Cuban scientist discusses exchange with SIUE

Last year, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville entered an agreement with the University of Havana to develop exchange programs to support the research and development of agriculture-related institutions. Mayra Heydrich, a professor of microbiology at the University of Havana, is in charge of facilitating these programs for future study in Cuba. She recently visited SIUE.

"It was an opportunity to adapt some of the training that we do in Cuba and take advantage of those technologies and equipment," Heydrich said.

Born in New York City, Heydrich grew up in Cuba. She received a bachelor’s degree in Biology and a master’s degree in microbiology from the University of Havana and her doctorate in biology from the Freie Universität in Berlin, Germany. As a microbiologist, Heydrich has been studying bacteria associated with a number of food staples, such as sugar cane. "These bacteria live associated with the sugarcane plant and in the roots, and if they are too high, some produce kind of substances (that) enhance their production," she explained. That ranges from plant antibiotics to substances that can be used as fertilizers. "We believe these bacteria can be used as biocatalysts in different areas," she said, of the importance of these bacteria in Cuba.

Among the discussions made by Heydrich and her colleagues are strategies and measures that not only lengthen the life of sugarcane but also can control pathogens that are damaging agricultural products. They also have been looking at the use of water in Cuba. "Cuba," she said, "is that we don’t have enough water to grow the rice and we don’t have a lot of plants for adequate treatment. Industries create some of the products that lead to chemical pollution, but the main source of pollution comes from (food production) and to the river." When asked about the areas of the science that Cuba has advanced the most, she is unconvinced.

"Bacteriology, health, and biology are very strong in Cuba," she said. "In general the natural sciences have made great progress in Cuba, and people who work in these fields are very well prepared. Thanks to international cooperation. Not only because we receive the knowledge in our country, but also because we have had the possibility to visit and even to work in different institutions."

"It is this type of cooperation that SIUE will soon embark upon with the University of Havana. Heydrich said she thinks that this initiative will include short-term courses for undergraduate and graduate students and for foreign students. She recently visited SIUE.

"I think that in the academic world, we have to fight very hard so that in the near future we can have the same cooperation that we have already," Heydrich said. "We have the hope that the economic embargo will stop someday and that the degree of cooperation that we need to do will be there."

Young Authors

District 7’s Young Authors were recently recognized by the Board of Education. This year marks the 39th statewide Young Authors Conference and the 23rd Madison County Conference. Over 1,200 District 7 students wrote and illustrated books for this year’s Young Author’s program. During the month of February, manuscripts were read by community volunteers who selected state, county and local representatives. Fifty-two authors were chosen to attend the Madison County Young Authors Conference which will take place at Edwardsville High School on April 20 while 12 authors will attend the State Conference on May 18 in Bloomington. The 2013 Young Authors include Maia Rowe, Marian Morby and Eleanor Sedabres from Glen Carbon Elementary; Mia Piepgge, Eric Herman and Clara Durivan from Goshen Elementary; Linda LeDuc from Harrel Elementary; Ava Hillerman, Gabrielle Rathgeb and Olivia Riad from Laclede Elementary; Jeremiah Bartlett from Midway Elementary; Rain Jennings, Bryden Schrewe and Rylee Coffey from Nelson Elementary; Meera Bharati, Haley Gebauer, Elannore Matarelli, Emily Kloostra and Edgar McClintock from Cassens Elementary; Felicity Guttmann, Mackenzie Kimble and Ava Zeller from Columbus Elementary; Julia Richardson, Andrea Bester, Alexandra Lynn, Nara Markowitz, Jessica Krebs, Gabriella Hulme and Mary Webb from Lincoln Middle School.

Real World, a University of Illinois Extension Program developed to give the middle school students “a glimpse of the real world of career choices, decision-making and money management,” the website states. The young ladies also were shown the middle school students “a glimpse of the real world of career choices, decision-making and money management,” the website states. The young ladies also were shown the science field,” Matarelli said. “A lot of our students want to be doctors, nurses, pharmacists – those careers that they didn’t think of.”

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