

## **Locals aid Mexican pollution battle**

*By Jason Pulliam - The Daily Iowan*

Homegrown pollution-prevention strategies are being prepared for export to the developing world under a program designed to synthesize industrial and environmental needs.

The UI chapter of Engineers for a Sustainable World has secured federal funding to come up with a plan to help Xicotepec, Mexico, respond to development-driven environmental degradation.

The group was among 42 recipients nationwide of \$10,000 "People, Prosperity, & Planet" grants from the Environmental Protection Agency. The UI organization will travel to Washington, D.C., in the spring of 2006, to compete against other recipients for the national award, which supplies additional funding to winning proposals.

Marcelo Mena, a graduate student in the UI College of Engineering, said members are eager to refine their proposal to position themselves for the national award, but he pointed out that the initiative is about much more than money and accolades.

"It's [about] exporting a great idea that was born in Iowa," he said. "Iowa is a great place to grow things, but it's also a place where ideas can become seeds to be planted elsewhere."

Group members drew upon their experiences as interns in the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Pollution Prevention Program to design their proposal to help Xicotepec address its pollution problems. The program enables Iowa college students to work at an Iowa company for 11 weeks to help identify areas of industrial waste that result in economic loss and environmental contamination.

Pieter Beyer, a UI senior and environmental-engineering major, said the waste-reduction recommendations he made while interning at Textron Fastening Systems in Decorah resulted in "conservatively estimated" savings of \$700,000 per year. Beyer and Mena argue that common-sense solutions to industrial waste, as demonstrated by the successes of the Natural Resources program, are transferable to places - such as Xicotepec - all across the developing world.

Local engineering-chapter members have been visiting Xicotepec since 2003 in an effort to assess the quality of its drinking water and waste-treatment capacity, as well as analyzing pollution resulting from coffee production, the area's primary industry. Their involvement began as an offshoot of the engagement of Iowa City's four area Rotary clubs, which have been involved with Xicotepec Rotary counterparts since 2001.

Craig Just, an associate research scientist in the engineering school and the group's faculty adviser, said the situation in Xicotepec is a microcosm of the developing world, and countries such as the United States have a vested interest in making certain development proceeds in a sustainable way, because it is inextricably linked to stability the world over.

"Impoverished countries are breeding grounds for global instability," he said.

Jim Peterson, an Iowa City Rotarian and UI alumnus, said he hopes Engineers for a Sustainable World's efforts will spur other members of the UI community to action.

"I see President Skorton has named this the 'Year of Engagement,' and there are many ways students in a lot of disciplines could become involved in Xicotepec and places like it," he said.

As the program progresses, professors and students from the UI and Xicotepec will work closely to maximize the cultural interchange of the project to complement its technological emphases.

"This program is as much about cultural exchange as it is about technological exchange," Just said.

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