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HEADLINE: CULTIVATING A VISION

Subhead: Faculty Research and Industry Support Lead to Grand Opening Of BioTrek, a Multi-Centered Learning Environment

A decade ago, professor Chris George and graduate student Chris Brady started a rainforest simulation as part of a biology course at Cal Poly Pomona. They used a humidifier to promote a “cloud forest” atmosphere, a sleep-inducing mechanism to mimic a background waterfall and a tape player to simulate animal sounds of the rainforest. Mike Brown, a botany technician, brought in and nurtured the flora, Brady contributed taxidermy specimens and George brought in insects she had collected on various trips to indigenous rainforests.

Within months, thanks to the visits of students and word-of-mouth, this “closet” rainforest became so popular that it was relocated to the roof of Building 8, where it expanded and became more permanent. It hasn’t stopped growing yet.

On **Oct. 1** at 9 a.m., Cal Poly Pomona is unveiling its Rain Bird BioTrek Project, the next incarnation of that highly successful seed project. BioTrek has grown far beyond its humble beginnings as a pet project stuffed in a tiny prep room. It now encompasses more than 25,000 square feet of learning space, and is expected to provide more than 10,000 students and visitors per year with the opportunity to learn the importance of environmental conservation and how the future is linked to present conservation efforts through an integrated, interactive learning and research process.

BioTrek includes three learning centers—a rainforest simulation, aquatic biology center and ethnobotany garden—devoted to teaching science curriculum as well as developing a

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tangible relationship between visitors and the rainforest environment. BioTrek will be dedicated to learning on all levels, from visiting K-12 classes, to undergraduate courses, to graduate and faculty research projects.

The gift that made BioTrek possible came from the Rain Bird Corp., the leading manufacturer of irrigation equipment. It has long been involved in the efforts of the Science IMPACT program at Cal Poly Pomona to improve and enhance teaching methodology in the sciences in grades K-12.

A new freestanding greenhouse has been constructed to house the Rain Bird Rainforest Learning Center, featuring Asian, Australian, African and American rainforest exhibits that tie into research by faculty, such as George and Curtis Clark. The rainforest environment will include permanent living plants and insects, plus some fauna that may be brought in on an as-needed basis to demonstrate plant-animal relationships.

The Rain Bird Aquatic Biology Learning Center will display professor Jonathan Baskin's research on fish in fresh water, salt water and mixed environments. Among its notable features are a tank with a tide that rises and falls and a river simulation with adjustable water speeds to test the rapidity different fish species prefer.

The Rain Bird Ethnobotany Learning Center, which emphasizes the historical and ongoing relationship of people and plants, boasts 190 plant species carefully arranged to reflect different environments.

“The point of BioTrek is to stress to students of all ages the importance of biodiversity,” said George, who also writes and develops curriculum for the project. “It’s so important for young people to understand the implications of a global ecosystem—that our future is dependent upon our conservation efforts *now*. It’s very difficult to make that seem real to kids who’ve never seen anything like a rainforest environment, except maybe on television, and who may never have the opportunity to travel to one. They think, ‘What does this have to do with me? I don’t live anywhere near the rainforest.’ What Bio Trek can do is make those abstract ideas concrete. When kids hike through and see the insects and other animals, epiphytes and other plants, ideas like species diversity, mutualism and carbon sequestration become real.”

Teachers from area schools can visit the rainforest with their students, and are given take-home projects to extend the experience, as well as access to an interactive, education-based website at www.rainbird.com. Visitors are divided into groups to look at various aspects of the ecosystem, including medicines, plant/animal interactions, aquatic biology, biodiversity, and threatened or endangered species.

The grand opening ceremony will begin at 9 a.m. on Oct. 1. It will include children from elementary schools in Chino Hills and Pomona.

Cal Poly Pomona is located at 3801 W. Temple Ave. in Pomona. Daily parking permits are required, and can be purchased for \$4 at the Visitor Information Booth along Kellogg Drive. Media representatives can also arrange parking by calling Uyen Mai at (909) 869-5331.

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ABOUT RAIN BIRD CORPORATION – Rain Bird Corp., based in Glendora, Calif., is the world’s largest manufacturer of irrigation equipment. Founded in 1933, Rain Bird offers the industry’s broadest range of irrigation products to golf courses, sports arenas, amusement parks, farms and commercial and residential developments in more than 120 countries around the world. Rain Bird has been awarded over 130 patents, including its first in 1935 for the impact sprinkler, which was designated a historic landmark in 1990. Rain Bird is committed to “The Intelligent Use of Water” and is dedicated to educating the public about water conservation and water’s critical role in the environment. The company maintains state-of-the-art manufacturing and assembly facilities in the United States, France, Sweden and Mexico. www.rainbird.com.

ABOUT CAL POLY POMONA – Located on more than 1,400 acres in Southern California, Cal Poly Pomona is part of the 23-campus California State University system. Offering degrees in bachelor’s, master’s and certificate programs, its 2,500 faculty and staff serve over 19,000 students. One of only six polytechnic universities nationwide, Cal Poly Pomona’s mission is to advance learning and knowledge by linking theory and practice while preparing students for lifelong learning, leadership and careers in a changing, multicultural world. www.csupomona.edu.