



Contributed photo

UW-Eau Claire honors class visits the bee hives on campus. The class has spent the semester working on a project to educate the community about the importance of pollinator species and strategies for creating pollinator habitats.

# Garden party

Event set to create local habitat for pollinating animals

UW-Eau Claire News Bureau

After months of research, planning and community outreach, a group of UW-Eau Claire students and community volunteers will gather Friday in downtown Eau Claire to plant a pollinator habitat in the Phoenix Community Gardens. During the event, titled Planting Fiesta, students in the Civic Agency; Environmental Stewardship class will work with community gardeners — including those with outdoor spaces, school groups, local gardening club members and others — to create a habitat that will help support the pollinating animals that are vital to the Chippewa Valley's ecosystem. "It is important for all citizens, regardless of whether they live in an urban or rural setting, to feel a connection with nature and a responsibility for environmental stewardship," said John Cronje, an associate professor of English who is teaching the honors course. "People need

## If You Go

**What:** Planting Fiesta, an event to create a habitat to support pollinating animals.  
**When:** 1 to 4 p.m., Sunday.  
**Where:** Phoenix Community Gardens.  
**Cost:** Free.  
**Information:** facebook.com/PartnershipsForPollinators.

a reason to get outside, experience nature and become environmental stewards of their own backyards."

The 13 undergraduate students in the class are partnering with community agencies to create educational materials and to offer communitywide events, such as Planting Fiesta, to encourage people in the area to create and monitor pollinator habitats and the abundance and diversity of pollinator species, Cronje said.

Students hope the habitat they create in Phoenix Community Gardens will become one of many established and maintained by individuals and groups in yards and parks throughout the community, Cronje said.

Research shows that pollinating animals — including bees, birds, butterflies and beetles — are vital to the ecosystem and support wildlife, provide a healthy watershed and

pollinate food crops and flower gardens, Cronje said.

"Yet in many places, pollinator species are in crisis due to habitat loss, use of pesticides and other assaults, such as viruses and mites," Cronje said.

### Education effort

In 2010, Beaver Creek Reserve, one of the class's community partners, worked with volunteers to collect and identify native bee pollinators from the Coon Fork State Natural Area. The study was the beginning of the tracking of pollinators in the area, and the data serves as a reference in monitoring the population of native pollinators.

To support those efforts, the UW-Eau Claire class is preparing multimedia materials, including online videos, to educate community members about pollinator habitats. The materials will be available in English

and in Spanish.

Among the educational materials created by the students are pollinator kits, which will include information that will help citizens understand how they can best help pollinators.

The positive response from people and organizations in Eau Claire to the student project is surprising and inspiring, said Blake Weimerskirch, a philosophy major from Plymouth, Minn.

"I realize now what a small group of students can accomplish," Weimerskirch said. "We made things happen that I would not have guessed we could make happen when we started."

Interactions with community members and organizations helped students feel more connected to the Eau Claire community and the region, several students said.

"I grew up in Eau Claire but never felt part of the community in the way that I do now," said John Schoen, a biology, ecology and environmental biology major. "I'm realizing now how cool it is to be a citizen who is contributing something to my community, and not just a bystander watching what others are doing."

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