

Dominican seeks OK for lab on hillside

Site would be used to study sudden oak death fungus

By Mark Prado

Marin Independent Journal

A Dominican University plan to build an outdoor laboratory on a San Rafael hillside to study how a fungus-like pathogen spreads in nurseries will be the subject of a public meeting Thursday.

A team from the school plans to research the impact of pathogens and pests on ornamental nursery plant stock, which has been hit hard by the fungus *Phytophthora ramorum*. It has appeared among camellia plants in nurseries throughout California over the past two years and is the same pathogen that has infected

thousands of trees with sudden oak death.

"We want to come up with data to stop the spread and infestation of this," said Sibdas Ghosh, chairman and professor of biology in the Department of Natural Sciences and Mathematics at Dominican. "We want to learn more about how this is spread. This will help us do that."

Last fall Dominican University received a \$54,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to research the fungus and determine how

DOMINICAN: Research laboratory planned

From page A3

it spreads, and the outdoor laboratory — which would be less than an acre — would be funded by that grant.

The new research site would be on university land near the intersection of Deer Park and Magnolia avenues. It would be identical to the existing temporary site near the Forest Meadows Amphitheater which is a highly controlled setting modeled to reflect a small nursery.

All water and soil would be self-contained. Ground barriers would capture all runoff from each study plot. Each plot would be fenced and locked in order to control access. Both sites

would be closely monitored by the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

The work is designed to determine how the pathogen spreads, what type of tissue damage there is at the infection site and what the minimum safe distance is between a healthy and infected plant.

The project would use one-gallon pots of three different species of camellia, which may show different levels of resistance to the disease. Pots would be set up in a circle with an infected camellia in the center. Each plot would have six experimental plants and two of each species at varying distances.

The researchers, who in-

clude undergraduate students, would gather samples from infected plants to determine how the pathogen spreads and enters the plant and how the disease progresses through the various tissues of a leaf or stem.

Because the project requires a rezoning, the city of San Rafael is involved and a public meeting is required.

"This is an opportunity for the public to find out about the project from Dominican," said Steve Stafford, project planner for the city. "It's not a public hearing, but more informational."

Contact Mark Prado via e-mail at mprado@marinij.com