Alix Mitchell

The college is building a stronger, more modern image.

Most of the changes are rooted in the vision of Ross S. Whaley, former director of forest resources economics research for the U.S. Forest Service, who became president of ESF in 1983. Under Whaley, the school has experienced perhaps the largest reorganization in its history.

Before last August, ESF was made up of four schools: Forestry; Landscape Architecture; Environmental and Resource Engineering; and Chemistry, Biology, and Engineering. Now there are none. They have been replaced by eight individual departments, which represent the college’s academic programs: paper science and engineering, wood products, forest engineering, chemistry, landscape architecture, environmental studies, environmental and forest biology, and forestry.

“The purpose of the reorganization,” Whaley says, “is to streamline the organizational structure and improve internal communications.” It seems to be working.

ESF’s Birthday Party

This year, the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, once known as the New York State College of Forestry at Syracuse University, will celebrate its 75th anniversary.

The college is celebrating its accomplishments in a variety of ways. It kicked off its diamond anniversary with a convocation in January, and a birthday party is scheduled for July 28. From August 10 to 16, ESF will host the Fourth International Congress of Ecology.

The main event will be October 10–11, when ESF will hold a two-day celebration for all alumni, students, faculty, and emeriti faculty. It will feature an open house, forest games, and an anniversary banquet and dinner dance.

The year-long celebration will conclude on December 12 with a convocation focusing on ESF’s future.

ESF graduates will receive more information about the upcoming events in future issues of ESF ’86. They may also call Harrison H. Payne or Elizabeth A. Elkins, cochairs of the 75th Anniversary Committee, at 315-470-6500.
are offered at SU, and our faculty has found these sessions extremely valuable."

That ESF is striving to maintain, much less enhance, its high standards is impressive in itself, given the recent difficulties it has faced. From 1978 to 1983, it lost 60 staff and faculty positions due to state budget cuts. Yet ESF continued to attract a number of diverse research grants and maintain steady enrollment figures—without lowering its admission standards.

More recently, state support has improved—between 1983 and 1985, 18 new positions were added. Ironically, though, the college’s enrollment began to drop during this period, as competition for a shrinking number of students increased.

And so, last fall, ESF embarked on an intensified recruitment plan.

"With competition for students as fierce as it is across the country right now," says Dennis Stratton, director of admissions, "anyone who expects to see significant increases in enrollment in any college or university doesn’t understand the extent of the problem. Nevertheless, we expect to stabilize enrollment this fall and to strike moderate increases over the next few years," Stratton and his colleagues expect to accomplish this while maintaining their admission standards.

The problem of competing for a shrinking number of students is compounded by another complication: while ESF does award both bachelor’s and master’s degrees, it is exclusively an upper-division and graduate school. This means that undergraduates must do their freshman and sophomore work at another institution, such as SU, and then transfer to ESF as juniors. Some students view this as an inconvenience.

Several years ago, ESF launched the Advanced Early Admittance Program to solve this problem. Aimed at high school students who meet the admittance requirements, it guarantees their acceptance into ESF in their junior year of college, as long as course and grade requirements are met.

There are other programs: campus tours for high school and potential transfer students in the fall, the establishment of student and faculty advisors to counsel prospective junior-year transfer students, and increased efforts to educate teachers and counselors in the high schools and lower-division institutions about ESF’s laboratories, field stations, and facilities research. So far, ESF’s intensified recruitment plan seems to be paying off.

"Although we don’t have all the figures yet," Stratton says, "as early as January we were seeing a marked increase in inquiries."

To a large extent, ESF owes the success of its recruitment efforts to the fact that they have helped to change the public’s impression of the college.

"Most people equate ESF with a Smokey the Bear image," Heffernan says. "They don’t realize that in addition to doing important research on our 27,000 acres of Adirondack land, our students and faculty members also have at their fingertips specialized laboratory equipment, state-of-the-art computers, climate-controlled greenhouses, electron microscopes, one of the nation’s most complete environmental libraries, outstanding design studios, plant and insect growth chambers, a fully equipped photogrammetry facility, and a semicommercial paper mill, to name just some of our resources.

"The training our students receive prepares them to enter a broad range of professions," he adds. In fact, an undergraduate degree from ESF can lead to a career as an urban or regional environmental planner, landscape architect, parks designer, surveyor, forest technician, fish and wildlife biologist, plant and soil scientist, environmental or polymer chemist, biochemist, or toxicologist, among others.

"Our work here is vastly important," Whaley says. "Throughout a good share of Africa, Latin America, and some portions of Asia, you can see problems which stem from the misuse of natural resources. What can be done to help these countries to better manage these resources and provide a higher economic standard? These are issues which our teachers and students are trained to address."

And, while the public may not know it, they are issues that ESF students and teachers have been helping to solve over the past seven decades. When the efforts of Whaley and his colleagues pay off, ESF will receive the recognition it deserves from its hometown and country. It will shed its "Smokey the Bear" image and become as well-known and appreciated in Syracuse and America as it is in Japan.