Press Release
March 4, 2008

Nature, the Changing Climate and You: Act Locally!
An Educational Initiative at Hilltop

Friends of Hilltop Arboretum announced at their Annual Symposium in January an educational initiative called *Nature, the Changing Climate and You: Act Locally!* In keeping with its mission, the organization is undertaking to emphasize education about plants and the important role they play relating to the changing climate. Friends president, Cathy Coates, notes “Regardless of cause or degree, we are partners with our natural surroundings and must live with environmental reality. Acting at our own homes and in our own community, we will all benefit from smart planting for a healthier future.”

Hilltop’s mission is to provide a sanctuary where students and visitors can learn about natural systems, plants, and landscape design. Since its inception, Friends has sponsored programs that emphasize the potential of native plants and trees to conserve resources. It was the original donor Emory Smith’s example to cut and propagate plants which are naturally suited to the local environment and to encourage people to use plants that would be easy to grow, able to survive in extremes of drought and heavy rain, and would not require extra watering. The Millinium Tree project of 2000, selling native and adapted trees at affordable prices for use as street and shade trees, had as its goal to add to the canopy of the urban forest in Baton Rouge, decreasing the temperature of the “heat island”. Other Hilltop programs have similarly addressed the need to use the appropriate plants not only to beautify our environment, but to increase its sustainability.

Within this context, Hilltop is in a unique position to educate the community about planting and planning for a better future. Adult programs for 2008 which will address this educational theme include the quarterly “Sustainable Landscape Design Series” and a six-week urban forestry certification program (“Arbor Day Everyday”) that will emphasize the aesthetic, ecological, and environmental benefits of trees as well as in-depth instruction on tree selection, planting and care in a changing climate. Hilltop’s Summer Academy will offer children ages 4-7 an educational and environmental experience and will include nature walks of exploration and discovery, organized games, music, movement and arts and crafts using recycled and natural materials. In partnership with the LSU Reich School of Landscape Architecture, a landscape design course for high school students will be piloted this summer. Peggy Davis, Executive Director of Friends of Hilltop responsible for the development of programming, observes “Our beautiful 14 acres on Highland Rd. make it easy to plan and host environmentally important classes. We welcome students and adults, previous friends of Hilltop and new ones, experienced gardeners and novices, and all who are interested in the conservation possibilities of smart planting.”

The organization is also embarking on a capital campaign to build a long planned and much needed enclosed educational facility which will strive to achieve LEED certification. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is the rigorous rating system operated by the U.S. Green Building Council, measuring sustainability in design, construction, and operations of buildings across the world.

For more information about Hilltop’s programs or capital campaign, go to lsu.edu/hilltop or call Peggy Davis at 767 9074.