

GROW WITH EXTENSION



The Ability Garden Greenhouse at the New Hanover County Arboretum serves as the winter classroom for therapeutic horticulture program. [CONTRIBUTED PHOTO]

From the classroom to field



Haleigh Swenfurth

As we are getting back to some normal aspects of life, we are still in the midst of COVID-19. People returning to work, restaurants, and businesses are beginning to open again. This comes at the end of my internship here at the New Hanover County Extension Center. I have had many opportunities to participate in activities that have prepared me for the post COVID-19 workplace. This comparison comes from previous experience working with New Hanover County 4-H during 2018. Having to quickly adapt all projects that were outlined for completion pre-COVID-19 was a challenge, but we were able to do this as a team. Regardless of having to make these adaptations, I was still able to have a successful experience.

My summer work included watering the Ability Garden greenhouses and other plant care needs, directed by Heather Kelejian, Extension Agent, Therapeutic Horticulture. The Ability Garden is a nonprofit therapeutic horticulture program operating on the grounds of the New Hanover County Arboretum. The program grew out of the Friends of the Arboretum's desire to engage people of all abilities in nature.

While at the same time, Scott Enroughty, Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development and I worked on 4-H summer fun camps. This was challenging to try to figure out ways to engage our campers virtually. Like many of us in present times, they too suffer from "Zoom burnout". We were able to create virtual summer camps for campers to access the content at their own pace, and work with a family member or guardian on the various projects. There were two other camp opportunities offered through UNCW's MarineQuest and Fort Fisher Aquarium. This provided free summer camps to any and all who wanted to participate, which is much needed at this time. Learn more about online 4-H programs here (<https://newhanover.ces.ncsu.edu/online-youth-activities-while-at-home/>).

The most interesting project of the summer I worked on was the Eagles Island Project with Lloyd Singleton, County Extension Director. Being able to learn about the rich history of the area that I was not aware existed. The Eagles Island Coalition is a multi-agency, non-governmental organization partnership focused on protecting the existing natural area on Eagles Island and the lower Cape Fear/Brunswick River Marsh complex. Eagles Island Coalition mission is to lead efforts to conserve and manage the natural and cultural assets of Eagles Island and provide compatible educational and recreational opportunities. Eagles Island is located in

Brunswick and New Hanover Counties, North Carolina, consisting of approximately 3,110 acres fixed between the Brunswick and Cape Fear Rivers. The land of the island is currently owned by private and corporate individuals, the State of North Carolina (NC Division of Soil and Water Conservation, NC Department of Transportation and NC Ports Authority), the New Hanover Soil and Water Conservation District, the Town of Leland, and the United States of America. It is a part of a number of Natural Heritage Areas, which are areas of interest identified by the North Carolina Department of Environmental and Natural Resources Natural Heritage Program. The call for these areas to be preserved is due to natural communities being present or a clustering of rare species, or both. Cooperative Extension plans to be involved in furthering these efforts in the future.

Being able to gain real world experience, though most of it being virtual, has given me the tools I need to Grow in Extension or any field. You can Grow with Extension too!

The Arboretum grounds are currently closed for clean-up and repair from hurricane force winds. Please check our website for the latest information at <https://newhanover.ces.ncsu.edu/>.

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