This is known as the poplar biomass gene set.

In addition, Allan Dickerman, assistant professor at the Virginia Bioinformatics Institute, will collect data and employ advanced techniques of computational biology to map protein-protein interactions. These maps reveal functional clusters of protein interactions that will give scientists visual clues about the molecular biology of poplar cell wall-related biomass production.

“These research projects build upon DOE’s strategic investments in genomics and biotechnology and strengthen our commitment to developing a robust bioenergy future vital to America’s energy and economic security,” said U.S. Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman when making the grant announcement. The DOE is funding the Virginia Tech project.

In 2006, DOE and USDA began funding fundamental research in biomass genomics to provide a scientific foundation to facilitate and accelerate the use of woody plant tissue for bioenergy and biofuels. New research projects on cordgrass, rice, switchgrass, sorghum, poplar, and perennial grasses join last year’s portfolio of research on poplar, alfalfa, sorghum, and wheat.

Other universities and research centers that received this second round of awards include the University of Minnesota, South Dakota State University, Mississippi State University, University of Georgia, University of Florida, University of Delaware, USDA Agricultural Research Service Western Regional Research Center, and Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

Visit the DOE Office of Science website for more information about the Virginia Tech grant and the other research projects that received awards.

Founded in 1872 as a land-grant college, Virginia Tech is the most comprehensive university in the Commonwealth of Virginia and is among the top research universities in the nation. Today, Virginia Tech’s eight colleges are dedicated to quality, innovation, and results through teaching, research, and outreach activities. At its 2,600-acre main campus located in Blacksburg and other campus centers in Northern Virginia, Southwest Virginia, Hampton Roads, Richmond, and Roanoke, Virginia Tech enrolls more than 28,000 undergraduate and graduate students from all 50 states and more than 100 countries in 180 academic degree programs.

Contact Michael Sutphin at [msutphin@vt.edu](mailto:msutphin@vt.edu) or (540) 231-6975.



Row of Poplar Trees

## **Hardwood Federation Newsletter Available On-Line (note \$1,000,000 for scanning of hardwood logs in appropriations bill for Purdue University)**

The Hardwood Federation has published its June 2007 newsletter. This issue includes stories on illegal logging legislation, APHIS fee increases, and log scanning funding. To view the newsletter, please click on the link below.

[June 2007 Newsletter](#)

The Hardwood Federation advocates for the hardwood industry in Washington, DC and represents thirty associations, including NHLA. For more information on the Federation's activities and legislative initiatives, please visit its document library on its website.

[Hardwood Federation Documents](#)

Thank you. If you have any questions about NHLA's government affairs program, please let me know.

Kevin Ketchum

Director of Public Affairs

National Hardwood Lumber Association

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## **European Conferences of Interest**

### Third European Conference on Wood Modification

15-16 October 2007, The Angel Hotel, Cardiff

The programme for ECWM3 has now been published, with many scientific and industrial presentations reporting developments in this exciting field.

The conference is being hosted by Dr Callum Hill of University of Wales Bangor, following successful conferences in Gehnt (2003) and Gottingen (2005).

All details are available on the conference web site [www.ecwm3.com](http://www.ecwm3.com)

### International Panel Products Symposium (IPPS 2007)

17, 18, 19th October, The Angel Hotel, Cardiff

The new name for the European Panel Products Symposium reflects its increasingly international flavour. The conference addresses all aspects of the panel products industry.

The full programme is available from the conference website [www.ipps.uk.com](http://www.ipps.uk.com)

Any queries about these conferences should be addressed to the conference organiser on [ipps@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:ipps@bangor.ac.uk) We look forward to welcoming you to Cardiff this autumn.