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Brittany Johnson, 16, of Charlotte is a soft-spoken teenager despite her imposing 6-foot-2-inch, 300-plus-pound frame. She was pre-diabetic by age 11 and now deals with full-blown diabetes. She's hoping weight-loss surgery can help her get control of her life.

Children's weight woes might start in the womb
Second of five parts
BY YONAT SHIMRON - Staff Writer

Brittany Johnson's appointment calendar is cluttered with doctors. There's her diabetes doctor; her primary care physician; her sleep apnea expert; her podiatrist; her ear, nose and throat specialist; her psychiatrist and her bariatric surgeon.

Brittany is 16. All of her medical problems can be traced to one source: She weighs more than 300 pounds.

The Charlotte teen is among the rising ranks of obese children who are developing diseases once associated with aging adults: diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, fatty liver disease, osteoporosis, depression. The crisis is so severe that experts say this generation may be the first in 200 years to have a shorter life expectancy than its parents. New research shows that the path toward obesity actually might start in the womb.

Mounting evidence suggests that what a mother eats, what toxins she's exposed to and how active she is during pregnancy have profound effects on her offspring's weight and wellness later in life.
"People don't realize how early this starts," said Dr. Sarah Armstrong, a pediatrician and the director of Duke Children's Healthy Lifestyle Program, a clinical treatment program for obese kids.

As researchers begin unlocking keys to childhood obesity, some doctors are embracing radical treatments to help young patients.

Brittany is pinning her hopes on weight-loss surgery once reserved for adults. Next month, she will undergo gastric banding, a procedure in which a surgeon will wrap an adjustable silicone ring around the upper part of her stomach, restricting how much food she is able to eat.

The procedure has not been approved for children under 18. But at least three insurance companies, including Brittany's, are funding a clinical trial, approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, as a way to try to stem the costs of treating obesity, estimated at $147 billion a year. Nationwide, more than 12 million children are obese, including 13.4 percent of 14-to-17-year-olds in North Carolina.

Brittany's surgery will take place at Presbyterian Hospital in Charlotte. Duke Hospital in Durham is also exploring the possibility of weight-loss surgery for teens.

"The hope is that weight-loss surgery will reduce the risk of early mortality from obesity-related diseases," said Dr. Caren Mangarelli, a pediatrician at Duke who is drafting protocols for the new procedure.

Brittany's mother, Nancy Johnson, who is also overweight, can't help but wonder whether her sedentary lifestyle, taste for rich, fatty foods and love of eating out contributed to her daughter's condition.

"When I look at Brittany, I see an issue I have that I didn't address and have pushed on my child," said Johnson, who is in her mid-40s. "There are some habits that were developed, and kids learn from the environment they're in."

**Eating for two indeed**
Ask any obesity expert when the trajectory for excessive weight gain begins, and he or she will answer with one word: conception.

Although the science is just emerging, new research in North Carolina and around the world suggests that the conditions children experience in the womb may predispose them to a lifetime of obesity.

A 2007 Harvard study found that the more weight a mother put on during pregnancy, the more likely her child was to be overweight at age 3, even if the baby's weight was normal at birth. And it might not be a woman's genetic predisposition to obesity that explains this. Another study by State University of New York researchers found that the children
of women who gave birth after undergoing weight-loss surgery were 52 percent less likely to be obese than siblings born before the mother had trimmed down.

Scientists theorize that what a mother eats sends signals to her fetus that influence appetite and metabolism for the rest of the child's life. In other words, if a pregnant woman's diet is rich in fat, salt and sugar, it may predispose her child to gain weight. The process begins even before a woman knows she is pregnant.

"In utero programming is the hottest area of biology in this century," said Dr. David Collier, a pediatrician who directs the Pediatric Healthy Weight Research and Treatment Center at East Carolina University in Greenville. "If the mother is obese, it preprograms that offspring to be prone to obesity, prone to insulin resistance, prone to diabetes, prone to hypertension."

One of the most important studies in this field was conducted by Duke epigeneticist Randy Jirtle and his postdoctoral student Robert Waterland in 2003.

Working with a strain of fat yellow mice, they found that mothers on a healthy diet that included folic acid, vitamin B12, choline and other food supplements gave birth to pups that were lean and brown. While the pups still carried the same fat genes, the scientists found that changes in the expectant mothers' diet could affect the way those genes were expressed, much like instructing a computer software program to turn on or off certain preferences.

Environmental factors also might predispose a fetus to obesity.

The National Institutes of Environmental Health Sciences in Research Triangle Park is awarding grants for research on whether exposure to certain chemicals and pesticides also causes obesity. Scientists think estrogen-like compounds in some hand lotions or shampoos used by pregnant women may disrupt a developing baby's endocrine system, which helps control metabolism. Results aren't expected for several years.

Scientists caution that a fatty prenatal environment doesn't necessarily doom an offspring to a lifetime of obesity. The postnatal environment is important, too. But research suggests that a trajectory launched at conception may be all that much harder to alter later.

"These marks aren't permanent; you can alter them later in adulthood," said Jirtle, who heads Duke's epigenetic lab. "But I don't think it's as easy as what you can do very early on. ... What you're talking about later in life is trying to reverse something. That's more difficult."

**An obese mom's guilt**

Jennifer Joyner of Fayetteville is now doing the hard work of trying to change her children's trajectory.
She weighed 320 pounds in 2005 when she got pregnant with her second child, Eli. In her first trimester, Joyner developed gestational diabetes, or high blood sugar levels, and needed three shots of insulin a day.

Born three months prematurely, Eli weighed 12 pounds - more than most full-term babies. Doctors rushed him to intensive care, not only to monitor his insulin levels, but also because he was found to have a hole in his heart. It has since closed.

"After he was born, I said, 'No more babies for me,'" said Joyner, 38, a part-time television news assignment editor. "I felt so guilty for doing this to my child. I felt terrible."

Eli, 5, and sister Emma, 6, are doing well now. Joyner attributes that to her weight-loss surgery in 2008, which helped her shed 156 pounds and led her to adopt healthy eating habits for the entire family. Joyner carefully monitors what her children eat and allows them dessert once a week, after dinner on Saturday. So far, both youngsters weigh in at the 75th percentile, meaning they are at healthy weights for their ages.

Joyner, who has written a book about her experience titled "Designated Fat Girl" (Globe Pequot Press, 2010), has advice for obese women wanting to get pregnant: Think carefully. "You really need to educate yourself and be truthful with what it may mean for you, for the baby and for the rest of your life," Joyner said. "If you can avoid that happening to your child, then you need to do that."

**Getting families aboard**

For Brittany Johnson, the 16-year-old from Charlotte, weight-loss surgery is the last best hope.

"It's an opportunity to start over," she said.

Born 8 pounds, 11 ounces, she started putting on excess pounds when she was 6 years old. By age 11, she was pre-diabetic, meaning her blood glucose levels were higher than they should have been. By 13, she was diabetic. High cholesterol and high blood pressure followed. She also suffers from Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, a hormonal condition that causes irregular menstrual periods.

Brittany has tried all forms of dieting. Her most successful effort was at Shining Stars, a weight-loss camp for kids in Wilson. During three weeks in the summer of 2009, Brittany lost 14 pounds and felt so good she didn't need her daily insulin injections.

Much as her mother wanted to send her back to camp last summer, the cost - $3,250 for three weeks - was too much. Meanwhile, the weight she lost came right back on and then some.

"What we need is a longer-term fix for kids with similar issues," Nancy Johnson said.
Brittany and her mother have begun a six-month medical management program through Southeast Bariatrics, the Charlotte group that has launched the gastric-banding clinical trial for 14- to 17-year-olds. The program aims to teach patients and their families about nutrition, exercise and behavior modification to help prevent a return to bad habits after surgery.

Dr. David Voellinger, Brittany's bariatric surgeon and the director of bariatrics at Presbyterian Hospital in Charlotte, said gastric banding has two advantages for teen patients: It's reversible, and it reduces the risk that nutrients won't be properly absorbed, an occasional consequence of gastric bypass, in which a portion of the upper intestine is rerouted.

But the key in treating obese adolescents is to get parental support, Voellinger said. "You've got to have family involvement," he said. "It's Mom that buys the groceries, so it makes sense to educate the entire family."

The gastric banding will allow Brittany to lose up to 60 percent of her excess weight, though precisely how much she'll lose will depend on how willing she is to exercise and change her eating habits. She's already eating a low-carbohydrate, high-protein diet, though she eats out with her mother at least four times a week.

More important, the surgery will give Brittany a nearly 75 percent chance of improving, if not resolving, her diabetes. That alone fills her with joy.

Recently, Brittany created a blog in which both she and her mother, who plans to diet, will record their weight-loss stories. Brittany has been teased mercilessly at school - so much so that she won't divulge exactly what she weighs. She can't wait for the surgery itself to "jump start" her life.

"I know it won't be everything," she said. "It won't help me magically lose the weight overnight. It will be a long-term process. But it will give me the structure I need to get back in control of my life."

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Dr. James Hupp, dean of the School Of Dentistry, talks about ECU’s new dental school near the Brody School of Medicine Thursday, Dec. 9, 2010. (Justin Falls/The Daily Reflector)

Dental school dean looks ahead
By K.J. Williams
The Daily Reflector
Sunday, January 2, 2011

East Carolina University's new dental school will rely on the latest technology with medical simulators serving as stand-ins for human patients for students.

The School of Dental Medicine will open in August, accepting its first group of 50 students. They will learn on simulators that resemble mannequins but that have bells and whistles no mannequins can match.

The trend in medical schools across the country, including ECU’s Brody School of Medicine and the College of Nursing, is to use these medical simulators to begin teaching students procedures.

The custom-made dental simulators will have torsos and heads only. The simulators' hinged-joint jaws are held together magnetically, and can be taken apart if needed. “You can swap out teeth,” to do various procedures, said Dr. James Hupp, dean of the dental school.
After a fake tooth inside the simulator is used for a filing, it has to be replaced with a fresh fake. “They're the whole tooth — root and all. And they are anatomically correct. They're precisely what a normal tooth looks like,” he added.

The dental school expects to buy 56 simulators at a cost of about $10,000 apiece. Each comes with a $4,000 cabinet. “They're expensive but they're so superior,” Hupp said.

“Compared to the alternative that we used to use, there's no comparison. They're much closer to the real human condition than the old way. “The person is not only learning how to do things the right way … but they also have to approach it from the right position,” he said. “And so it allows them to learn in the most actual and the most realistic atmosphere that you can create.”

Besides teeth, the simulators are equipped with materials that mimic the entire spectrum of a human mouth, including a tongue, cheeks and gum tissue. The school's newness means it will be outfitted with the latest equipment.

Hupp said another advantage to building a dental school from scratch is that it provides an opportunity to improve upon the past. “Many of the concepts that this school was built around came from a series of consultants,” said Hupp, who was part of a 2004 consulting team.

This consulting process “led to some new thinking” that was presented to legislators in 2006 when funding was requested, he said. “That made it clear that it would be a new direction that would not only benefit our dental school, but that would be a model that more dental schools would start to follow.”

The school's curriculum is still under development although the topics have been decided. No print textbooks will be used, just electronic versions. Students fees will pay for their use of Apple iPhones, laptops and iPads.

State-of-the-art equipment from dental chairs to simulators has been on loan from vendors and remains on display at the Medical Pavilion. Faculty and dentists are viewing the equipment and making recommendations before purchases are made.

By the students' fourth and final year, the class of 2015 will be largely out of the classroom, gaining experience working under faculty supervision at community centers. The centers will be built as training facilities in under-served areas of North Carolina.

The General Assembly allocated about $30 million of a total of about $90 million to the school for the construction of up to 10 of these centers on land donated to the state. Three sites have been decided upon. Elizabeth City will be one. There will be future sites in the Jackson County town of Sylva and the Hertford County town of Ahoskie. A fourth site will be announced in mid-January.
Services will be provided to patients on a sliding-scale fee basis. Besides students, resident dentists and hygienists will provide care at the centers, each of which will be outfitted with 17 dental chairs.

Some of the school's dental chairs will be equipped with light-mounted cameras, allowing instructors to consult about the images with students during procedures.

Hupp said he doesn't know of any other dental school offering this intensive hands-on experience to students for a full year.

“Even though they have educational components, they're really clinical sites,” he added.

**A sparse start**

Acceptance letters to the class of 2015 were sent last month.

“We're still conducting interviews,” Hupp said. “There are still open positions.”

The School of Dental Medicine's first group of 50 students will start their studies inside a renovated 3,800-square-foot section of the Brody School of Medicine and a newly outfitted classroom.

The dental school building that's been named Ross Hall won't be completed until July or August of 2012. Site work started in July, and construction started last month on the four-story, 188,000-square-foot building located adjacent to the College of Nursing.

Ross Hall has an estimated price tag of $50 million. It's named for retired Greenville orthodontist Ledyard Ross, who made a $4 million contribution.

Despite the current lack of a building, students and parents converged at Brody last month for an open house. The students were selected because they had “shown evidence of trying to give back to society,” Hupp said, since the school's focus is on “rural areas or the areas that have the most unmet need for medical as well as dental (services).”

Hupp appears to have the dental chops to forge ahead with the fledgling school. Right now, it consists of two modular buildings.

Hupp said it's not unheard of for a dental school to develop in this gradual manner. “Most schools usually start in a temporary building, or they start in an abandoned building that somebody has loaned to them,” he said.

The dean earned his doctor of dental medicine degree from the Harvard School of Dental Medicine in 1977. He began his career as a full-time assistant professor at Vanderbilt University, and has taught students ever since, while also providing dental care in academic settings.

At 58, Hupp said he's ready for a new set of challenges.
As dean of dentistry at the University of Mississippi in Jackson for six years, Hupp promoted diversity and revamped the curriculum. He also instituted another change, promoting women to leadership positions.

“These things were accomplished and I was ready to look for something,” Hupp said. “I actually thrive on change. I actually like to lead change.”

He found that change at ECU and moved to Greenville in 2008 with his wife, Carmen. The couple has four grown children. She's managing editor of the dental publication the Journal of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery.

Early in his tenure at ECU, Hupp said he faced some unexpected adversity due to the recession.

“Although things still seem to be turning out well, it was challenging to keep the faith,” he said, recalling how he was recruiting staff during state budget cuts.

The state did take $7 million from the $97 million in capital funds it approved in 2006. “They took some money back but not enough to slow us down,” Hupp said.

He noted that having students accepted to the school and a building going up gives the school more security.

While tuition and fees haven't been finalized, the estimated cost will be $20,000 annually for the year-round program.

**Preventive care proposed**

The dental school is breaking new ground, the dean said. “(It's) changing the way dental education is organized.”

The community centers that will be staffed by fourth-year students are one example of this change.

Another one will involve students in their second year, who will occasionally work a weekend day as part of a MASH-style setting for dental work.

Dental equipment that can be broken down and moved will be taken to various temporary sites where there's a “desperate need” and set up for several hours, Hupp said. “You're coming in; you're putting a foundation down with what you can, with what you've got.”

The services will be free, and donated supplies will be sought. “They'll be pretty much straightforward skills. They'll be preventive rather than therapeutic.”

Offered services could include cleanings, fluoride treatments, sealants and screenings for cancer.

“It's just another way to give back to the community,” Hupp said of the proposed program.

“We're going to try and instill in our students the passion to give back to society and we're going to attract that,” he said.
By the time the first class graduates, Hupp said he hopes the school will have weathered any state budgetary woes, and will have established itself.

“I'm hoping that people are amazed at how well trained our graduates are,” he said. “I think we'll be getting requests from other dental schools across the country to come see what we're doing.”

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Carroll Dashiell plays an original composition by Billy Taylor entitled "One for the Woofer". (Rhett Butler/The Daily Reflector)

Music community remembers Billy Taylor
By Ginger Livingston
The Daily Reflector
Friday, December 31, 2010

Carroll V. Dashiell Jr. was 10 or 11 years old when he first heard the piano playing in the home next to his Washington, D.C., row house.
Dashiell, who was studying music, liked the sound and tried to replicate it. One day the piano player invited Dashiell over, and they played together.

That is how Dashiell, today a jazz bassist, became a student of jazz pianist, historian and educator Billy Taylor.

Taylor, 89, died Tuesday night in New York City from a heart attack, The Associated Press reported.

“I grew up next door to his mother in Washington, D.C. He is definitely one of my mentors,” Dashiell said. “I would not be doing some of the things I am doing musically if it was not for him.”

Born July 24, 1921, in Greenville, Taylor is the namesake of East Carolina University's annual Dr. Billy Taylor Jazz Festival.

He is best known by most Americans for his reports on CBS News' “Sunday Morning.” However, his advocacy for jazz started years before when he founded “Jazzmobile,” which brought jazz performances into the neighborhoods of New York City, according to his biography on the North Carolina Music Hall of Fame website.
“People always said Louis Armstrong and Dave Brubeck were the great jazz ambassadors. I think Billy Taylor ranks right up there with them,” said Tom Mallison, host of Public Radio East's Sunday night show, “An Evening with TomtheJazzman.” “He was a consummate educator, broadcaster, communicator and musician.”

Taylor also had a weekly jazz radio show, and he was the first black to lead a television studio orchestra in the 1950s.

“Every broadcaster in jazz has been influenced by him. So many grew up listening to him,” Mallison said. “He had such a distinctive voice and delivery style.”

Taylor's work on “Sunday Morning” introduced Americans to performers often overlooked by the mainstream music industry, said Michael Cotter, secretary of ECU Friends of Jazz, an organization that raises money for scholarships. “As (Taylor) said, and so many other people have said, jazz is America's classical music,” Cotter said. “So it gave Americans an appreciation of something that was developed in this country.”

Taylor cultivated Dashiell's appreciation of jazz. He always gave the young musician tickets whenever he played at the Kennedy Center or other D.C.-area venues. Dashiell eventually studied under Taylor and performed with him. “He was a person who inspired me because of the quality he brought to everything he did,” Dashiell, director of the jazz festival and ECU's jazz ensemble, said. “There was elegance and etiquette and brilliance all at the same time. It was artistry at its highest level.”

Taylor left Pitt County when he was 5 years old, but he never severed ties with the community. When Dashiell accepted a position with ECU's School of Music, Taylor was one of the first people he called. “I said, ‘Doc, you'll never guess where I am going.' He said, ‘I already know.' He knew everything,” Dashiell said.

Taylor performed numerous times at ECU. The school renamed its annual jazz festival after him in 2002. He also served as the Robert L. Jones Distinguished Professor of Music at ECU. He earned a doctorate from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst along with numerous honorary degrees. He was the artistic director for jazz at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Dashiell said Taylor enjoyed mentoring young performers. ECU Jazz Ensemble A, the touring group of the School of Music's Jazz Studies Program, headlined the February jazz festival held at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York.
Taylor attended the show and joined the students for their closing performance of “I Wish I Knew How I Would Feel to be Free,” a composition he wrote. Dashiell said the piece was one of the most significant musical pieces of the Civil Rights era. Dashiell said he believes the piece is second only to “We Shall Overcome.”

“He did this just incredible, gorgeous solo introduction to the piece,” he said. Mallison was at the concert. “It was a beautiful venue. For the audience, you have the background of New York City, the young musicians on the stage and Billy Taylor, one of the jazz masters, playing with them. It was just phenomenal,” Mallison said.

Taylor met with students following the show and answered questions about his career and jazz. He said that night's performance was the second time he had performed at the Lincoln Center, Dashiell said.

Taylor's time with the ECU performers reflected his interest in people, Mallison said. “He was a very kind man. He always took time to answer questions from anyone. He never seemed to be in a rush in responding during discussions,” Mallison said. “In today's society, we hear stories of musicians and the drugs, sex and rock and roll, but here is a gentleman who carried himself with uprightness and quality. It was one of the many lessons I took from him,” Dashiell said.

The 2011 festival, scheduled for April 15-16, will be a tribute to Taylor, Dashiell said. The featured performer is scheduled to be Connaitre Miller and Afro Blue, a jazz vocal ensemble. Miller, director of jazz vocals at Howard University, is one of the performers Taylor selected in the past to perform his music.

Taylor's death “is definitely a loss for the world,” Dashiell said. “We have to make sure the lineage goes on.”

Contact Ginger Livingston at glivingston@reflector.com or (252) 329-9570.
Maureen Leslie was obese, pre-diabetic and depressed when she found help at a free clinic to make a healthy change. She now gets her cardiovascular exercise - and satisfaction - by mowing her neighbors' lawns.

Your body is thwarting your weight-loss efforts

*First of five parts*

BY SARAH AVERY - Staff Writer

It seems so simple: Too much food and too little activity make people fat. But the actual processes that create and perpetuate that imbalance are proving to be astoundingly complex.

Biology, physiology, psychology, genetics and environment figure in the obesity equation to varying degrees. Scientists across North Carolina and beyond are trying to understand how, in recent decades, the population has bloated to a point that lean people are a minority.

"There is no simple answer," said Bernard Fuemmeler, a Duke University researcher who is studying the mind-body link in obesity. "People tend to think that it may be willpower or just a lack of control. And these may be reasons, but not explanations for what is driving the epidemic."
In their quest for explanations, researchers at Duke, UNC-Chapel Hill, Wake Forest and East Carolina universities are discovering or are building upon findings that prove just how intractable a foe fat can be:

- Rich foods work much like heroin on the brain, making it hard to stop eating them. A recent study indicates a genetic link between overeating and drug addiction, explaining why obese people have such intense cravings and build up such tolerance.

- Depression and obesity can be so tightly linked, it's hard to tell which comes first. Some of the same hormones and neurotransmitters are active in both, which could explain a tendency to eat when not hungry.

- And as people gain weight earlier in life, they not only get chronic diseases sooner, they also set the course for a lifetime of weight battles. Growing evidence points to biological changes in obese people that means they must work harder to keep weight off than those who never gained.

The consequences are huge. Obesity is estimated to directly kill 112,000 people a year in the United States and to contribute to the deaths of many hundreds of thousands more. Health costs associated with the epidemic are tabbed at $147 billion a year, according to an analysis by RTI International.

"We evolved from species that have lived for the last millions and millions of years in environments in which food was hard to come by," said Wayne Pratt, a behavioral psychologist at Wake Forest University who has explored the connection between food and addiction. "And the food environment has changed in the last 50 years."

Those changes - cheap, abundant and tasty food that requires almost no physical effort to obtain - have upset an intricate equilibrium within the body that is at the very essence of existence.

Food is life; every system in the body depends on it. But too much of anything, even a basic necessity, can create a poison.

**Simply survival instinct**
Well-educated and motivated, Jennifer Joyner began every day determined to lose weight. By noon, she was off course.

"I used that failure to go ahead and eat [poorly] the rest of the day," said Joyner, 38, who lives in Fayetteville with her husband and two children. At her heaviest, she carried 336 pounds on her 5-foot-5-inch frame.

Joyner firmly believes she was addicted to food.

"Nobody is that heavy because they don't know how many calories they should limit themselves to," Joyner said. "That's absurd."
There's growing evidence she might have a case.

High-energy foods hit the same pleasure centers of the brain that heroin and cocaine activate, recent research has found. Wake Forest's Pratt said that very brain circuitry was once an evolutionary benefit.

Humans were programmed to like sweets and fatty foods so they'd eat more of them during those fleeting moments of abundance - finding a berry bush or a trove of tree nuts. "It makes sense to eat more than you'd need for that day, so you could put down a layer of fat to survive" during the inevitable periods of scarcity, Pratt said. "The reward system is there to take advantage of things that are beneficial to us."

Even though people are hard-wired to find rich foods pleasurable, most are not addicted in the sense of becoming increasingly compulsive and self-destructive.

But in an unprecedented environment of food abundance, a steady diet of cheeseburgers, pizzas and doughnuts can trigger in some the same cravings and tolerances that an addict gets from heroin or cocaine. Recent brain studies show that drug addicts and people who are obese have similar neurobiological circuitry.

Studies with rats show why we start craving fat. Rats on high fat and sugar diets begin craving the foods because the reward centers in their brains grow numb to the pleasure signals, much like the addict develops a tolerance to cocaine that fuels more and bigger binges. As a result, the rats eat more and more, growing obese.

Adding to the biological evidence, a team of scientists that included UNC-Chapel Hill researchers reported in 2009 that they had found a gene, NRXN3, associated with obesity in some people. The same gene previously was identified as playing a role in substance abuse.

Keri Monda, an epidemiologist at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health and one of the study's authors, said the finding draws a strong inherited link between overeating and drug addiction - problems characterized by difficulties limiting enjoyable experiences.

"We do know there are common underpinnings," Monda said, adding that additional studies are needed to make a definitive association.

For Joyner, the science only confirms her experience. In March 2008, she had weight-loss surgery and has since dropped 150 pounds and written a book about her experience, "Designated Fat Girl." But overcoming her addiction, she said, has taken counseling and work beyond the operation.

"You don't treat addiction with a diet-and-exercise plan," she said. "There needs to be intervention, family support, ongoing counseling."
The depression question
As anyone who has battled obesity knows, the struggle is as much mental as physical. Sadness, self-loathing, disgust and frustration often accompany weight gain. Bad health begets a bad frame of mind, which begets more bad health.

Maureen Leslie of Raleigh started that spiral six years ago, when she was diagnosed with pre-diabetes, a condition of early metabolic failure characterized by a growing inability to clear sugar from the bloodstream. It can often be reversed with diet and exercise, or it can bloom into full-blown diabetes.

Leslie then lost her job, her marriage fell apart and she sank into despair. Sweets offered a poisonous escape, turbocharging the tailspin.

"The stress of all that stuff was overwhelming," said Leslie, now 45.

The connection between depression and obesity, long linked by the anecdotal experiences of people who suffer from both, is only recently becoming better understood. Some of the same hormones and neurotransmitters are active in both diseases.

Fuemmeler, the Duke researcher, was the lead author of a 2009 study that investigated the intersection of depression and obesity.

It's a confounding area of research.

"There is some controversy about the relationship between obesity and depression," Fuemmeler said, noting that many factors cause depression and that an equal number cause obesity. Often, the two overlap, and it's hard to determine whether one causes the other.

Fuemmeler said his colleagues are studying brain chemicals that regulate reward and mood.

"These biobehavioral mechanisms might be driving both depression and/or a tendency to eat when not hungry," he said.

For Leslie, the two problems had to be addressed as one. A year ago, she carried 209 pounds on a 5-foot-4-inch frame and was well on her way to full-blown diabetes. She had blurred vision, and her feet and hands tingled from nerve damage caused by the high glucose levels in her blood. Every night, she cried herself to sleep.

Finally, through a free clinic in Raleigh and a diabetes intervention called Project DIRECT that provided free education and resources, Leslie began addressing her sadness and learned that, with proper attention and management, diabetes isn't a death sentence. She has lost more than 30 pounds, eats more vegetables and fewer sweets and works out by mowing neighbors' yards - which also boosts her mood.
"It's a mental thing," she said. "You know you need to eat right, you know you have something to accomplish, but you may not be fully prepared to commit to it. Finally, I realized I couldn't keep doing this to myself. I was slowly killing myself."

**The 17-year window**

Most people gain their greatest amount of excess weight between ages 18 and 35. There are lots of reasons - people go to school or work and don't exercise as much, eat convenience foods, party more, keep odd hours, have children. The weight inches up by an average of 30 pounds over that 17-year period of young adulthood.

It can be a dangerous accumulation, giving a head start to diabetes, cardio-vascular disease, hypertension and other diseases once associated with old age.

Courtney Ward actually wanted to gain a little weight after high school. At 6 feet 5 inches and 170 pounds, he thought he was too skinny. But he hit his desired weight of 200 pounds and kept gaining.

A year ago at age 43, the office manager at RDU International Airport weighed 269 pounds, putting him at 31.9 on the height-weight calculus known as the body mass index. A BMI over 30 is called obese.

Suffering high blood pressure and other signs of poor health, Ward was committed to shedding the weight. He has lost about 45 pounds, primarily by cutting out junk food and exercising daily at the Institute of Diet & Weight Management, a doctor-guided program in West Raleigh.

"I had to realize it was a lifestyle change," he said. "The dieting thing was never me - it had to be a total lifestyle change."

But Ward has a difficult task ahead. By gaining that weight, he might have created a monster because his body will challenge his willpower and try to drive his weight back up.

It's the yo-yo effect dieters know all too well. Most people gain all their weight back within five years, and 33 percent have some weight return in the first year after a successful diet.

Scientists attribute this to basic physiology. For the same survivalist reasons the brain is hard-wired to favor rich foods, the body's cells are programmed to sock away extra fuel as a hedge against famine.

That extra fuel is stored as fat. And once the body has created a fat bank, it fights to protect it, perceiving a successful diet as a heist.
To restock, the body sets into motion a complex cascade of hormones and brain signals that trigger hunger, while it simultaneously downshifts energy. The food cravings and a lack of energy often get worse the longer a dieter tries to stay compliant.

And in a diabolical irony, the body's pepped-up metabolism appears to store fat more efficiently. This makes it difficult for even the most committed to maintain their hard-won weight loss.

Heba Salama and Ed Brantley are a Raleigh couple who appeared on NBC's "The Biggest Loser" reality show two years ago and dropped more than 130 pounds each. They still fight to keep the weight from returning. Each has put back on about 30 pounds.

"It's hard," Heba said, noting that her body seems comfortable maintaining a weight that's about 10 pounds heavier than she'd like.

But the couple took the show's boot-camp mentality to heart and now work to promote healthy eating and exercise. They work out regularly, running or attending hot yoga and other workouts at a gym. They're also training to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in February.

Exercise may be the secret to success.

Deborah Tate, an associate professor of nutrition at UNC-Chapel Hill, said she worked on a study while at Brown University that showed the benefits of exercise outlast a diet, even when people return to unhealthy eating.

Tate noted that 90 percent of the people on the National Weight Control Registry, a research compendium of more than 5,000 dieters who have kept off significant amounts of weight, exercise on average an hour a day.

At the same time, Tate said, her research has reinforced a difficult truth: "People who successfully kept it off had to work a little harder than those who never gained in the first place."

Coming tomorrow: Trouble brews in the womb
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2010 was a year of change
The Daily Reflector
Sunday, January 2, 2011

Crime, weather, politics, education, and of course, football, made headlines in Greenville and Pitt County during the year just past. From the tragic and violent death of Greenville resident and state board of education member Kathy Taft to a political season fraught with charge and countercharge; from October's severe flooding to rare December snows; and from a controversial public school redistricting plan to the unexpected death of a respected school board veteran, news pages swelled with our community's stories. Before moving on to 2011, we'll take this look back at a sampling of the major events of 2010:

Kathy Taft homicide
Greenville resident and State Board of Education member Kathy Taft died March 9 after allegedly being beaten and raped at a friend's home in Raleigh three days earlier. Raleigh Police conducted the investigation in secrecy and a judge sealed the 911 call transcripts and other investigative information. Raleigh police arrested Jason Keith Williford, 30, of Raleigh on April 16, and charged him with murder and rape. The Wake County District Attorney's Office announced Dec. 16 it would seek the death penalty for Williford if he is convicted of murder.

2010 election brings change
Pitt County voters wanted change in 2010. Starting with the sheriff's office and moving to the General Assembly, voters in Pitt and surrounding counties removed a number of incumbents.
Retired Pitt County deputy Neil Elks, who was a captain with the sheriff's office, defeated incumbent Mac Manning during the May primary, winning the office because
no Republican ran in November. Elks campaigned on a platform of restoring values and leadership to the sheriff's office. Elks openly criticized Manning's handling of the investigation into the 2005 drowning death of Stacey Pollard, the husband of former Pitt County sheriff's deputy Michelle Pollard.

Manning responded repeatedly during the campaign that he handled the investigation appropriately. Elks also said Pitt County's crime rate increased during Manning's tenure. Manning said statistics showed crimes decreased during his time in office. Elks defeated Manning 7,254 votes to 6,170 votes.

Voters weren't the only ones seeking change. Four of six Pitt County Board of Education members up for re-election this year — Roy Peaden, Dick Tolmie, Marcy Romary and Mary Grace Bright — didn't run, producing a field of 21 candidates for six seats.

Christine Waters, Marc Whichard, Sean Kenny and Worth Forbes won their respective races in May. Incumbents Michael Dixon and Billy Peaden ran for re-election and won. Dixon, however, died several months later. Matthew Ward was appointed to his seat.

Current Greenville police detective Glen Webb defeated incumbent Kenneth Ross to earn a seat on the Pitt County Board of Commissioners. The Republican Party's takeover of both chambers of the General Assembly was aided by the defeat of two of Pitt County's Democratic representatives.

First-term state Sen. Don Davis, whose Senate District 5 covered all of Greene and parts of Pitt and Wayne counties, lost to former Republican state Rep. Louis M. Pate Jr. Political newcomer Bill Cook of Chocowinity defeated incumbent state Rep. Arthur Williams to take the House District 6 seat which includes all of Beaufort and part of Pitt counties.

New school redistricting plan
Pitt County Schools redrew attendance lines for 11 elementary and three Greenville-area middle schools to accommodate the fall 2011 opening of the new Lakeforest Elementary School and the conversion of Sadie Sautter Elementary to a Pre-K and special programs center. In a process that lasted from June to November, the district released more than a dozen maps and sought to incorporate more community feedback than during the last major redistricting. In 2005, satellites were created with busing in pursuit of more balanced demographics. In a split vote Nov. 15, the board approved plans that will move the district back to a more contiguous proximity-based model, which is projected to create some predominately minority and low-performing schools. The district plans to increase instructional time and redistribute teachers and resources to increase achievement at all low-performing schools.

McNeill new ECU football coach
“This is my destination job. This is not a stepping stone hop for Ruff. This is where I want to be until you all tote me away from here. You'd have to drag me away.” With those words in January, Ruffin McNeill reintroduced himself to East Carolina fans, this
time as Skip Holtz's replacement as head coach of the Pirates. Despite taking over a squad that lost nine starters on defense after capturing its second straight Conference USA championship a month earlier, the former Pirate defensive back turned what was supposed to be a rebuilding season into a fifth straight trip to the postseason, where the Pirates suffered a 51-20 loss to Maryland in the Military Bowl last Wednesday.

Area flooding, snowstorms
The remnants of Tropical Storm Nicole created a deluge in several sections of Pitt County and eastern North Carolina the first week of October, leading to flooding of creeks onto several major traffic arteries and in some residential neighborhoods. Dozens of people were forced to evacuate areas along local creeks, including Tranter's Creek in eastern Pitt County, Chocod Creek near Simpson and Swift Creek in Vanceboro. Some were able to rebuild and others were forced to find new homes. Red Cross and Salvation Army volunteers distributed comfort and assistance to flood victims, and FEMA workers were dispatched to the county and provided financial and material assistance for hundreds of victims in the county and region. The city of Windsor in Bertie County was hardest hit, after just completing many building restorations dating back to 1999's Hurricane Floyd-related floods.

The year finished on a cold and snowy note as two unusual December snowstorms sandwiched a period of extreme cold weather for Pitt County and much of eastern North Carolina.

Also from the education beat

Death of Michael Dixon: On July 30, Pitt County lost a civic and religious leader when Michael Dixon died of a heart attack at 54. Hundreds attended his Aug. 7 funeral at Phillippi Church of Christ in Greenville. Dixon had served almost 18 years, or three six-year terms, on the Pitt County Board of Education, and had been re-elected to a fourth in the spring. He served as the Pastor of Refuge One-Way Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ in Whitakers, N.C. and Bishop of the N.C. Metropolitan Diocese of the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Dixon was remembered for his strong voice and leadership, his humility and genuine character, and his commitment to improving the lives of children.

Board chairman controversy: The Pitt County Board of Education chose District 2 representative Billy Peaden to serve as its chairman in a split 7-5 vote in December. Peaden continues to serve a 30-month probation after being convicted in December 2008 on two misdemeanor counts of possession of illegal gambling devices at his convenience stores. Since the convictions were not felonies, he was allowed to keep his board seat and was re-elected in May. Previous chairwoman Barbara Owens was also considered. District 1 representative Ralph Love was elected vice chairman, also on a split vote.

School of Dental Medicine: The East Carolina University School of Dental Medicine will open in August, accepting its first group of 50 students. By the students' fourth and final year, the class of 2015 will be largely out of the classroom, gaining experience working under faculty supervision at community centers. The centers will be built as
training facilities in under-served areas of North Carolina. The General Assembly allocated about $30 million of a total of about $90 million to the school for the construction of up to 10 of these centers on land donated to the state. Three sites have been decided upon. Elizabeth City will be one. There will be future sites in the Jackson County town of Sylva and the Hertford County town of Ahoskie. A fourth site will be announced in mid-January.

**Race to the Top:** Pitt County Schools was awarded $3.2 million for the district's share in the second round of Race to the Top, the federal competitive grant program for education reform. With $400 million awarded, North Carolina was one of 10 states to win funding in the second phase of Race to the Top, awarded in August. Just two states, Tennessee and Delaware, won funding in the first round in March; North Carolina was a finalist. Race to the Top, one of the largest education reform investments in history, has been allotted more than $4 billion as part of the $787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, otherwise known as the economic stimulus package, signed into law in February 2009.

**More headlines from sports**

**ECU defeats Tulsa:** Ruffin McNeill's first game as Pirate head coach ended in thrilling fashion when Justin Jones leapt into the air to pull in Dominique Davis' last-second Hail Mary pass to give ECU a 51-49 victory over Tulsa in its season opener on Sept. 5. The catch capped off a wild game that featured 12 lead changes. Davis passed for 383 yards in his Pirate debut.

**Interception beats N.C. State:** East Carolina freshman Damon Magazu, making his first career start at safety, sent the crowd of 50,410 in Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium into a frenzy when he picked off a pass from N.C. State's Russell Wilson in overtime to seal a 33-27 Pirate victory. ECU squandered a 21-0 lead in the contest and rallied to tie the game when Pirate kicker Michael Barbour connected on a 31-yard field goal with 64 seconds left in regulation.

**Little Leagues hosts tournament:** Alabama, the team that traveled the furthest to compete in the 10-11-year-old Tournament of State Champions hosted by Greenville Little Leagues, got a home run from Brooks Carlson in the eighth inning to defeat Florida for the tournament title on Aug. 4. The event marked the first time that a Little League tournament that featured out-of-state teams was held in Greenville since 1953. The tournament, which pumped more than $230,000 into the local economy, will be back in Greenville in 2011.

**ECU coach changes — twice:** East Carolina had to replace its women's basketball coach twice this year. Wes Moore, who has won 11 straight Southern Conference titles at Chattanooga, was introduced as ECU's newest women's basketball coach on April 27, replacing Sharon Baldwin-Tener, who left ECU to become head coach at Georgia State earlier in the month. His tenure didn't last long. Two days after his introduction, Moore
announced he had a change of heart and was returning to Chattanooga. The next day, Francis Marion head coach Heather Macy was named coach of the Lady Pirates.

**Stadium bleacher malfunction:** When the Pirates faced Tulsa on Sept. 5, they unveiled a new-look Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium. The renovation added 7,000 end zone seats — an area dubbed ‘The Boneyard’ — and featured the installation of a new $2 million video scoreboard. But things didn't quite go as planned. The new scoreboard wasn't fully operational for the first game, though the bugs were eventually worked out. Also, during the Tulsa game, several of the bleachers in the newly added section collapsed, causing minor injuries to about a dozen spectators. University officials elected to remove the bleachers and let students sit on the bare concrete, while waiting until after the season to come up with a permanent solution. Thanks to the stadium expansion, the Pirates set school records for total attendance (297,987) and average attendance (49,665).

**Headlines from the community at large**

**Kandie Smith controversy:** The newly elected Greenville City Council member was arrested in a convenience store parking lot on Fifth Street in the early morning hours of June 6, charged with second-degree trespassing. At her Aug. 24 trial, Smith said she was talking with her constituents outside local nightclubs about some of the issues they have with police relations in the downtown district. A jury acquitted Smith of the charges, ending three months of debate and public attention about the merits of Smith's arrest, causing what some of Smith's colleagues on the council described as a “distraction” from city business. Smith said she wanted to look into police policies so the same thing would not happen to other visitors to the club district.

**Airport Authority shakeup:** A listing of the highest state pension payments shone a spotlight on a former Pitt-Greenville Airport manager. Jim Turcotte draws the seventh highest pension in the state at a rate of more than $14,000 each month. Requests were made for the release of his pay and compensation, from which pension figures are determined. The data were made public following debate and an attorney general-issued opinion on North Carolina's new personnel records law. Turcotte's total annual compensation grew over the last five full years he was employed at the airport from $191,000 to $257,000. One member of the Airport Authority, Greenville businessman Craig Goess, resigned for unexplained reasons in December.

**Duchess of York visit:** Sarah, Duchess of York, charmed nearly 1,500 women — and a handful of men — who attended the May 5 Power of the Purse luncheon at the Greenville Convention Center with her candid take on the roller-coaster events of her professional and private life. Her appearance raised thousands of dollars for the Women for Women Endowment Fund, which provides grants to assist women and girls in Pitt County. Just weeks after her Greenville visit, the Duchess became embroiled in a scandal in Great Britain for offering an undercover reporter access to her former husband, Prince Andrew, in exchange for $724,000.
**Spirit AeroSystems opens at Transpark:** The region celebrated the July opening of an airplane parts manufacturer that will eventually employ 1,000 people at its new location in the Global Transpark near Kinston. Spirit AeroSystems opened a 500,000-square foot facility to produce parts for the A350 XWB for Airbus, a manufacturer of commercial jets. The facility will produce the upper and lower shells for the jets center fuselage and parts of the wing assembly.

Golden LEAF Foundation, an economic development group, provided a $100 million grant to build the initial Spirit facility. The state's Economic Investment Committee awarded a grant that could yield as much as $20.23 million in benefits if Spirit creates and maintains the jobs called for under its agreement.

**Video sweepstakes in limbo:** Video sweepstakes businesses are continuing to operate locally and statewide despite the state Legislature's efforts to ban the games. The General Assembly adopted legislation outlawing electronic sweepstakes, also referred to as video poker, during its short session.

Local sweepstakes business owners fought the legislation. One owner, Jan Rouse, invited Gov. Beverly Perdue to visit her operations. Rouse shut down her business and has since left Pitt County. A Superior Court ruling from Guilford County in late November halted the enforcement of the new legislation by saying the definition of such games were too broad and violated the state's constitution. Attorney General Roy Cooper is seeking an appellate court ruling. Until that is issued Cooper advised law enforcement agencies to delay enforcing the ban.

**Pitt County provides help:** The generosity of Pitt County residents was roused in early 2010 following a magnitude 7 earthquake in Haiti on Jan. 12. Churches, civic organizations and businesses across Pitt County raised money, packed hygiene kits and meals and collected supplies to spur relief efforts. Ten Pitt County schools had fundraisers going on in mid-February. Members of the area medical community traveled to the island to lend their medical expertise.

Dr. Greg Murphy, a urologist, said he encountered some of the worst conditions he has experienced during 20 years of medical missionary work. “It was poverty stacked upon poverty and devastation stacked on devastation,” Murphy said. Greenville orthopedic surgeon Dr. Josiah Duke performed 50 surgeries to set femur, tibia and pelvis fractures. “The Haitian patients were incredible,” Duke said. “They are really sweet people, and they appreciated the help. I could tell that they were scared but hopeful.”

**Headlines from the crime file**

**Amanda Tyndall case:** A jury acquitted a Pitt County deputy May 18 of providing alcohol to a minor at a local sports bar. Pitt County deputy Amanda Tyndall, who worked as a Drug and Alcohol Resistance Education officer, was accused of offering a drink to an underage woman at Tie Breakers bar in 2009. Sheriff Mac Manning stood by his deputy throughout the investigation and trial and was in court during the trial. Tyndall returned to duty, but Manning lost the sheriff’s election to Neil Elks, who spoke openly during the campaign about Tyndall and another deputy, Michelle Pollard, who was
convicted of interfering with a drug investigation, as indications of poor leadership by Manning.

**Clayton Malloy homicide:** A local tow truck service owner was shot and killed Sept. 18 in the parking area of his business on Moye Boulevard. The police interviewed Eric Dominique Holloway, 23, the day of the shooting, then released him. He was arrested days later following further investigation and information provided in a CrimeStoppers tip, Greenville Police Chief William Anderson said. The chief used the arrest to highlight the dangers that tow truck operators face in their line of work and the value of CrimeStoppers as a source of information that leads to important arrests.

**Brathwaite homicide:** Derek A-Shaheed Brathwaite, 25, was shot and killed and another man was shot in the face and critically injured Dec. 4 in the parking area outside the Fuzion nightclub on Fifth Street in west Greenville. The case is still being investigated by Greenville police, who have named no suspects or provided any explanation for the incident. The homicide touched off no substantial public comments or actions by members of the City Council, the business community, civic and church organizations, law enforcement or city residents, as was the case immediately after two men were shot and killed outside a downtown nightclub in 2009.

**Rap artist arrested at ECU:** The aroma of marijuana emanating from a tour bus led to the Nov. 8 arrest of popular rap artist Cameron Jibril Thomaz, also known as Wiz Khalifa, after a performance on the East Carolina University campus. The entertainer was warned before his arrival by ECU officials not to bring illegal substances to the campus. Marijuana use is a central theme of Khalifa’s music. Student reaction to Khalifa’s arrest was mixed.
WASHINGTON, D.C. — If results are what really count in college football, Ruffin McNeill had a landmark first season.

If the best way to measure the success of the East Carolina coach's debut is to compare his results against those who came before him, McNeill had arguably the best opening act in the school's coaching history. His six wins are the most for a rookie coach since his own former ECU coach, Pat Dye, started roaming the sidelines back in 1974, and McNeill's came against far more formidable opponents.

Though his bowl trip didn't go as well as that of immediate predecessor Skip Holtz, McNeill's potential-infused inaugural campaign could give rise to another program growth spurt with even greater results than those achieved under Holtz.

And there is perhaps greater value behind McNeill's wins, now that he's proven he can make them happen. He wants ECU to be his long-term home, and if he gets that wish, McNeill will likely become the longest-tenured ECU coach.

If he can build beyond his bright beginning, it will be the former Pirate defensive back from Robeson County who will wear the face of the program in the era of its most important growth, even though it took some help from the other 19 ECU head men to create the pedestal for him.

But some might hesitate to heap such lofty praise on a first-year coach, especially one who finished 6-7. On the heels of an unprecedented string of winning seasons under Holtz, McNeill's finish might be tough to swallow for some, and nothing of major note to others.

Despite unexpected delights in the first half of the season and a pass offense that soared to No. 7 in the nation, the memories of a sobering 2-5 finish, including the Pirates' 51-20 pasting from Maryland at last Wednesday's Military Bowl, are much fresher.

A defense in disrepair which sunk to the bottom of college football would also need to be tossed into the 2010 ECU football time capsule. Forty-eight hours after a disappointing conclusion for ECU, the rapidly up-and-coming Holtz rang in the New Year with a bowl victory for South Florida in his first season after leaving the Pirates.
While neither Holtz's results — four bowl games and two conference titles and four winning seasons in five years in Greenville — nor his positive impact on the community can be questioned, McNeill has had an even more promising start at ECU, and his future plans are anything but in doubt.

While Holtz has earned his share of the modern ECU legend, McNeill's impact could last much longer and carry more meaning in the grand scheme of the story.

More firsts fell under Holtz's watch than perhaps any other — including inerasable wins over West Virginia, Virginia Tech, Boise State and North Carolina — but McNeill is still ahead of recent history and has already rewritten the Pirates' offensive record book. Fast starts have never been the forte of ECU coaches. In fact, all but one of McNeill's predecessors dating back to Dye have begun with a losing campaign. That includes Holtz (5-6), John Thompson (1-11), Steve Logan (5-6), Art Baker (2-9) and Ed Emory (5-6).

Bill Lewis enjoyed an even 5-5-1 mark upon his arrival in 1989. Although his recruiting prowess will now be put to the test, especially in trying to revamp his defense, McNeill already has the chance to solidify the kind of long stay at ECU he promised when he was hired a year ago this month.

In fact, one might say McNeill just made the strongest opening statement in the school's history.

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@reflector.com or (252)329-9595.
NACCO donates $55,000 to United Way through sponsorship of ECU football
Monday, January 3, 2011
WorkWeek

NACCO Materials Handling Group in Greenville donated $55,000 to the United Way of Pitt County on Nov. 27, during the first quarter of the East Carolina-Southern Methodist football game at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium.
NACCO Materials Handling Group launched a program with ECU athletics to sponsor 2010 Pirate football, opening an avenue to promote pledged United Way donations. Through the Pirate football sponsorship, NMHG and its employees donated $1,000 for each touchdown scored by ECU during the regular season. In all, $55,000 was donated to the United Way of Pitt County.
Tommy Baker, NMHG Americas controller, and Jonathan Dawley, vice president of marketing, presented the check to Cecelia Scott, executive director of the United Way of Pitt County, and Renee Blount, resource development director for UWPC.
NACCO has continued its sponsorship into basketball season and will give $100 for each 3-pointer scored by ECU. A check will be presented to the United Way at the end of the season.
Greenville residents unhappy with the service or conduct of the police department and its officers have been invited to a forum this week to express their concerns and ideas for a better relationship between residents and officers, police chief William Anderson said.

The chief described the meeting as a “community partnership information gathering session,” to be held at 6 p.m. Monday in the city council chambers on the third floor of City Hall.

The session, which Anderson said is the first of what will be an annual process, will be conducted by an outside agency, Developmental Associates, LLC, which has partnered with the City Council and police to gather and analyze the information, then implement solutions and policy improvements, police Capt. Ted Sauls said.

The evaluation process is in response to several issues that have arisen over the past year that caused some citizens in the community to question the conduct and performance of some officers in the department, Anderson said in a recent letter to city manager Wayne Bowers.

“To be effective, a police department and its individual officers must be seen primarily as protectors rather than agents of social control whose main purpose is to limit individual freedoms,” Anderson wrote in his letter.

The forum, to be led by Dr. Stephen Straus and Developmental Associates, is one of three intake sessions planned before the company puts together a strategy and suggests policy changes to improve police-community relations, the chief said. The first session was
conducted for all sworn and civilian employees, the second was for the police command staff, he said.

Discussions will focus on the major challenges limiting police-community relations and the reasons those challenges exist, then setting goals for police community relations and gathering ideas to improve them, Anderson said.

To ensure an atmosphere that welcomes people's comfortable expressions of concern, Anderson will bar police staff from Monday's public forum, he said. “While all the sessions are important, none are more important than the one involving the community,” the chief said.

A special effort is being made to include stakeholder representatives from community organizations and churches at Monday's first session, the chief said. “This gives those organizations an opportunity to be part of the process. We need them here,” Anderson said.

After council member Kandie Smith's June 6 trespassing arrest in the downtown nightclub district, of which she was later acquitted, there was a huge outcry of public dissent about the police department's relationship with the community, Anderson said.

“We started talking then about how we and our staff could address this and people's perceptions about police. Our officers need to know what the people think and say about them and the way they feel about their performance,” Anderson said. “Some of the perceptions people have about the police go back 10-15 years. They still seem to hang on to a lot of those issues. We still are a divided community, and a tremendous amount of that has to do with issues of race that go back a long time,” Anderson said.

The police department finds itself caught in the middle of a disparity issue over the deployment of resources in different sections of the city, Sauls said. “We are slowly breaking down the divide of west Greenville versus east Greenville. The historical perspective is that law enforcement resources go to the large university area. People think we've neglected west Greenville when we really have not. I think we have addressed that well, with our first police substation (on west Fifth Street) and our code enforcement efforts,” Sauls said.

Another perception Anderson wants to address is that his department might engage in racial profiling, targeting black kids, for example, he said.

“But if we make an arrest downtown, we are suddenly targeting ECU students, singling out the college kids,” he said.

Anderson wants to more fully involve residents in a partnership with his officers to prevent and solve crimes, another reason a respectful and cordial relationship is important, he said.
In November, Anderson reported to Bowers, at the direction of the council, about individual citizen complaints against officers that were investigated by the department.

There were 65 complaints registered in 2010, the chief said, of which 17 were sustained by internal investigations. Individual consequences and outcomes are not available for public review, according to state statutes related to personnel records. Investigations also were conducted each of the 38 times force was used to subdue a person, the report indicated.

Council members heard residents' concerns during the year about possible excessive use of force by officers and poor interactions with citizens in the course of their duties. Councilwoman Smith acknowledged that there are issues about police behavior the council needs to identify and address.

“Constituents in my district think about the issues they had before mine occurred. They wonder whether anything would have been addressed had I not been arrested. They ask whether changes will occur even if they do partner with the police. If the chief is serious about change, he will need open and honest feedback from the citizens,” Smith said.

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ECU to help create website on tour about 1922 New Bern fire

December 30, 2010 4:50 PM
Laura Oleniacz, The New Bern Sun Journal Staff

A New Bern tourist attraction is getting help from professors at ECU in generating public interest and possibly drawing visitors to the city.

Derek Alderman, professor of geography research at the university in Greenville and a fellow in cultural and heritage tourism for the school’s Center for Sustainable Tourism, said university officials are on board to help raise money to design a new website for The Trail of Flames Tour.

The tour currently starts and ends at the New Bern Firemen’s Museum and takes visitors to sites that were destroyed, displaced or impacted by the Great Fire of 1922.

The fire swept through the city on Dec. 1 of that year, doing an estimated $2 million in damage to property in the city and leaving several thousand people homeless.

“We think this history needs to be known by everybody,” said Mary Peterkin, president and acting executive director of the Uptown Business and Professional Association that manages the tour and works for economic development of the Five Points area. “We think this virtual tour is going to help us greatly to get the word out about the Great Fire of 1922 in New Bern, N.C.”

Alderman said the web resource would be developed to allow public access to photographs of the fire, historical maps, and oral histories. He said the hope is that the site would attract tourists to New Bern and would also stimulate economic development.
Alderman said he got involved in the project after he was contacted by the N.C. Humanities Council and was asked to meet with the Uptown Business and Professional Association to help determine the next step in the tour’s development.

The Center for Sustainable Tourism worked with the association to apply for funds, he said, and the N.C. Humanities Council awarded the association a $750 grant to begin planning for the website.

The school’s African and African American Studies Program, the Center for Diversity and Inequality Research, and the Center for Geographic and Information Science will also be involved.

“What we’re doing is donating and offering our assistance in trying to find funds as well as consult in the project overall,” Alderman said.

Peterkin said the association did not run the tour this year because of the Broad Street construction and because the tour bus they were using moved to Morehead City.

The hope is to have the tour running again in 2011, she said, and that the website, involving a virtual tour as well as oral histories and maps, will draw people to want to know what the area looks like now.

“It will be knowledge that you could get at the click of a key,” she said. “You could be sitting in California and know what happened in the Great Fire of 1922 in New Bern, N.C., just by clicking on the tour.”

Laura Oleniacz can be reached at 252-635-5675 or at loleniacz@freedomenc.com.
Mallie Bennett Penry

Dr. Mallie Bennett Penry, 87, of Reedville, Va., died quietly on Christmas Day, 2010. She was a quiet person, a good listener for her friends and family, interested in those around her and kept in touch with many whom she had known throughout the years.

Mallie was a North Carolinian by birth but adopted Virginia as her retirement home after completing her second career in 1986. She worked as a secretary and bookkeeper in her early career, secretary to the Winston-Salem City Manager and employed by the Baptist Home for the Aging in Winston before becoming director of the Baptist Home in Albemarle. In 1962 Mallie returned to school to pursue her nursing education and teaching career. She completed her two-year program in nursing at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro, obtained her Bachelor's Degree from East Carolina University in Greenville, and her Masters from the University of Florida. She returned to Greensboro for the Ph.D. in the early 1970's. In 1982, she completed a Nurse Practitioner program in Gerontology at Rochester, N.Y.

Mallie's teaching career took her to Virginia Highlands Community College, the University of North Carolina in Greensboro and finally to East Carolina School of Medicine. She valued the experiences and opportunities she found awaiting her and delighted in encouraging those she met to take advantage of the opportunities to pursue their dreams.

Mallie is survived by her son and his wife, Ray and Judy Penry of Reedville, Va.; two grandsons Bing of Atlanta and Todd and his wife, Wendy, of Rockville, Md. and their two children, Alex and Jessica; two sisters, Mary Knott and June Rikard, both of Atlanta. She was predeceased by her parents Romy "Rome" and Beulah Bennett; brothers Troy, William, and R.O.; and a sister Phyllis McCamman. She was a member of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, in Kilmarnock Va. A graveside memorial service will be held on Friday, Jan. 7, 2011 at 1 p.m. at Forsyth Memorial Park, 3771 Yadkinville Road, Winston-Salem.

In lieu of flowers, Mallie would like to be remembered with contributions to the Mallie Penry Memorial Nursing Scholarship Fund in care of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church P.O. Box 1366 Kilmarnock, VA 22482. Online remembrances may be made at faulknerfamilyfuneralhome.com.

Published Sunday January 2, 2010
Major Ben G. Irons, USAF retired was born Jan. 11, 1918 and died Dec. 27, 2010. Ben was married to his beloved wife, Mary Ellen Irons of Santa Cruz, Calif., for 50 years. His sons are Ben Irons and wife, Yvette, of Chico, Calif., Dr. Ted Irons and wife, Martha, of Auburn, Calif., and John Irons of Truckee, Calif. His grandchildren are Lillian and Camille Irons of Chico and Tommy, Scott, and Tori Irons of Auburn. His nephews are Dr. Tom Irons and wife, Carol, of Greenville, Ben Irons and wife, Susan, of Greenville, Dr. Fred Irons and wife, Susan, of Chapel Hill, and their families. He was predeceased by his brother, Dr. Fred and sister-in-law Dr. Malene Irons of Greenville; sister, Evelyn and brother-in-law, Wallace Lynn, of Occoquan, Va., and sister, Sarah and brother-in-law, Billy Williams, of San Francisco.

Ben was born in Pickaway, W.Va., and raised in Virginia and Florida. Ben enlisted in the US Army in 1938, and then transferred to the Army Air Corps where he trained as a bombardier. His B-17 was shot down over Germany in July 1943 and he spent nearly two years as a Prisoner of War, first in Luft Stalag III, then Stalag VIIA. The most difficult part of his POW experience occurred during the forced evacuation from Sagan, Germany, ahead of the advancing Russian Army and subsequent "March" to Moosburg, Germany, during the brutal winter of 1945. He received a Purple Heart for injuries when he was shot down.

He was a "mustang," rising from private to major by the time he retired in 1958. He continued to fly during his career in the USAF and spent the final years in the Strategic Air Command as a navigator on B-47s. He met his wife Mary Ellen while stationed at March Air Force Base. They married in 1960 and had three sons by 1964! Ben graduated Summa Cum Laude from East Carolina University in 1962. His second career was with the Social Security Administration from 1962 until 1986. He worked the final 20 years in Santa Cruz, Calif. Always a fan of the San Francisco Giants, he rarely missed a game. He was delighted with their World Series victory this year! He traveled widely, both in the military and with Mary Ellen, including trips to Europe, the Balkans, Antarctica, South America, the Galapagos Islands, Canada, and Australia. Ben and Mary Ellen also traveled across the United States many times and visited most of the 50 states; they enjoyed seeing family and friends around the country. He was a member of the First Congregational Church of Santa Cruz and Soquel for 50 years and was a Santa Cruz Elk and member of SIRS.
We will all miss "Big Ben" and his sense of humor. He was hardworking, honest, and a gentleman until the end. Most importantly, he loved and was loved by his wife and family. Ben G. Irons can be honored by donating to the American Red Cross, whose rations helped him to survive while he was a Prisoner of war in Germany.
College of Business offers SAT prep course
Monday, January 3, 2011
WorkWeek

The College of Business at East Carolina University will offer an intensive five-day review course designed to prepare individuals for the SAT Reasoning Test.

The SAT prep course is open to the ECU community as well as the general public. It will be held on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to noon from Jan. 29 to Feb. 26 on the ECU campus.

Ben Worthington, an English teacher at J.H. Rose High School, and Maureen Green, a math teacher at North Pitt High School, will provide the course instruction.

The cost, which includes two SAT review books, is $140 on or before Jan. 21 and $155 after the Jan. 21 deadline. Course registration is limited to 50 participants.

The SAT Reasoning Test is a standardized test for college admissions. It is administered by the College Board, a not-for-profit corporation, and is developed, published, and scored by the Educational Testing Service.

For more information or to register for the SAT prep course, call the College of Business Office of Professional Programs at 328-6377 or visit www.ecu.edu/cs-bus/programsoffered.cfm online.

For SAT exam dates and locations, visit online at www.collegeboard.com.
HARRY LYNCH - hlynch@newsobserver.com
Tom Ross, president of the state university system, unpacks in his office at the UNC General Administration Building in Chapel Hill. Ross has the advantage of being familiar with the leaders of the 17 UNC campuses and the leaders of state government.

Intense UNC chief Bowles gives reins to genial Ross

BY ERIC FERRERI - Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL It's a tired joke, but Erskine Bowles can't help it. Asked repeatedly in recent months whether he'll really slow down in retirement, Bowles has invariably responded: "My wife [Crandall] tells me I'll be fine on Monday. But she's really worried about Tuesday."

It's funny because it's true.

Bowles' tenure at UNC was a rigorous, fast-moving, work-to-the-bone five-year term during which public universities slashed hundreds of millions of dollars from their budgets, eliminated thousands of positions and laid off hundreds of workers.

But it wasn't all grim. Under Bowles' leadership, tuition became more predictable, financial aid increased, distance education expanded, and the relationship between universities, community colleges and the K-12 system
grew closer. The university now serves the state's needs more directly, a theme that underscored Bowles' tenure.

He did it through hard work. Known for the 4a.m. e-mail message and a ragged, bleary-eyed staff, Bowles concedes he's more short-term change agent than long-term leader. But many close followers of the university system say he was precisely what it needed.

"He would not be very effective in one job for 30 years," said State Sen. Richard Stevens, the Wake County Republican who was co-chairman of the Senate education/higher education committee during Bowles' UNC tenure. "But he's very effective in one job for five years."

**Change of command**

Bowles' tenure ended Jan. 1. He turned the keys over to Tom Ross, the longtime Superior Court judge who most recently spent more than three years as president at Davidson College.

Ross takes over a university system trying to stanch the bleeding after four years of steep budget cuts, with even more looming.

Bowles didn't inherit a fixer-upper in 2006. The UNC system was well regarded within the state and across American higher education. A construction boom was under way, and the economy was relatively healthy.

Still, Bowles took office with efficiency on the brain. He made changes in purchasing and thinned middle management. A distance education program, the University of North Carolina Online, was created to make courses more accessible and far cheaper to administer than those taught in classrooms.

He slowed spending before the recession forced all state agencies to do so and continued on that path as the state budget grew tighter. Even the university's budget document itself got a lot smaller - from about 300 pages to 30.

"He promised administrative cuts, and then he did it, and thoroughly," Stevens said. "That certainly appealed to legislators strapped for dollars."

Bowles is a businessman. He worked first in investment banking and founded venture capital and private equity firms before becoming the White
House Chief of Staff under Bill Clinton. He later ran two unsuccessful U.S. Senate campaigns.

Although his corporate approach was appealing in Raleigh, it took others longer to warm to Bowles, who learned quickly that universities do not operate like for-profit businesses.

"I come from a world of ready, fire, aim, and I came to a world of ready, aim, aim, aim, aim," Bowles, 65, said recently. "In almost any organization you need to meet the demands of the customers. Universities are almost the opposite. They spent their whole careers doing what they durn well want to. I tried to think about how to meet the demands of North Carolina and its citizens. You can't operate it like a business, but you can operate it in a more businesslike manner."

**Big change in five years**
The UNC system is a far different animal than it was five years ago, smaller in some areas, larger in others, and more directly focused on the needs of the state.

It hasn't come easy. Bowles was a demanding boss, heaping task after task onto a staff 35 percent smaller than it was five years ago.

"The work demands, under me, are always unreasonable," he says now. "That's why I say there's only so much people can take of Erskine Bowles. I don't think there's anybody here who'd say they haven't worked really, really hard over the last five years. I think that's really good. I don't apologize for that. But I also know I can push too hard."

**Running a far-flung empire**
The job demands a tireless leader. The UNC system is a far-flung empire of with more than 220,000 students on 17 campuses. It also includes a health care system, a public television station, an arboretum and UNC Press, a publishing house. Its total budget tops $7 billion.

Into this cauldron steps Ross, the genial, well-regarded former judge who also headed the state's court system, the Z. Smith Reynolds charitable foundation and Davidson College, the small, elite private school north of Charlotte.
In many ways, Ross and Bowles are similar. They're each from Greensboro and products of North Carolina's Democratic establishment, with deep political roots and connections across the state.

Ross also routinely works into the early hours. And like Bowles, he can talk earnestly about budgeting. But he is just as likely to talk to you about his golden retriever, Chelsea, or his beloved Cincinnati Reds. His cell phone ring tone is the Monday Night Football theme music.

Chosen as Bowles' successor in late August, Ross spent the balance of the year finishing up work at Davidson, his alma mater, while keeping a keen eye on UNC issues. He did so largely behind the scenes, wary of stepping on Bowles' toes or forcing staff to choose between two masters.

He didn't have several months to visit campuses and read over long-range plans, as Bowles did.

But he has some built-in advantages. He's known already by many in the General Assembly through his many years as a judge and administrator of the state court system. And he's familiar with many of the campuses and their chancellors. He's a former UNC Greensboro trustee. As a judge, he gave talks at N.C. Central University's law school. At Davidson, he was part of a leadership council with the heads of UNCG, Western Carolina and Appalachian State, all members of the Southern Conference.

He's already talked extensively with campus chancellors, cognizant that each institution is unique.

"There are no cookie-cutters in this business," Ross said in a recent interview. "The nuances of these campuses are important to know."

**Job 1: More budget cuts**

One thing is clear: He'll have his hands full immediately.

Even after budget cuts of $620 million over the last four years, the UNC system is expected to take another hit this year as the state grapples with a $3.7 billion budget deficit. And there's new political leadership in Raleigh, which means Ross and his staff will have to forge ties with new legislative leaders and committee heads.
"He's stepping into an even worse [budget] situation," said Stevens, the Wake County state senator. "And now there are new people, of a different political party, who have not had years of working with your budget. So you have to build new relationships."

Ross, 60, swears he isn't daunted.

"My sense is the General Assembly of North Carolina will continue to be very supportive of the university and it doesn't matter who's in control of it," he said. "They realize how important an asset it is to the state."

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In their own words
Bowles, on his UNC legacy: "Clearly, we had lots of budget cuts. We tried to do them in the most effective way possible. We greatly slimmed down the administrative operations. We protected the academic core. I think that's the right way to do it. I hope we'll also be remembered for UNC Tomorrow and making the university more relevant and focused on the demands and needs of the state. And I hope we'll be remembered for helping make K-12 better. And I hope we'll be remembered for really making the university and the community colleges not enemies but working together, functioning as one. I hope those things will be remembered as just as important."

Bowles, on eliminating nearly 1,000 administrative jobs for budget reasons: "I could have cut the academic budget and, I think, hurt the quality of the education we offer. I think that would have been penny-wise and pound-foolish. I don't make any apologies for that, or for the cuts we made. If you ask me the one thing that hurt me the most, it's letting all these people go. That's the most painful thing. Those are not just numbers. They're people. But did we have to do it? Absolutely."

Bowles, on his recently concluded work with the federal budget commission: "I think it's great for the university, period, to have the president in a high national leadership profile position doing something good for the country. I think it's good for the students to see the president out there leading in the public arena. Rather than the president of Harvard or the president of Berkeley, it's the president of University of North Carolina. That's great for us here."

Ross, on the role of the president when the NCAA investigates a campus athletics program: "If the chancellor is asking you for advice, that's within your role. On the other hand, if the chancellor feels he or she is able to handle the issue and you agree with it, I think it's appropriate that you let he or she run the institution."

Ross, on reading the UNC budget as a way of understanding the institution: "If you try to figure out the money, follow the money, it gives you a really good sense of the institution. This is a really big institution. If it was a for-profit business it'd be Fortune 500 in terms of size. So to sit down and try to absorb and learn a budget in the billions is a challenge."

Ross on the outlook for UNC workers: "In the near term we're going to have to continue to ask a lot, and we're not going to be able to show them we value them in their paycheck."
As Erskine Bowles steps down as president of the UNC system, North Carolina owes him the utmost appreciation.

Bowles' life is much like a play. Act I consisted of a highly successful career in business. Act II, and perhaps his most significant legacy, has centered on public service.

Bill Clinton recruited the Charlotte businessman to head the Small Business Administration, a role he filled so capably that the president brought him into the White House to become his chief of staff. During this time, Washington learned what many in North Carolina already knew: Bowles is an incredibly hard worker, is indefatigable in helping broker agreement between opposing viewpoints and prefers to keep a low profile in order to accomplish specific goals. Washington insiders give him much of the credit for the federal balanced budget achieved during Clinton's administration.

But don't mistakenly believe everything Erskine Bowles attempted was successful. He ran twice to become a U.S. Senator and lost both attempts. Looking back, one must conclude Bowles was needed more in North Carolina.

Bowles brought those same attributes to a troubled UNC system when he assumed its presidency. His tenure was marked from the beginning by budget problems but started his administration by initiating a listening tour to hear the dreams and concerns of citizens of North Carolina. UNC Tomorrow resulted from those sessions, outlining how the 16-campus system might respond to the changing needs of our state. Despite constant financial pressures and budget cuts, Bowles met all challenges. He leaves a laudable list of accomplishments, including a renewed emphasis to produce more teachers, greater controls over tuition increases and a change in focus from admitting more students to retaining and graduating more of those students.

His legendary work ethic, leadership skills and ability to resolve conflicts prompted President Barack Obama to ask Bowles to co-chair his Deficit Commission, a task force formed to challenge the nation's leaders to understand the urgency of the financial condition and seek solutions. Some believe this commission failed in its mission because Bowles was unable to gain a majority of members to vote favorably on the conclusions. One of its members publicly called Bowles a true patriot.

Just as the final story has not been written on his presidency of the UNC system, neither have the final results of his efforts on the Deficit Commission been measured.
In the first two acts of his life's play, Erskine Bowles has led an exemplary life of accomplishments and service to the state and nation, but most who know him seriously doubt he will retreat into the shadows of retirement. We cannot wait to learn what is in store for Act III. One thing is for sure. Whatever he attempts, Bowles will give it his all and will most likely leave us the better for having done so.

Tom Campbell is former assistant North Carolina treasurer and is creator and host of NC SPIN, a weekly discussion of state issues airing Sundays at 12 a.m. on WITN-TV and on Cable 7 Sundays at 10:30 a.m., Mondays at 8:30 p.m., Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. and Friday at 9 p.m. Contact him at nespin.com.
The group Next Level, a male mentoring group designed to keep black men from dropping out of college that also does community service work, prepares to pick up trash on their adopted Landmark St. in Greenville Saturday morning. (Scott Davis/The Daily Reflector)

**Program targets minority students**

*By Kim Grizzard*

The Daily Reflector

Monday, January 3, 2011

When Torel Daniels left home to attend North Carolina A&T, he had no trouble making friends. But he had a hard time keeping them.

During his freshman year, the Winterville native hung out on the Greensboro campus with a group of about 15 guys. By his sophomore year, he was one of four.

There wasn't a falling out among the guys. There was simply dropping out.

“The majority of them left,” Daniels said. “A lot of them had to drop out of school. At the end ... it's me and maybe two or three of my friends that are graduating this May.”

The dearth of diplomas is not unique to N.C. A&T, the largest publicly funded historically black college in North Carolina. The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education reports that the college graduation rate for black students stands at 42 percent nationally, compared with a 62 percent graduation rate among white students. Nearly two-thirds of black men who enter college do not graduate.

The statistics are no better for North Carolina's community colleges. In the 2007-08 academic year, minorities accounted for only one-third of the male enrollment. But they had the lowest retention rate and the highest dropout rate.

To combat the statistics, the state's community college system launched the Minority Male Mentoring program in 2003. Also known as 3M, the program, funded initially by a grant from the state Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, was aimed at first-
generation college students or those with a history of substance abuse. Now operating in 40 of North Carolina's 58 community colleges, 3M programs have evolved.

The Next Level, launched three years ago at Pitt Community College, focuses on academic, professional and personal development for minority male students. Next Level functions like a club with weekly meetings, social activities and off-campus outings for its 21 members.

“We're really trying to bridge the gap to retain students here and to graduate these males on campus,” Bershuan Thompson, program assistant for Next Level, said. “If we can find that way to connect them, creating an atmosphere where there's some type of social network for the student body to stay on campus a little bit longer, it creates an environment where students are going to benefit academically.”

Without such connections, said Andre Gregory, coordinator for 3M, students who struggle academically, financially or socially may simply stop coming to class.

“It is a lot easier for them to disappear, to fall through the cracks,” he said. “For males in general, and not just minority males, being connected is the No. 1 factor in whether or not they're going to be successful.”

Nineteen-year-old Jay Coleman was looking for a way to tie in with other guys his age when he came to Next Level a year ago.

“When I first came to campus I was looking for a club because I didn't know anyone who was going to Pitt,” said Coleman, who is hoping to transfer to a university after completing two years at PCC. “When I came to the first meeting, everyone was friends. It seemed like more of a brotherhood.”

There was no such brotherhood at North Carolina A&T, so, with the help of a faculty adviser, Daniels decided to create one. He founded Men on the Move in 2008. Like Next Level, Men on the Move is built on the concept of male mentoring. Both organizations focus on academic accountability; Next Level members are placed on probation if their grade point average falls below a 2.5. But neither organization is strictly academic in focus.

“It helps them to talk about not just schoolwork,” Daniels said. “It gets boring if you just preach to them about staying in school. We talk about everything in and outside of school. That's what makes a lot of students stay.”

Both Next Level and Men on the Move get members involved in community service. Men on the Move members tutor Greensboro-area elementary students in math and English. Next Level members participate in a variety of projects, including adopting a street where members periodically meet and pick up litter.

Since launching Men on the Move, Daniels has seen fellow members step up to take leadership roles in other campus organizations as well.
“It helps them to get more enthusiastic about life,” he said, “not just school — about anything that they do.”

Next Level members are required to become involved in planning and leading many of their own events. Gregory and Thompson serve in advisory roles.

“I think that it's important for this age group to have individuals that are not going to tell them what to do but are simply going to be able to listen to them, connect with them and then give them advice,” Gregory said. “They are a really good peer support group.”

Coleman relies on friends like Hakeem Suggs, 18, whom he met at Next Level, to encourage him when he's feeling stressed about school.

“College can be very discouraging. It seems overwhelming,” he said. “In this program, you get support.”

Next Level member James Grate, 22, remembers a time when he needed some reassurance. He was experiencing some problems with financial aid, and he was starting to see his grades go down.

Friends with Next Level helped him realize that the only thing he needed to quit was his major. He is glad he switched and stayed in school.

“(Next Level) helped me through a few situations that I had,” Grate said.

“If you're in school and you don't know anybody, you may just be like, ‘Ugh, I don't really care,’” he said. “Nobody's helping, pushing them in the right direction. They may just stay where they're at and not even try.”

For more information on Pitt Community College's Next Level program, located 1311 B Warren Building, e-mail nextlevel@email.pittcc.edu or call 493-7506. Contact Kim Grizzard at kgrizzard@reflector.com or (252) 329-9578.
'Early college' high school to start next year at NCSU

BY JANE STANCILL - Staff Writer

North Carolina has become the nation's incubator of early college high schools, with one-third of the total in the United States.

A new one will be launched in 2011 at N.C. State University, bringing the innovative concept of blended high school and college to one of the state's flagship campuses. The school will focus on science and technology, and its location - the edge of NCSU's Centennial Campus - is sure to be a draw. Early college high schools offer free college courses and an accelerated educational path to students who are often the first in their family to go to college. North Carolina has 71 such schools with 15,000 students - more than any other state.

The schools are on community college or university campuses, where students can simultaneously work toward a high school diploma and an associate's degree or up to two years of credit toward a bachelor's degree. State taxpayers funded the schools at about $22 million this year, not including tuition for the college courses, which are free to students.

The model that started in 2004 as an experiment aimed at low-income and underrepresented students has built a track record of success.

In 2008-09, the schools had lower dropout rates than the statewide average. This year, the 19 schools with graduating classes had a combined high school graduation rate of 90 percent, compared to the statewide average of 74 percent.

Students in the schools have better attendance records, lower suspension rates and higher participation in college prep classes, according to early results this year from a federally funded study conducted by UNC Greensboro's SERVE Center, an education research institute.

"The results look really promising," said Julie Edmunds, project director for high school reform at the center. "What we're finding is that basically more kids are on track for college."

Began on NCCU campus

You don't have to tell James Blackwell, who received his diploma this month from N.C. Central University, six years after he enrolled at the Josephine Dobbs Clement Early College High School on the NCCU campus. He and his sister are the first generation in his family to earn college degrees.
Blackwell was in the first class at Clement, which posted a 94 percent high school graduation rate. He chose the experimental school over Durham's Northern High School, he said, because it sounded like an interesting idea. And the offer of two years of free college credit was hard to pass up. NCCU also promised the first Clement class free tuition for four years at the university.

Blackwell adjusted quickly to high school life on a college campus. "People accepted us," he said.

"It's a very rigorous kind of program," he said. "It's more rigorous than competitive because students supported one another. It's very, very nurturing."
The schools are small by design and often include special counselors, mentoring and internship opportunities.

The students were held to higher standards by their teachers, Blackwell said. "What was important is we all had the essential goal of graduating from high school and attending college," he said.

Blackwell, 20, majored in history and minored in German. He'll start a master's program at NCCU next month and hopes to earn a doctorate eventually.

Passing a college course as a high school student can be a real motivator, said Joel Vargas, a vice president at Boston-based Jobs for the Future, a nonprofit that coordinates a national early college initiative with more than 200 schools in 24 states. "There is a powerful sense of self-efficacy that comes with this," Vargas said.

It's not clear, though, whether the schools will multiply on a large scale. Because the tuition is free, they cost more; early colleges in several other states have shut down during the recession.

But over the long term, Vargas said, the schools are a worthwhile investment if they lead low-income students to high school graduation, college and good-paying jobs. "You're going to pay now or pay later," he said. "It's much more efficient to pay now."

**Science, math stressed**
The approach is good for students and for the economy, said Fay Agar, who directs the early college high school initiative for the N.C. New Schools Project, a public-private partnership that works to establish innovative schools.

"Not only does it expand their opportunities and earning power, it also provides a firmer economic base for the communities in which they reside," she said.

The school that will open next fall at N.C. State will focus on science, technology, engineering and math - areas of predicted job growth.
The curriculum will revolve around collaborative problem-solving and the "grand challenges" from the National Academy of Engineering. The challenge list includes 14 areas for exploration, including making solar energy economical, preventing nuclear terror and securing cyberspace. In the first year, the emphasis will be on sustainability.

"They're real and they're problems of the future," said Ruth Steidinger, senior director of secondary education for the Wake County public schools. "These kids are going to be so lucky."

The first year, 50 ninth-graders will be admitted. Eventually, 250 students will be enrolled. The school will occupy a renovated building adjacent to NCSU's Centennial Campus.

Steidinger said priority will be given to students from groups that are underrepresented in science and technology fields, including women and minorities. So far, interest has been high, she said.

**Students are thriving**

Early college high schools aren't for everyone. Unlike comprehensive high schools, they have no athletic teams; and the social atmosphere is different.

Students have to understand the environment they're heading into, Steidinger said: "This is for the child that is focused and wants to get it done."

That drive is part of the formula for success. The programs are somewhat self-selective; students who have their eye on college are more likely to take the time and effort to apply.

Still, the environment apparently helps students thrive.

The UNC Greensboro study compared data on 718 ninth-graders at six early college high schools with data on 574 ninth-graders in traditional high schools. (Those students had applied for early college spots but had lost out in the lottery for admission).

Results from the study show that 97 percent of the early college students had taken Algebra I by the end of ninth grade, compared to 76 percent of the other group. More early college students were successful in the class.

The early college approach also seems to virtually close the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students, said Edmunds, the researcher.

"A lot of these kids want something different in their life, they really do," Edmunds said. "The traditional school doesn't give that to them."

"[Early college] helps them see their future."
Early college high schools, by the numbers
71 - Early college high schools in North Carolina
15,000 - Students enrolled in early college high schools in the state
90 percent - Combined graduation rate for 19 early college high schools with graduating classes in 2010
74 percent - Average graduation rate for all public North Carolina high schools in 2010
5 - Number of years most students spend at an early college high school to receive a high school diploma and two years of college credit