



**Kentucky Community and Technical College System
Somerset Community College
Somerset, Kentucky
Environmental Education and Outreach**

SCHOOL

Kentucky Community and Technical College System – Somerset Community College, Somerset, Kentucky. Public 2-year colleges. System-wide KCTCS Fall 2011 Enrollment 108,302 credit students, of which 10,028 were enrolled at Somerset Community College.

ABSTRACT

Somerset Community College sponsors and presents a celebration of Earth Day by planning a free community event on its Somerset Campus. Each year since the inaugural Earth Day Celebration, the annual event's attendance and the public's anticipation about the celebration grows. In just seven years, the event has grown from 100 community and college attendees to over 750. Until Somerset Community College initiated an event recognizing Earth Day seven years ago, none existed in the community. The celebration is a model of collaboration internally and externally, engaging numerous departments, students, faculty, and staff at the college as well government agencies, educational institutions, and business and industry across the southern Kentucky region. The objective of the event is to increase awareness of environmental issues and their solutions among community members and area students of all ages. To achieve this objective, the college incorporates learning activities and outdoor events in the day's agenda to engage the community in sustainability education. In addition to the community engagement and education, the event also includes a service learning component. Several classes involved in service learning projects on sustainability presented their work at the conference. Farmers Market representatives were onsite selling their products. Three car dealers were present to discuss hybrid and electric cars and private businesses brought solar products available for homeowners. In 2012, a global component was introduced when a



faculty from a KCTCS sister college hosted a discussion of the environmental impact of China's Three Gorges Dam.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Goals

The overarching goal of the event is to increase community awareness of environmental issues in a family-oriented outdoor event. Designed to generate an appreciation of natural areas and wildlife, event activities encourage personal responsibility and stewardship of the planet. Each year the college aims to increase attendance and to involve additional community leaders, businesses, and science professionals in the planning and implementation of the celebration. For the next 2-3 years, the goals include working with local teachers to increase the number of regional K-12 schools presenting projects at the event and to provide more information about the availability of green building products to homeowners.

Accomplishments and Outcomes

Over the last seven years, the event has grown from 100 attendees in 2005 to 750 attendees in 2012. At the 2012 celebration, over 200 energy efficient light bulbs, 400 reusable grocery bags, 200 heirloom tomato plants, and 200 tree seedlings were distributed free of charge to the community as part of our educational outreach. Community members were:

- Provided information on how to reduce their impact on the planet.
- Made aware of global and local environmental issues.
- Given the opportunity to engage in volunteer organizations monitoring environmental quality.

Challenges and Responses

The event has become a tradition for many families in the community. As attendance increases each year, the challenge is to find the human and financial resources needed to keep the event fresh, educational, and fun.

Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint

The event indirectly impacts the college's carbon footprint through the distribution of seedlings. However, at the heart of the event is the aim to educate the community about sustainability, which includes caring for the environment and reducing the amount of energy and natural resources consumed. Reducing the amount of energy consumed will reduce the Green House Gas emissions.

Commentary and Reflection

As an educational institution, the college's first impulse was to provide lecturers on environmental topics. To reach all ages and audiences, Somerset abandoned formal lectures for hands-on learning activities and demonstrations presented in an outdoor festival atmosphere. One gratifying aspect of the project is how all units of the college work together to make it happen. The reward is the response of the community!

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

The Somerset Community College Earth Day Event is an exemplary example of collaborative effort. All of the college's units work together, making the Earth Day Celebration a success. Somerset Community College Student Clubs represented include Phi Theta Kappa, Fruit of the Lens Photography, Multicultural Club, and the London and Somerset PRIDE (Personal Responsibility in a Desirable Environment) Clubs. Some of the event sponsors include:

- Eastern Kentucky PRIDE (Personal Responsibility in a Desirable Environment).
- Girl Scouts of Kentucky's Wilderness Road Council staff and scout troops.
- Pulaski County Public Library.
- Somerset Community College Culinary Arts, Cosmetology, and Interdisciplinary and Early Childhood Education students.
- Somerset Community College Relay for Life Team.

Other groups contributing to the success of the 2012 event include:

- Faculty, staff, and student across the college (including several Human Ecology classes).
- Other KCTCS colleges.
- KCTCS sister four-year institutions.
- Local secondary education schools.
- Local, state, and federal government.
- Business and industry.
- The community.

Presenters at the 2012 Earth Day Celebration included naturalists, biologists, and educators from such agencies and organizations as:

- Appalachian Science in the Public Interest.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- Pulaski County Conservation District.
- U.S. Forest Service.
- National Resources Conservation Services.
- Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources.
- University of Kentucky Agriculture Extension Lexington Office.

In addition, Farmers Market representatives were onsite selling their products. Three car dealers were present to discuss hybrid and electric cars and private businesses brought solar products available for homeowners.

Funding and Resources

Hosted by Somerset Community College at no charge to presenters, estimated expenses for the 2012 event total \$2,600. Funding for the event came from a variety of sources, including the college (\$500), an Eastern Kentucky PRIDE Environmental Education grant (\$750), fundraising (\$1,000), and donated materials/food (\$300).

Education and Community Outreach

Until Somerset Community College initiated an event recognizing Earth Day seven years ago, none existed in the Somerset community, which is located in rural southern Kentucky. Seeing a need as well as an opportunity, the college's faculty, staff, and students partnered with the nonprofit Eastern Kentucky PRIDE (Personal Responsibility in a Desirable Environment) to host a small event in 2005. Each year since the inaugural Earth Day Celebration, the annual event's attendance and the public's anticipation about the celebration grows. Partners now include multiple agencies and their professional staff, local K-12 schools, other postsecondary education institutions, farmers' market organizations, sustainability/environment-related business and industries, utilities, and as well as faculty from other community colleges and local businesses. For example, the 2005 celebration's attendance was approximately 100 and estimated 2012 attendance was 750. At the 2012 event, several classes involved in service learning projects on sustainability presented their work at the conference. Farmers Market representatives were onsite selling their products. Three car dealers were present to discuss hybrid and electric cars and private businesses brought solar products available for homeowners. A global component was introduced when a faculty from a KCTCS sister college hosted a discussion of the environmental impact of China's Three Gorges Dam.

National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology Program

The National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology Program has a plethora of great resources. The Online Case Study Database was especially helpful with this project.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

Campus Sustainability History

Under KCTCS President Michael B. McCall's leadership, KCTCS launched a sustainability initiative in November 2010 titled "KCTCS Green+ Initiative" (see the KCTCS Green+ website at http://www.kctcs.edu/en/About_KCTCS/System_Administration/Sustainability.aspx). The initiative includes energy efficiency and environmental conservation as primary goals. KCTCS leadership has

committed that KCTCS will demonstrate commitment to enhancing the quality of life for citizens through the protection of Kentucky's natural resources and environment, providing "green" leadership to ensure that KCTCS not only preserves but also enhances Kentucky's unique ecosystem. In alignment with leadership's commitment to improve efficiency and protect Kentucky's resources, in June 2012 a sustainability framework was approved by the KCTCS President's Leadership Team (that is, the KCTCS President, the KCTCS President's Cabinet, and the 16 KCTCS College Presidents). Select objectives of the framework include:

- Facilitating cultural change to balance the social, environmental, and economic criteria of the sustainability triple bottom line across KCTCS.
- Protecting Kentucky's natural resources and environment, providing 'green' leadership to preserve and enhance Kentucky's unique ecosystem, including tracking the KCTCS carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions (including emissions from electricity, heating, commuting, and air travel).
- Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of KCTCS, its partnerships, and collaborations to spur sustainable economic development and a green economy.
- Establishing energy management strategies to stabilize and reduce long-term energy costs.
- Benchmark sustainability progress using nationally recognized sustainability measures for higher education.

Somerset Community College (SCC) is one of 16 two-year colleges in the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS). Opened in 1965 and accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the college goal is to prepare students for successful transfer to Kentucky four-year colleges or for immediate entrance into fulfilling careers. The college is one of the fastest-growing community colleges in the nation, offering a high-quality, targeted education to meet the professional and personal goals of all Kentuckians. Somerset Community College offers daytime, evening, and weekend classes at six convenient campus locations and awards associate degrees, diplomas, and certificates in more than 60 areas of study.

Image Credit: Somerset Community College 2012 Earth Day Celebration