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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CUTTING-EDGE HORTICULTURAL PROGRAM AT OLATHE NORTH HIGH SCHOOL SLICES INTO \$500 MILLION KANSAS INDUSTRY

Olathe North High School now offers the most cutting-edge horticulture program for grades 11-12 in the country. The program is run by Greg Krenke, the school's Horticulture and Landscape Science Instructor.

Landscape design is a \$61 billion industry in the United States, where over 70,000 landscape companies operate. In the state of Kansas in the year 2000 alone, horticulture generated \$500 million in revenue, second only to wheat and corn as the highest-grossing agricultural crops. 27,000 jobs throughout the state are directly tied to horticulture. In 2003, the FFA, a premier national student organization, rated "Landscape" as a "Top 5 Agricultural Career."

Krenke's program prepares students for careers in landscape design and horticulture. Currently one year long, it will be extended to two years in 2004-2005. Twelve students now participate in the class, which covers all aspects of horticulture, including plant science, soil science, insects, disease, propagation, landscape design, greenhouse management, and nursery operations.

The class is co-sponsored by Greenbush, the Southeast Kansas Education Service Center. Greenbush was founded in 1976 to ensure equal educational opportunities for students throughout the region by providing specialized educational services. This affiliation allows students from several Johnson County high schools to participate in Krenke's program.

"The key is to provide students with a base of knowledge and activities for a horticultural career," says Krenke. "This can be everything from identifying plants that tolerate alkaline soils, to learning how the plants grow and how they get propagated."

The class is centered around a unique, story-based curriculum, designed by a local company, I Support Learning. Students spend the semester acting as landscape design interns, solving real client design problems. The storyline, scientific research, and video demos are all available on the computer, where students pick up their new client assignments.

"This is really the first story-based curriculum that's ever been applied in horticulture," says Steve Waddell, a curriculum designer at I Support Learning. "This kind of immersive

curriculum really works.”

Erick Humphrey, a senior student in the class, agrees. “I like the program a lot,” he says, working over a drafting table. “The storyline puts us in a real-life situation, and tells us step-by-step what to do. But then it gives us the freedom to make our own decisions about how to solve the problem.”

I Support Learning creates technology and agricultural education curricula for grades 6-12, in areas such as landscape design, robotics, animatronics, and game development. All their curricula are multidisciplinary and designed to support the No Child Left Behind initiatives of schools. They have partnered with Krenke to supply all of the computer-based curriculum for the course, including the scientific research, the intern challenges, and the extensive video demonstrations, freeing up Krenke to focus on facilitating the learning process. I Support Learning is based in Olathe, Kansas.

Each student must solve the client’s problem with a unique design solution that fits the client’s specified design parameters—all of which is included in the software. Krenke’s students spent most of January redesigning the landscape of a virtual “client’s” backyard, building a rose garden and a wheelchair ramp around the existing trees and shrubs. However, they do collaborate as a team to solve some of the trickier design problems.

“The toughest thing is problem-solving for the clients,” says Patrick Freeman, a senior at Olathe North. He is planning to major in Horticulture, with a minor in Greenhouse Management, at Kansas State University. “You have to meet customer needs, their constraints, and use their existing landscape at the same time—like this shed and maple tree, here,” he says, pointing to his drawing.

The class prepares students like Freeman for the real-world problems of careers. Students are accountable for making their designs function with real-life repercussions, building entrepreneurial experience as well. Students in this class may go on to pursue careers and higher education as turf managers, soil scientists, botanists, landscape designers, or even entrepreneurs, managing their own business.

“This is a one-of-a-kind program in the nation for horticultural opportunities,” says Dr. Ann Sanders, Principal of Olathe North High School. “It also teaches the real-world working skills, like how to negotiate with a client, how to develop that client relationship, how to advise a client on a certain perennial or annual. Those are special skills.”

The program will host an Open House on Monday, February 2, from 6:00-8:00 p.m. at Olathe North High School. The public is welcome to attend.

For more information about the Open House, please contact Olathe North High School at (913) 780-7140. For more information about the landscape design curriculum used at Olathe North, contact I Support Learning at www.isupportlearning.com.

****PHOTOS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST****