



## Chance encounter in Cuba

By Carolyn Gonzales

Chance Munns, a graduate student in the UNM landscape architecture master's program, got involved with Step into Cuba, a park project in Cuba, N.M. Attila Bality, National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, contacted the UNM School of Architecture and Planning looking for a student group to tackle an initiative in that community.

As president of the Society of Landscape Architecture Students, or SOCLAS, Munns got the call. RTCA, the village of Cuba and Nacimiento Medical Foundation were partnering to look at ways to transform St. Francis of Assisi Park into an area focused on improving healthy living in the community.

Cuba had a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to create community gardens, safe routes to school and other health-focused opportunities in the village.



Chance Munns

Through a town meeting, Munns and other students discovered that they needed to create walkways and trails connecting various parts of the community, as well as the gardens. "Walking is an easy and effective way to combat diabetes, a disease affecting many in the area," Munns said.

Their designs included retaining the baseball field, expanding the community center, establishing more sports fields and identifying how to create trails and how they would fit into the community. "We all drew ideas and even had a sandbox model for the park where people could place things within the park to see the design concepts," Munns said.

He and SOCLAS presented their ideas to the village council in December, about the same time Munns had to decide what he was going to do for his master's thesis project.

"I wanted my thesis to address something I was excited about. The preparation leading up to this gave me a connection to the people and the process. I knew I would want to engage community involvement in planning professionally," he said.

Munns thought critically about the need for a park in an area surrounded by wilderness and outdoor opportunities. "Cuba is a rural village with access to a pastoral setting. They didn't need a retreat from concrete, but they did need a place to go to do

things," he said.

"By expanding the community center, they could offer Tai Chi and other exercise and wellness programs. They could lease pedometers so that people could document the walking they were doing to follow doctors' orders," he said.

Because they are all about mud-bogging in Cuba, the pit would stay. "I proposed establishing a mud festival with mud volleyball, wrestling, mud sculptures and dorodango balls," he said. Dorodango balls are Japanese shiny mud balls.

Munns took his designs to the lunch line at the local high school to get feedback from the students. "Chance knew the value of their input and knew they wouldn't show up at a meeting," Bality said.

In late May, Munns went back to present his final plans and the village endorsed his concept.

"Chance brought together an outstanding group of students. I like working with the students from the UNM School of Architecture and Planning. The plans they develop are not hypothetical, but have real world applications. They adhered to a need to keep costs low – they understood the resources available and stuck to those principles," Bality said.

Munns graduated in May. ■

## High technology to help uncover Mayan ruins

By Karen Wentworth

A new field season in Uxbenká begins for Keith Prufer, assistant professor, UNM Department of Anthropology. Every summer he takes students to the lowlands of Belize to study what was a small but flourishing Mayan city in the 10th century.

This year, thanks to a grant from the Alphawood Foundation, they will have electronic equipment to analyze the composition of artifacts they find in the Mayan ruin. "It should tell us where materials like the obsidian we are finding came from, because it was traded a long way. Some came from Mexico, some from Guatemala," Prufer said. "We can work out trade routes and sources of materials with it."

## Businesses, Taos High building partnership

By Matthew Van Buren, The Taos News

A Taos High School/UNM-Taos collaboration is combining carpentry, community service and business partnerships to help a local child with epilepsy.

The Green Technology Center, housed on Taos High School's campus, teaches students from the high school and UNM-Taos building techniques such as plumbing, electrical wiring, carpentry, blueprint reading and photovoltaic systems.

Instructor and Onyx Construction owner Mark Goldman said the students have really gotten into this semester's project – building a wheelchair ramp for the home of 4-year-old Damian, who has severe epilepsy.

"They're taking tremendous pride and being very meticulous," he said.

He said during the course of the project, students had to learn about using basic carpentry techniques, building to the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act and designing a project using 3-D software.

Goldman said he strives to teach up-to-date techniques.

"The construction industry is rapidly changing," he said. "If you don't know those techniques you're gonna get left behind."

Its latest endeavor has also forced the Green Trades and

Building Technology program to form partnerships with local businesses.

He said the state's anti-donation clause prevents the program from donating a ramp made using public funds to an individual, so collaborating with private people and receptive businesses became necessary.

Businesses that have donated money or items to the program include Cid's Food Market, Hinds and Hinds Storage, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Applebee's and Taos Auto Electric, plus several artists and community members.

UNM-Taos student Danilo Fontana said the Taos program, as it grows in a community that has already accepted green building techniques and harnessing solar energy, can be a model for other communities.

Goldman said the ramp, expected to cost \$1,155, is mostly paid for, and those interested in making a donation can do so at People's Bank. An account has been started there for "Damian's ramp." Goldman also said he is always seeking funds and donated materials that meet code, as well as ideas for more community projects.

For more information, visit [taos.unm.edu/greentech](http://taos.unm.edu/greentech) or contact Goldman at (575) 770-1137 or [mgoldman@kitcarson.ne](mailto:mgoldman@kitcarson.ne). ■

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Green Building Technology Program instructor Mark Goldman, right, with his students. PHOTO BY TINA LARKIN, COURTESY OF THE TAOS NEWS

landscape, where people lived and their relationship with the urban center.

The grant from Alphawood will be used to hire an airplane from the University of Houston equipped with LIDAR, or Light Detection and Ranging, an optical system that allows remote sensing. Prufer is excited because he should be able to map partially buried ruins and save days of searching through the undergrowth to find the remains of structures he and students might excavate in the future.

Funding for students' travel expenses comes from the National Science Foundation as part of its Research Experience for Undergraduates program. ■



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