Loyola campus plans Harvest fest
By Chelsea McDougall
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WOODSTOCK – Small flecks of brown leaves speckle the green grass and rolling hills at Loyola University’s Retreat and Ecology Campus in Bull Valley as the campus prepares to open its doors to the community.

When Loyola University bought the 98-acre property, at 2710 S. Country Club Road, in 2010, it announced plans to maintain the property’s ecologic preservation mission. The university bought the property for $6.4 million from Chicago-based Congregation of the Resurrection, which closed in 2009.

The property since has been annexed to the village of Bull Valley.

Community members will have a chance to visit the campus Oct. 23 at a Harvest Festival and open house. The event, from 2 to 5 p.m., will include food prepared by campus chef Scott Cummings, tours, live music, pumpkin painting, bags and Frisbee games, a beer and wine tent, a farmers market, and more.

Congregation of the Resurrection ditched its proposal to convert the retreat and convention center into senior living because of a lack of funding. Expansion plans riled neighbors and split county government.

Neighbors overwhelmingly opposed the plan and expressed concerns about traffic and the impact on the area’s ecology.

LUREC, as it’s known for short, sits on 20 acres of natural habitat that includes ponds, streams, woods and prairie land.

More than a year after it opened to Loyola faculty and students, the campus is buzzing with professors and students conducting scientific research and exploring environmental sustainability trends.

Currently, faculty and students are investigating ways to restore the hydrology of a fen to eliminate the buckthorn and honeysuckle that now dominate it. Also, work is being done to protect oak seedlings.

A half-acre sustainable garden, maintained by interns and Loyola students, provides the majority of the food used in the campus kitchen and cooked by Cummings.

“Our philosophy is all about ecology and maintaining a sustainable model that can be replicated by others looking to do that,” farm operations assistant Alex Tuchman said.

When Loyola bought the campus in 2010, a few neighbors breathed a sigh of relief, including Bob Kelly, a four-decade resident of Bull Valley.
Kelly was a vocal opponent of the expansion plans as the proposal moved through county government. He called Loyola’s purchase a “blessing.”

“By the grace of God and the economy, it has turned out to be absolutely fantastic,” Kelly said.

The university transformed and modernized the retreat center’s guest rooms, chapel, dining area and meeting spaces. A newly completed challenge course offers popular team-building exercises.

The university is looking for ways to further include the community and add more classes for Loyola students in the future, General Manager Patti Carty said.

Registration for the Harvest Festival is encouraged by Sunday. Visit www.luc.edu/harvest/home for information and to register, or send an email to harvestfest@luc.edu or call 773-508-7450.