If you mention “raptors”, most college students will assume you’re referring to the NBA team. But when Lauren Gaikowski, a UW-Platteville junior who’s majoring in Sustainable and Renewable Energy Systems (SRES), hears the term, she pictures birds of prey and the project she completed last semester. The project was sponsored by the Pioneer Academic Center for Community Engagement. (PACCE)

For the past two years, students in Dr. Dino Ress’s SRES class have worked with PACCE community partner - Four Lakes Wildlife Center in Dane County - to design and build an advanced solar-powered remote monitoring system for raptor rehabilitation. Designed to provide 24/7 surveillance within a rehabilitation housing unit, the system enables professional staff at Four Lakes to assess the rehabilitation progress of injured raptors.

“This project saw real results”, says Dr. Dino Ress, Electrical Engineering Assistant Professor at UW-Platteville. “By using a weather-proofed surveillance camera, the group decreased the rehabilitation time from three weeks to three days”, according to Dr. Ress. “This is an extension of our PACCE project with Four Lakes Wildlife Center in Dane County. Lauren is enthusiastically taking her education, training and practical experience to a new level in the practice and application of sustainability and renewable energy,” says Dr. Ress.

The opportunity for students to apply their knowledge to a real-life challenge was especially meaningful for Lauren. Much like the raptors, known to have keen vision, Lauren envisioned a business opportunity beyond the scope of the PACCE project. “Through my early market research, I’ve learned that there are over 1200 wildlife rehabilitation centers in this country alone. I feel confident that this product has applications in other market sectors in addition to this niche. I now intend to perform more extensive market analysis and to then create a marketing strategy,” says Lauren. “I envision
concentrating my initial marketing efforts on facilities that rehabilitate wildlife in enclosed spaces where active human monitoring is problematic and for which conventional power options are unavailable or prohibitively expensive”, she notes. Marketing a complete solar photovoltaic-powered monitoring and surveillance system for wildlife applications in remote locations wasn’t a direction that Lauren would have anticipated. But she now sees this as a natural extension of her education.

Lauren is from West Salem, WI and her other passions are music, traveling and reading. Her interests have now grown to include launching a new business venture. “I think this is a viable business idea and I look forward to gaining even more experience by the groundwork that’s been created through this Four Lakes/University of WI-Platteville/PACCE partnership.”

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