

WMU reclaims stormwater

By Ociel Torres

Sangren Mall is more than just an eye-catching fountain with beautiful scenery and nice study areas for students. Sangren Mall is part of a campus wide system to make WMU more sustainable.

Steve Keto, the open areas and special grounds manager of Western Michigan University's [Landscape Services](#), is happy that the [Sangren Mall](#) is up and running after the cold winter months.

"I always love seeing Sangren Mall get ready to open," he said. "It's a sign that spring is finally upon us here at WMU. It's a really lovely area that everyone can enjoy."

Sangren Mall overlooking the newly built Sangren Hall features an artificial lawn and a fountain and officially opened in Fall 2013. The area is part of WMU's continued initiative to become more sustainable by trying to become stormwater neutral.

Stormwater neutral means taking responsibility for all of the rain and snow that falls on impervious surfaces such as roofs and sidewalks.

The [stormwater management system](#) is a large system seen all over WMU's campus. Some areas, such as the rock ponds in Brown Hall and the Chemistry Building, work in conjunction with the stormwater system.

"The Mall is a highlight here in Western Michigan University," Keto said. "It's not just aesthetically pleasing, but works well with our efforts of sustainability."

Keto said WMU has committed to sustainable practices that will protect the surfaces and groundwater, improve biodiversity and save resources at WMU. The mall is also an integral part of WMU's efforts for a more sustainable campus because of its location on campus and the function it serves.

"The mall is below the highest point of main campus which works to its advantage of detaining the water and collecting all the water through the fountains located in the mall," Keto said.

Keto said that WMU started the implementation of the mall after years of seeing the effects pollutants had on rainwater. "The area around here was a very polluted area which dumped all the rainwater to streams and ponds," Keto said.

Tim Holysz, director of Landscape Services, said the fountain is a special area as it collects all of the of water that has been cleansed by the grass and rocks placed along the edges of the mall to the sewerage pipes that send the water to major creek areas in Kalamazoo.

Holysz said that snow removal is a big issue that comes along every year during the winter. Even though Sangren Mall is not operational in the winter season, it still serves a purpose. A total of 78 inches fell this winter, according to the Facilities Management Departments' Annual Report.

“Even though it wasn’t as bad as last year, snow accumulation is a serious problem,” Holysz said. “Last year we had the roundabout area for snow, now we are actively trying to find areas to place snow in, and the mall is a place we looked into.”

Holysz said that the area around the mall is also a centrally planned area by WMU’s Landscape Services. “There is a reason that rocks are placed in the areas that they are,” he said. “They are there to collect all of the sediments and pollutants from the pavement of all of the collected rainwater to the fountain.”

But one concern that many have about Sangren Mall is whether it harms wildlife and damages their surrounding habitats.

Jenny Ballas, a senior studying political science and environmental studies and the leader of the Student Environmental Conservation Organization (SECO), said that one of the issues about the other fountains in WMU is that many small animals get caught in the waters.

“Many of the animals use the fountains as part of their habitat,” Ballas said. “But there have been many instances where chipmunks and other small creatures have been found dead in the waters.”

Ballas and SECO’s purpose is to educate students about the ways animals on campus have been able to live in WMU’s surroundings as well as to advocate for a more active role for WMU to become more animal conscious when constructing or renovating buildings.

Tim Marinoff, a senior majoring in marketing and a student worker for WMU Landscape Services, said that although it is unfortunate that some animals have died as a result of other fountains at WMU, Sangren Mall is actually a very animal friendly site.

“The site actually has edges by the fountains where animals can go in case they are caught by the waters,” Marinoff said. “That’s actually one of the reasons the ledges were placed there; we’ve seen what the other fountains have caused to animals’ habitats.”

Marinoff, who helped construct Sangren Mall in summer 2013, said that one of the main responsibilities while constructing the new fountain was to protect wildlife.

“We wanted to be able to have a fountain that would be a sight to behold, as well as work well with the stormwater management system as well as protect wildlife,” Marinoff said.

In the end, Keto said he believes that Sangren Mall is only the beginning in WMU’s long line of renovations around WMU campus to make it more stormwater neutral.

“There [have] actually been talks to have every building here on campus to be either renovated or built by 2035,” Keto said. “With that, the great work we have done with the storm water system here, we will hopefully implement to those areas in the near future.”