DSU facility offers the public a unique look at plant life

Delmarva’s lone herbarium houses thousands of botanical samples

By MICHELE BESSO
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DOVER — Rosalynne Sommers works very slowly, using glue, miniature paperweights and gentle pressure to mount a clipping of Cyperaceae sedge, a type of flowering plant, onto a paper mat. Once it’s secured, the specimen is labeled and stored alphabetically in one of more than 70 climate-controlled cabinets in the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium at Delaware State University in Dover. The herbarium is a resource for documentation, research, education and identification of unknown plants.

The two-level, 16,000-square-foot facility houses an extensive collection of more than 150,000 pressed and dried plant samples — including mosses, fungi, algae and fossils — from Delaware and around the world.

Sommers, a sophomore art major and a paid student worker, prepares up to 20 horticulture specimens a week for storage.

“T’m doing it because I need a job, and it’s a really nice job,” Sommers said. “It’s relaxing, artistic and you can come in during a busy day and escape in here. The first week, they give you easy plants and you figure it out as you go along. It’s not that hard.”