

Decoy duck awaits feathered friends

By Christina Garza
Pulse Staff Reporter

Palo Alto College has a new and innovative botanical garden called the Science Exploration Laboratory and Interpretive Center (SELIC) that stretches over seven acres of the college.

"Not only does it beautify the campus so that the community and the students can be proud of it, it also acts as an educational resource," said Angela Miller, Palo Alto Project Director of the CCRAA STEM Grant. "The SELIC gives the students the opportunity to get the hands-on learning experience that they need to be successful in their course objectives."

The construction of the SELIC started on July 1, 2009, and was designed by landscape architect Barry Landry of Austin, Texas. The main purpose of the SELIC is to serve as an educational resource and to increase student success rates in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math.

The SELIC features four exhibits in the center of the campus, stretching from the Gym to the Executive Offices and the Library to the Performing Arts Center. Currently, the exhibits that are in the development phase include the Butterfly Garden, South Texas Native Plant Trail, Duck Discovery Lab (DDL) and Dry Desert Gardens.

The Butterfly Garden exhibit was designed to attract and sustain pollinators by using a diverse range of plants native to the Texas Hill Country. It features an insectary and a butterfly spring that will attract not only butterflies but all insects. This resource will give students the opportunity to investigate the different lifecycles of these species.

The South Texas Native Plant Trail consists of more than 100 South Texas plant varieties. This trail allows students the opportunity to experience native wildflowers and plants while studying the South Texas ecosystem. The trail also has benches throughout for students to sit and relax while they study in a quiet, peaceful environment.

"It's nice sitting out here between

classes instead of in the Library or Student Center. There is no traffic from students or any loud distractions," said Vicki Smith, a junior Education Major. "It's very beautiful and relaxing and will only get better as time goes on and the plants grow fuller."

The Duck Discovery Lab exhibit allows students to explore basic principles in Biology and Chemistry through the examination of natural systems on Earth.

"It is a really nice and beautiful pond," said Christopher Ramos, a sophomore Communications major. "I saw a duck in

The Dry Desert Gardens exhibit allows students to study water conservation by growing plants that prefer more arid conditions. It consists of cactuses, grasses and succulents that enjoy alkaline soils and a dry climate.

"The total cost of the SELIC to be built is approximately \$800,000 that was funded from a two-year, \$2.5 million grant that the school received through the U.S. Department of Education's College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRAA)," Miller said.

All of the plants and trees used in the



Wooden duck floats happily around the SELIC pond.

Photo courtesy of Christopher Ramos

the middle of the water, so I quickly got my camera out and took a picture of it, not realizing that it was a fake duck 'til I zoomed in and carefully examined my photo. It was really disappointing to find out it was not real."

The pond currently contains Texas Perch fish, tadpoles and one wooden duck with the hope of having some real ducks join it in the future.

"The subcontractor thought that the wooden duck would be used as a decoy and would be symbolic that eventually live ducks would come," Miller said. The college plans on adding turtles, frogs and different reptiles and amphibians.

SELIC were purchased through Millburger Landscaping. The SELIC is not complete yet. Future plans include a second phase of adding an Acequia, a Rain Gardens, an Energy Trail and a Geology Trail.

The Acequia will be used to demonstrate the process of transporting water. "The second phase will cost well over a \$1 million in the future," said Miller.

The SELIC is not only for student use, but it is also open to the community.

"The future plans are to incorporate brochures and information so that the community can come out and visit the exhibits and learn all the different aspects and components of it," said Miller.