Smart Communities Initiative kicks off in Cleveland, Tenn.

by Paul Leach

CLEVELAND, Tenn. — The Smart Communities Initiative, a University of Tennessee-Knoxville student service learning program, has officially kicked off and its first partner city is Cleveland.

The program will give students hands-on experience as they tackle 19 civic projects, including stormwater mapping and analysis, streetscape improvements, greenway extensions and redevelopment of old industrial sites.

Faculty, students, city staff and community stakeholders recently praised the initiative during its opening event at the Museum Center at Five Points in downtown Cleveland.

"This is a critical step forward for us as we look forward to helping our students learn by doing," said Dr. Susan Martin, UT provost.

The initiative is a great way to merge "theory and practice" for both students and faculty in meaningful and useful ways, she said.

Faculty and city staff will lead the projects while students handle the work, write reports and make suggestions for resolving issues they study. The program will involve hundreds of students throughout the 2014-15 academic year.

For Cleveland, it provides the opportunity to address a whole package of needs.

"As a professional planner, SCI is like winning the lottery," said Greg Thomas, city planning director.

Mary Beth Robinson, an associate professor with the college of architecture and design at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, left, stands with architectural student Taylor Dotson at the kick-off of UTK's Smart Communities Initiative at the Museum Center at Five Points in Cleveland, Tenn. Dotson, a Cleveland native, poses near a series of 20 civic project summary boards she designed in support of the program, which will place college students in work-learning environments that will address a number of needs identified by city planners. Photo by Paul Leach.
UTK officials announced in March that Cleveland had been selected as a pilot city for SCI. The city agreed to provide $3,000 to $9,000 for each project, up to a maximum of $100,000, according to the program agreement.

The Smart Communities Initiative projects evolved from a collection of long-range city and county planning efforts.

City personnel, nonprofit organizations and the business sector have combined to make Cleveland a "perfect partner city," said Kelly Ellenburg, UT campus coordinator for service learning.

Creating the groundwork for SCI involved a holistic approach that embraced environmental viability and sustainability as well as social integrity, she said.

Taylor Dotson, a UTK architectural student and Cleveland native, designed 20 project summary boards that were on display at the museum as part of the kick-off event.

"This is an example of what I'm talking about, where people were just coming up wanting to contribute," Ellenburg said. "I've benefited extremely from her help."

Dotson said that when she heard about the project and its partnership with Cleveland, she had to ask how she could help.

Students attending the kick-off event also expressed excitement for the opportunities to engage in real-world practice.

"It's an interesting project to be involved in," said Jacob Walker, a senior geology student who will get to use new tablet-based technology in conjunction with his work on the city's stormwater study.

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When sinkholes open, they can swallow fortunes

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) - Solid ground isn't always a certainty. Sinkholes can lurk anywhere, beneath suburban homes, city streets or even football stadiums and museums.

Man pleads not guilty in tainted steroid case

BOSTON (AP) - A pharmacist who worked for a Massachusetts company blamed for a nationwide meningitis outbreak that killed 64 people pleaded not guilty to a mail fraud charge Thursday as his lawyer said he is concerned he could be made a scapegoat.

Country singer Merle Haggard: still on the road

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - Even Merle Haggard gets nervous about stepping onto a stage when the audience is filled with songwriters, record label executives and fellow artists.

Dollar General goes hostile in bid for rival

Dollar General is going hostile with its $9.1 billion bid for Family Dollar after its rival repeatedly rejected previous offers.
Review: Brice moves step ahead on 'I Don't Dance'
Lee Brice, "I Don't Dance" (Curb)

Dollar General goes hostile in bid for rival
Dollar General is going hostile with its $9.1 billion bid for Family Dollar after its rival repeatedly rejected previous offers.

Police: Remains are those of missing Tenn. woman
MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) - Human remains discovered in a rural Tennessee county are those of a missing nursing student who disappeared from her home in April 2011, investigators said late Monday.

Candidates seek state attorney general post
NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - Tennessee Supreme Court justices on Monday heard candidates make their case for the next eight-year term as state attorney general.

Justin Townes Earle falls short on new album
Justin Townes Earle, "Single Mothers" (Vagrant)

Another teen from juvenile jail breakout is found
NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - Police say they've captured one of the six teens that were still on the run after a mass breakout from a troubled Nashville detention center.
Family Dollar bucks Dollar General bid again
CHESAPEAKE, Va. (AP) - Family Dollar is rejecting Dollar General's latest acquisition offer, and Dollar Tree says it will now divest as many stores as needed to get antitrust clearance for its deal to buy Family Dollar.

Pharmacist arrested in tainted steroid case
BOSTON (AP) - A pharmacist who oversaw the sterile clean rooms at a Massachusetts compounding pharmacy responsible for a deadly meningitis outbreak was arrested Thursday as he was about to board a flight for Hong Kong, federal officials said.

More violence at troubled Nashville juvenile jail
NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - At a Nashville detention center with a long history of violence, escape attempts and sexual-abuse allegations, more than two dozen teens broke out of a common area and created a large disturbance in the yard Wednesday night, roaming the area with sticks and spraying a fire extinguisher.

Coalition works to preserve Nashville's Music Row
NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - With development squeezing Nashville's famous Music Row, some in the music industry say time is running out to preserve the district's character and the studios where the Music City's iconic sounds were born.

Sting, Tom Hanks among Kennedy Center honorees
WASHINGTON (AP) - It's a rare honor for an artist to receive accolades from the president, let alone have him sing one of your tunes.

Miranda Lambert has record-tying 9 CMA nominations
NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - Miranda Lambert released the most ambitious album of her career earlier this year and Country Music Association voters responded by giving her a record-tying load of nominations.

Juvenile jail escape latest for troubled facility
NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - The juvenile detention center where 30 teens escaped under a fence has a long history of violence, allegations of sexual abuse and previous efforts to break out.
Jimi Jamison, lead singer of Survivor, dead at 63

NEW YORK (AP) - Jimi Jamison, who sang lead on Survivor hits such as "Burning Heart" and "Is This Love," has died. He was 63.

32 teens escape from Nashville detention center

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - Thirty-two teens escaped from a Nashville youth detention center by crawling under a weak spot in a fence late Monday, and 10 of them were still on the run Tuesday, a spokesman said.

Dollar General raises Family Dollar bid to $9.1B

GOODLETTSVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - Dollar General upped its bid for the rival Family Dollar chain and addressed an earlier roadblock, saying that it will more than double the number of stores it would shed to tamp down the antitrust concerns of its takeover target.

Carrie Underwood announces pregnancy

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - Country star Carrie Underwood and NHL player Mike Fisher chose the Labor Day holiday to announce they are expecting their first child.

Brad Paisley turns up the fun on latest album

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - Brad Paisley is taking control of the conversation about Brad Paisley with the release of his new album, "Moonshine in the Trunk."