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Medicinal Garden in Peru

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Medicinal garden in Peru

Charlotte Trowbridge '10 and Josh Ness '11 dug in and got their hands dirty when they led a binational team effort to create a medicinal garden at the ancient Chimu site of Chan Chan, Peru, last summer.

The garden is a prototype intended not only to supply municipal health care facilities with medicinal plants for healing, but also to help educate local schoolchildren. In the process, a deep cultural tradition of medicinal plant use is reinforced among new generations of Peruvians. Along the way Trowbridge, an environmental studies major and Spanish and Latin American studies minor, and Ness, a math major and Spanish minor, developed friendships, gained planning and organizational skills, and, yes, got dirt under their fingernails.

Ness and Trowbridge were involved from the earliest stages of the project.

With the guidance of Ashley Glenn, program manager of the Sacred Seeds Program for the Missouri Botanical Garden, and Julia Calderon, local healer, Ness and Trowbridge spent six weeks creating the garden.

"We did most of the planning, gathering and planting along with all of the layouts, the budget and the manual labor," said Ness.

"We ended up way more involved than we thought we would be," said Trowbridge. "We really got to see it from start to near finish."

Ness and Trowbridge got a taste of the complexities involved in such a seemingly straightforward project, working within a tangle of local, regional and national authorities (such as the Instituto Nacional de Cultura, which administers Chan Chan, a globally significant archaeological site), as well as local municipal officials and teachers, to build trust and buy-in for this innovative project.

In order to learn which regional plants were known for their medicinal properties, the students sought the expertise of Calderon, a prominent local healer. They learned about plants such as yerba buena, to help with stomach pain; floripondio, to relieve fright; and laurel, to alleviate skin problems.

"Julia was our expert in medicinal plants: how to incorporate them into the garden to educate and preserve the local plants for the people," said Ness. It was doubly gratifying that her father had worked for a time at the Chan Chan complex.



Josh Ness '11 and Charlotte Trowbridge '10, center, flanked by Adam Mekrut and Ashley Glenn, created a garden with medicinal plants for healing in Peru last summer.

Assembling, planting and beginning proper cultivation of the plants was the most strenuous part of the project, but the pair was motivated by the enthusiasm and support of the local people.

"Just about everyone we met was really into doing this project because they wanted us to help preserve their culture and regional traditions," said Ness.

"It was cool to see how our work, as small as it was, would help to become something so much bigger," said Trowbridge.

Both Ness and Trowbridge plan to apply the skills they cultivated to their future endeavors. After Linfield, Ness hopes to attend medical school, and Trowbridge hopes to intern with nonprofit organizations in the field of conservation biology and community development.

The project was supervised by Thomas Love, Linfield professor of anthropology; Douglas Sharon, retired director at the Museum of Man in San Diego, Calif.; and staff of the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis, the world's premier neotropical research garden striving for the conservation of and education about floral diversity in such places as Peru, Madagascar and Nepal.

"Linfield's faculty-student collaborative research program is central to Linfield's mission," said Love.

"Charlotte and Josh learned and accomplished so much more than we'd even dreamed."

– Crystal Galarza '13