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## Fairchild wants to lure kids into science

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Image Courtesy of Becker Public Relations

Rendering of the new Science Village at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden.

Bruce Greer, the president of the board of trustees of Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, has a favorite story he likes to share. It's about Carl E. Lewis, the garden's director.

When Carl was 13, his mother gave him a copy of "The World is My Garden, Travels of a Plant Explorer," by David Fairchild, the internationally known scientist who traversed the globe in search of new plant species – and the man for whom the garden is named.

According to Greer, the book was the impetus for Lewis' interest in science and botany – a path that led Lewis to earn a bachelor's degree in botany in 1995 from Connecticut

College and then a PhD in plant biology in 2001 from Cornell University.

Greer's point: he wants there to be more Carl Lewises in the world.

With an army of volunteers, politicians and well-heeled benefactors to Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Greer and Lewis on Wednesday unveiled a long-term, multi-faceted plan to cultivate more scientists and create more science jobs.

In a nutshell: bring the scientists to the garden. Inspire visiting children to learn more about science by having them watch the scientists at work.

Give students college-level opportunities in science by beefing up the garden's partnerships with local colleges such as Florida International University.

Fairchild is embarking on an ambitious, multi-million dollar building program to achieve these goals.

Fairchild officials Wednesday held a groundbreaking ceremony for four planned facilities: The Paul and Swanee DiMare Science Village, the Dr. Jane Hsiao Tropical Research Laboratories, the Clinton Family Conservatory and the Joyce and Anthony M. Burns Building.

"We are going to bring science physically to the heart of the garden," Lewis told an audience of 500 volunteers, trustees and elected officials. "We are going to give students the

opportunity to learn science and connect them with academic research and training to help them build environmental careers.”

“This is a new era,” he added.

The Science Village complex will be composed of three buildings encompassing more than 25,000 square feet. They will be located where the Garden Café and the Windows to the Tropics Conservatory now stand.

Fairchild’s conservation team will move into their new laboratories at the Science Village, where visitors and students will be able to see them conducting research, Lewis said.

There will be laboratories for graduate students as well as interactive classrooms.

The complex will also include a new conservatory to house a world-class collection of orchids and butterflies.

Over the next five years, the vision is to support the Science Village with 10 scientists with PhDs, 20 graduate students pursuing PhDs and 40 undergraduate research students, Lewis said.

The undergraduate and graduate courses are being developed to piggyback on the Fairchild Challenge, a program that encourages elementary, middle and high school students to learn about biodiversity and conservation. More than 70,000 students in Broward and Miami-Dade counties participate in the Fairchild Challenge.

According to Greer, the new Science Village and its educational expansion could not have come at a better time. He cited a Dec. 7 story from the New York Times about how students in Shanghai earned top scores in the international standardized exam known as the Program for International Student Assessment or PISA – outpacing American 15-year-olds in science, math and reading.

Test scores from the United States put American students in 23rd place in science; 17th place in reading and below average in math.

“We don’t have the devotion to science we need to have,” Greer said. “We have 100,000 school children coming through the garden every year. Can we make this [science] pipeline go all the way through college? That’s the goal.”