

Member Profile: Sandhill Grounds Crew

By Ellen Strother, Environmental Landscape Specialist

The grounds crew at the new Clemson Institute for Economic and Community Development, formerly known as Sandhill REC, are all SCNLA members. These individuals, according to Donna Shealy Foster, executive director for SCNLA, "display tremendous support to industry programs."

Billy M. Nelson:

Billy Nelson is native to South Carolina's Lowcountry. With a strong background in forestry and farming, he joined the Clemson Institute's grounds crew one year ago. Nelson's experience with farm equipment and a strong work ethic have made him a valuable asset to the team. During his first year he has installed landscapes and helped maintain over 300 acres of field and forest.

Nelson claims it's the people at Clemson Institute that he enjoys. "I really like the people. They try to work together here." His favorite project was installing the rose and perennial field trials. "All the work that went into that job was worthwhile." He also appreciates the beauty and calmness of the site. "I bring my daughters here on weekends sometimes just to walk along the water."

Nelson is attune to implementing the new mission at Clemson Institute and he attended the design planning charrette in November (see article Sandhill REC grows into an Institute, this edition.) "I liked all the choices, there are so many possibilities for the future."



Billy Nelson prepares soil for new planting

Continued on Page 47



Brooks Thompson installs raised beds

Brooks Thompson

Brooks Thompson is native to Winnsboro, SC. He joined the grounds crew 1.5 years ago and has been instrumental in implementing the new mission. Thompson has a strong landscaping and farming background and an equally strong work ethic.

At the Clemson Institute Thompson supervises volunteers, performs mechanical repairs and helps maintains over 300 acres of forestland and fields. Thompson especially likes being outside and in the woods. "I like to work outside on the grounds. I especially like creating trails in the woods, it's a good place to walk and look around. It feels good to not see buildings, just wildlife and water views. Thompson also enjoys working in the Children's Garden. "I feel real relaxed when I work there, you hear the chimes going in the trees and see the kids playing. It seems like the place to be."

Thompson appreciates the group dynamics of the new Clemson Institute for Economic and Community Development. "I like the people I work with. They interact well. When you're feeling bad they know it, it's like a family. It feels good, like home."

Thompson attended the design charrette held in November and was amazed at what the architectural design teams accomplished. "When they first started, it just looked like chicken scratch and I said 'What is this?' Then, at the end, it all came together." The process also impressed him. "I was amazed to see how they all worked together so well, one person would talk and someone else would start drawing and make it come to life."

When Thompson isn't working at the Clemson Institute, he can be found fishing for breams, bass & catfish.



Guys by the water, Joe Hudson (middle)

Joe Hudson

Joe Hudson was born on the Fort Jackson Army Base and grew up outside of Columbia in the town of Blaney, which is now Elgin and Pontiac. His family ran a chicken farm and he learned early how to work hard. He gave up the chickens in 1988 when he realized the cost to modernize would exceed income potential and the surrounding development made waste disposal difficult.

Joe Hudson arrived at Sandhill seven years ago and was in charge of the hog test station for three years. He then assumed the role of Farm Manager and now oversees all buildings and grounds activities.

Hudson doesn't have a favorite task or job at the Clemson Institute for Economic and Community Development. "Everything makes me happy here. I just love to come in every morning and see if anything has happened around the place."

Hudson's work ethic is legendary. "Don't put off work if you see something that needs to be done, just do it!" Donna Shealy Foster claims people like Joe are rare and precious. "The Association is indebted to him for his support and assistance with the CLT test. If I say we're going to be there at 6 a.m., he's there at quarter till, waiting on me, and he's there at 10 p.m. when we leave. He always wears a smile."

Hudson's favorite places on the facility are the Lakehouse and the Children's Garden. "I like the Lakehouse more than any place else. Sitting on the porch or steps is my favorite place; it's a peaceful quiet place to think. I also like the Children's Garden. I like to listen to the wind chimes, they sound real good and they relax you."

Hudson is also a Warden for the SC Forestry Commission and is on call to respond to woods' fires. In his spare time, he farms 300 acres of coastal Bermuda hay, and bales 800 acres of wheat straw every year. Hudson claims to have one passion that doesn't involve hard work- watching the Andy Griffith show.

Hudson is enthusiastic about the new economic and community development mission. "This new mission fits the time and place. We're in the center of development for northeast Columbia and it's good to have a piece of land that won't be developed. It will be really nice for people to come and visit here."

