

Outdoors

Famed gardener sees UC Davis as 'new Eden'

The next Eden trades apple trees for redwoods. Native grasses flutter in the breeze as students learn from birds and bees.

In this garden, every plant offers lessons of its own. Water and time are precious and little wasted in an oasis for mind and spirit.

That could be the University of California, Davis, of the very near future.

Peter Raven envisions UC Davis as that new Eden, ready to inspire future generations as well as its surrounding community and the state.

"Using the campus as a model, this could be a modern garden of Eden that will allow us to live in harmony with the Earth," he said. "It would be sustainable in every respect."

Hailed by Time magazine as a "Hero for the Planet," the famed conservationist recently spent time with the university's staff as they prepare to turn the entire campus into a public garden.

"I feel this campus is right at the cutting edge," said Raven, president emeritus of the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis and a San Francisco native. "I'm the same age as the Davis arboretum - 75 years old. When the arboretum and I were born, California had 6 million people; now it's 39 million. It's affected every aspect of our lives."

In that time, the Earth's population has more than tripled, he added. "It's no longer a matter of dividing the world into wilderness and managed land; it's all managed."

A Cal grad who got his doctorate at UCLA, Raven taught at Stanford before moving inland to St. Louis to transform the Missouri Botan-

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ical Garden into an ecological showcase.

"He's an amazing advocate and wonderful curator," said Mary Burke, the UC Davis Arboretum's director of planning and collections, who persuaded Raven to visit Davis. "It's impossible to conserve the biodiversity of the Earth if we don't know what we have."

"We're just at the beginning of our long-range planning," explained Kathleen Socolofsky, UC Davis assistant vice chancellor. "At the Missouri Botanical Garden, he really turned it into one of the premier gardens of the world."

Added Vice Chancellor John Meyer, "What we're trying to do here is create a way and a place where the university becomes a portal to treasures. We want to engage the community in ways we didn't think possible."

The UC Davis Arboretum already embodies some of those ideals, Meyer added. "It has free access; there are no gates, no tolls. We want people to say when they visit UC Davis, 'We had no idea!'"

Raven, the author of 17 books, focuses on conservation. He also believes the best way to teach a subject is to immerse students in it.

"All of us are concerned about sustainability," he said. "But we've learned that no one can envision or implement sustainability when

they have not lived it. (By creating a sustainable campus environment), how better equipped graduates will be to deal with the world like it really is."

Raven already is impressed by the work done at UC Davis.

In its efforts to become more water- and time-efficient, the university turned a 2-acre unused lawn near Shields Grove into a meadow featuring purple needlegrass, California's official state grass. Bermuda grass was pulled out of turf median strips on LaRue Road and replaced with wildflowers; eventually (when all the Bermuda is eradicated), drought-tolerant perennials will take that turf's place.

"Lawns? Get rid of them," Raven said. "Lawns really don't work in a California climate. Lawns in Davis are a really sick habit, trying to imitate commons in Cambridge. It's not a suitable model. You've got to get over it and move forward."

Raven hopes that by pulling out traditional lawns and making the whole campus more sustainable, UC Davis will give graduates and visitors a lesson for a lifetime.

"It's fundamentally so important that every graduate has some idea what's going on with the world, no matter their major or future career," Raven said. "The vision here is to treat the campus as an ecosystem - including the people in the buildings - and make it all sustainable."

"This project has brought a kind of spirit to the campus," he added. "Hopefully, future generations will always share that perspective, and it will carry over into the community."

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