Behind the Bloom

Thanks to a little groundwork, the College is really blossoming
It seems like we’re all learning to do more with less these days, and – let’s face it – we can all use whatever help we can get. Here are a few pointers that could save your department a minimum of $3,225. Save the green stuff – and be green!

Stop throwing away your money. If you’re going through five cases of 10 reams of paper a year, that’s $200 a year. Instead,

- use PrintFriendly.com to control what you print from websites (no more ads or other info you don’t need);
- use PrimoPDF.com to make files into PDFs;
- use elax.com to send electronic faxes; and
- download Stickies software from Sticky-Notes.net to replace paper notes.

Turn your Inkjet off and stay in the black. If your Inkjet printer uses three black cartridges and three color cartridges a year, you’re spending $540–$675 on ink annually. Instead, use laser printers or Xerox machines to print.

Get clear about your water and stop pouring money down the drain. Remember, tap water is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency; bottled water is not. If your office is going through one five-gallon jug a day, you’re spending $2,400 on water every year. Instead, call Charleston Public Works at 727.6800 to get a free testing kit and then test your water for serious impurities; if there are none, invest in an on-tap water-filtration system ($25) or a water-filtration pitcher ($10).

Use real dishes and eat up some savings. Most offices will save at least $120 annually if they stop buying disposable cups, plates and silverware. Instead, bring in some old dishes from home or from a thrift store or yard sale.

What’s Your Limit?

The unofficial Paul Young Memorial Dirt Path/ Mike Richter Walkway. It may have been Professor of Mathematics Paul Young who blazed the trail, but it was (now former) Grounds Crew Leader Mike Richter who paved the way ... or at least the walkway. Young has been beating down a path through the bushes outside his office at 4 Green Way for 20 years now, often joking that the dirt foot trail should be named after him when he’s gone. Then, in February, Young’s mark on the campus was set in stone when Richter paved the 8’x1’ path with bluish gray bricks. “It’s a wonderful little path,” says Young. “But now, you see, he is the person responsible for it in its present state, not me.”

Indeed, for Richter and Young, this little walkway has become a two-way street.
"We start working on the spring flower order around the middle of January and place the order by the end of January," explains Paty Cowden, grounds supervisor – who, together with crew leader Marlene Williams, begins the process by looking through websites to get ideas for new plants for the hanging baskets, planters and seasonal beds across campus. "I get into that part. For a week or better, I’ll be skipping my break – I don’t want to stop looking at everything they have," says Williams, whom Cowden credits for the creative vision behind the arrangements. "When I see a combination of colors I like, I’ll look for flowers with similar colors. It’s got to be something that’s going to pop at you and keep your attention."

And, says Williams, it has to fit: “Each house, each garden – they’ve each got their own personalities. You can’t just take one basket and hang it on any porch.”

"Every house is different, and the plants have to do well in the area," agrees Cowden. "Beyond that, every basket is different, because some are hanging in the shade, some are more in the sun. So, we’ll put different things in the different baskets – as long as the colors and texture look good together, it isn’t noticeable. They just have to look right together."

Hanging baskets and planters look best when there’s something tall and upright in the center and something cascading around the edges, with a medium-height element in between. "You want to include different types of flowers, with diverse textures, but they have to have the same needs – that’s why it takes so much research," says Cowden. "We have to know how they’re going to react before we put them in the ground, because, if it doesn’t work, you can’t start over. You’ve wasted that money."

The College spends about $2,000 for its big spring flower order every year, and about $1,000 on other, little things they pick up – at Hyams Garden Center (which Williams equates to the candy store), for example. The flowers are delivered about a month before commencement, and the crew spends the next week or so getting 3,000+ flowers into the soil. "From April to the first frost, that’s the trial period to see what will last on campus," says Cowden, explaining that – no matter how much research they do – everything is trial and error. "A lot can go wrong. But we’ve been able to get a lot of summer flowers to carry through to the fall. There’s a lot that goes into taking care of it all."

And that, of course, is the price we pay for beauty.
Move with the Music

Music can get us up off our seats, stir up our memories and emotions and bring goose bumps to our arms and tears to our eyes. And, while the right song can get just about anyone moving, the Wayfaring Singers of Charleston have taken it to the next level, proving just how moving music can be.

For these singers – including Ceil Fewox, visiting professor of accounting and legal studies; Johnnie Ann Margiotta, data-entry clerk in the Controller’s Office; and Pamela Riggs-Gelasco, associate professor of chemistry – it was the joy of making music together that really got them going in the first place. They’d sung in a church choir together for some 15 years, so – when church politics forced their beloved director to leave in early 2008 – the entire choir stepped out from behind the pews and hit the road with their director.

“It was a big move for all of us, but we didn’t want to leave each other,” says Margiotta. “We are like a family.”

And so they followed the music, purchasing a portable piano, renaming themselves the Wayfaring Singers of Charleston and letting the music take them wherever it may – which turned out to be the space above what’s now a West Ashley wellness center, where they meet weekly to rehearse what they call “songs for the soul”: classical sacred hymns, spirituals, show tunes, rock arrangements and just about everything else under the sun.

“We’re a mixed bag,” says Fewox, adding that the 25-30 Wayfaring Singers range in age from 19 to 80-something. “We just have a rip-roaring good time. Holy cats! We have so much fun!”

Although the group does perform at events like weddings, holiday parties and community festivals, the bulk of their performances are at worship services – whether it’s as the visiting choir at an area church or as the main event in their makeshift sanctuary above the wellness center.

“We consider ourselves a music ministry,” says Riggs-Gelasco. “Our focus is on performing ministry with music, and also community outreach. So we’re always, always, looking for something that we can do to help the community.”

That might mean distributing groceries or collecting food, funds and school supplies for various local organizations – or, even better, visiting retirement communities.

“That’s the most rewarding thing we do, I think. It makes us feel so good to see their faces when they hear a song they know,” says Riggs-Gelasco, adding that – over more than one occasion – members of the audience who haven’t spoken a word in years will break into song.

“We’ve definitely got something special going on here,” says Fewox with a smile. “And I think we’re all grateful to be here, singing together. It feels right to all of us – we’re where we’re supposed to be.” ♩
CONGRATULATIONS TO ALYSON GOFF, executive assistant to the EVP for business affairs, who correctly guessed that the object in question was the Sottile Theatre’s new marquee. Designed in classic art-deco style, the new sign was modeled after the theatre’s original sign (c. 1927), which was dismantled in 1951.

If you think you know what the object in the above photo is and where it can be found, send your guess to lutza@cofc.edu by Monday, April 11. The names of those who submit the correct answer will be entered into a drawing for lunch for two at the Fresh Food Company. The contest is open to all College faculty and staff.