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\$1 MILLION

Grant fuels Dominican sudden oak death study

By Rob Rogers

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San Rafael's Dominican University has received almost \$1 million in federal funds to establish a research center targeting the pathogen responsible for sudden oak death.

"Just to have the facility itself is amazing, and having it be here in Marin is especially nice," said Janice Alexander, sudden oak death coordinator for the University of California Cooperative Extension in Novato. "We've been the focus of sudden oak death for so long, and we have a lot of people in the general area with expertise in the disease."

The new National Ornamentals Research Site will

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den oak death infects and kills more than 100 species of plants, including black oak, California bay laurel and coast redwood. The Phytophthora pathogen is believed to have killed as many as 1 million trees in California, including tens of thousands in Marin and Sonoma counties. Those vast swaths of dead forest may have increased the danger of wildland fires.

In addition, the spread of the fungus through nursery plants has caused many California growers to be quarantined, wreaking havoc on the state's \$2 billion horticultural plant industry. The new Dominican research site, situated near the Forest Meadows amphitheater on the school's San

Rafael campus, will resemble a plant nursery, and will be surrounded by safeguards to prevent the escape of disease-causing pathogens. The site's research committee, which will oversee all project proposals, will include representatives from the California Department of Food and Agriculture, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, the Marin County Agricultural Commissioner's Office and several other federal, state and local agencies.

"This is one of a kind. Scientists do not have a nursery research site for ornamentals and sudden oak death," said Sibdas Ghosh, associate dean for academic development at Dominican's

School of Health and Natural Sciences. "We're hoping to be able to attract national and international scientists to do research to find the answers for our nurseries."

Although the grant provides one-time money for the site, Dominican University will be able to reapplly each year for additional funds.

Dominican University received a \$54,000 grant from the USDA in 2005 for a one-year study of sudden oak death. Among other discoveries, Dominican researchers developed a device to prevent the spread of the Phytophthora fungus by scrubbing the tires of mountain bikes.

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