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Local economy is on the mend, Niswander says

BY JOSH HUMPHRIES
The Daily Reflector

The local economy is on the mend, said Rick Niswander, dean of the East Carolina University College of Business.

Niswander spoke to a turnout of about 90 people at the Greenville-Pitt Chamber of Commerce event Tuesday at the City Hotel and Bistro. He said the recession will end soon if it hasn’t already.

“No matter what you are looking at, the seeds of recovery are noticeable in virtually everything,” Niswander said.

He explained how the economy began diving in mid-2008, but signs of a troubled economy could be seen as far back as 2006. Recovering from a tanking economy, he said, takes time, and many economic indicators are showing that the economy is at least stabilizing and even growing in some areas.

“I am not trying to paint a rosy picture, but the worst is behind us,” he said. “We are not out of the woods yet, but the worst is certainly behind us.”

Niswander insisted that good things happened in 2009, including a slightly bet-

ECONOMY
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ter Christmas season, growth in Dow Jones indexes, and increases in personal income and spending.

“Some indicators are that we are not going down any more,” he said. “The likelihood of the economy going down any more is very low.”

Niswander said that a lot of the economic downturn can be attributed to decreases in spending by individuals and businesses, which is why the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) and stimulus federal legislation was so important.

“They were the kind of thing that you needed to do and the size that you needed to do them,” he said. “These pieces of legislation were imperfect, but by and large, they were addressing the right kinds of things.”

Niswander predicted that the country’s gross domestic product will rise by 2.5 percent in 2010 and by as much as 3.5 percent in 2011. He said the rest of the world will recover faster on average.

A flat unemployment rate for Pitt County and North Carolina are a good sign of recovery for the region, he said. While the rate is high, at 9.9 percent, it is stable and showing signs of improvement.

“The economy has stabilized and is showing signs of recovery,” he said. “The recovery will be slow but it is com-

RICK NISWANDER speaks at a luncheon sponsored by the Greenville-Pitt Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday.

Contact Josh Humphries at humphries@reflector.com or (252) 329-9565.
Former ECU vice provost of student affairs takes job at Delaware State

Kemal Atkins, former vice provost of student affairs at East Carolina University, has been appointed to a one-year term at Delaware State University.

Atkins will serve as interim vice president of student affairs at the historically black, public university in Dover, Del. He served as vice provost at ECU from February 2008 through July 2009, when Provost Marilyn Sheerer announced his resignation. His duties fell to Sheerer, who handled them until this month. ECU announced in October that Virginia Hardy would be the new vice provost for student affairs. She began work in that position this month.

Before he joined ECU, Atkins was the assistant vice president of academic and student affairs for the University of North Carolina General Administration.

Atkins was an assistant director of undergraduate admissions at ECU from 1994-96. He also was the director of ThinkCOLLEGE, a college access program for high school and college students in Charlotte from 1996-2001.

Atkins has a bachelor's degree in English literature with a minor in communications arts and a master's degree in English literature with an emphasis in postsecondary instruction, both from Appalachian State University. He also completed the NASPA Institute for New Senior Student Affairs Officers.

Atkins replaces Paul Bryant, who left DSU to pursue other opportunities. A search for a permanent vice president of student affairs will be initiated, DSU announced.
Autopsy: Swimmer thought killed by shark actually drowned

A Pittsburgh vacationer on the Outer Banks thought to have been killed by a shark in September actually died of accidental drowning, the final autopsy report says.

The report was released today by the North Carolina Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

It says that Richard Snead, 60, drowned. His body was discovered the morning of Sept. 17 by a passerby walking on a beach in Kill Devil Hills.

Snead was on vacation with his wife in Corolla and had gone for a swim about 11 p.m. on Sept. 12. She called 911 to report him missing just after midnight after he did not return.

An autopsy was done at the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University. Initially, the office said Snead died of a shark attack. But in October, the medical examiner said the death appeared to be a drowning and remained under review.

The final autopsy report said disruption of the body "limited the reliability" of an examination of a lung and made it difficult to determine the cause of death.

When Snead went into the water, it was dark and there were coastal wind warnings, the report said. Doctors reviewed shark behavior and photos with marine biologists and determined that "death was not likely due to shark attack."

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Source URL (retrieved on 01/05/2010 - 14:41): http://hamptonroads.com/2010/01/autopsy-swimmer-thought-killed-shark-actually-drowned
Officials want people to get H1N1 shots

RALEIGH -- The push is on to vaccinate nearly everyone in North Carolina against the H1N1 flu virus.

State epidemiologist Dr. Jeffrey Engel and other health officials have cautioned that another wave of infection is likely to hit this winter.

Although infection rates for influenza have diminished from the fall peak, they are still higher than in a normal flu season.

Now that the vaccine is more commonly available, restrictions on who could receive one have been lifted.

For those interested in getting a vaccine, clinics are planned throughout the Triangle.
Duncan promotes simpler college financial aid application

By Nick Anderson
Wednesday, January 6, 2010; B02

Torin King, a college-bound senior, was racing through an online student aid questionnaire Tuesday morning in the counseling center at Banneker Senior High School. He clicked through one Web page after another, demonstrating the streamlined federal application as Education Secretary Arne Duncan watched over his shoulder.

"It's pretty easy to do," the 17-year-old student from Southeast Washington said. "You don't have to be a specialist. It's user-friendly." Torin, who is applying to Penn State University, the University of Pittsburgh, George Washington University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said his older sister had painful memories of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

"When she did it years ago, she said it was a hassle," he said.

This month, the government is rolling out a shorter, simpler aid application to reduce barriers to higher education, especially for needy students. About 20 million students file the FAFSA, as it is known, each year.

Duncan and Jill Biden, wife of the vice president, promoted the revised application in a visit to the school, near Howard University in Northwest Washington.

The application is used to determine a family's expected annual contribution to college expenses. It also determines eligibility for need-based federal Pell grants and other student aid.

Duncan said FAFSA had been "really, really, really tough" to fill out, making it an obstacle to many students. "It's crazy," he said.

"Folks are working really hard to make it simpler so it's not a barrier," Duncan said. He urged the college-bound students to file their aid applications quickly. "If you can get it done this month," he said, "you'll be in great, great shape to get your share."

Generations of students and their parents have wrestled with the complicated questionnaire. The latest version, taking effect this month for the 2010-11 school year, has 107 questions in its paper form. But government officials are pushing students to apply online to take advantage of the new "skip logic," which suppresses unnecessary questions based on individual answers.

For the first time, low-income students are able to bypass certain questions about financial assets because the information is not required to determine their aid eligibility. Questions about legal residency and previous drug convictions also have been cut for certain applicants. The number of questions skipped will vary from person to person. Officials provided an example of a hypothetical 17-year-old who receives a reduced-price lunch at school, is not employed, plans to attend college in the fall and lives with two parents who report an adjusted gross income of $45,000: She would have 22 fewer questions.
In addition, officials are testing a system this year that would allow tax-return information to be downloaded straight onto the aid application. In September, the House passed a bill to further simplify the form. It is pending in the Senate.

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Mass. college bans head coverings that block face

By JAY LINDSAY
The Associated Press
Tuesday, January 5, 2010; 5:14 PM

BOSTON -- A Massachusetts pharmacy college instituted a ban on clothing that obscures the face, including face veils and burqas, weeks after a Muslim alumnus who is also the son of a professor was charged with plotting terror strikes.

The policy change at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Services, announced in a campus-wide e-mail last month, went into effect Friday.

Michael Ratty, a college spokesman, said the policy was developed in the fall during the school's annual review of its public safety procedures and was unrelated to the arrest of 2008 graduate Tarek Mehanna.

"It is not directed to any group or individual. It applies to all students and faculty," Ratty said.

Ratty said the school believed everyone entering the small Boston campus should be able to be properly identified. He said the college discussed the policy with Muslim students and officials at the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, and all understood the need for the change.

The policy bans only those head coverings that entirely conceal the face, which could also apply to winter clothing such as scarves or ski masks, Ratty said. The college has about 4,300 students, including 3,300 at its Boston campus. The school remains closed for winter break this week.

Jonathan Kassa, executive director of Security on Campus, a nonprofit that advocates for safer college campuses, said his group had not heard of similar policies at any other U.S. college.

Mehanna, of Sudbury, was arrested Oct. 21. He is accused of conspiring with two men to randomly shoot mall shoppers and kill U.S. public officials and soldiers in Iraq. Mehanna's family has denied the charges and Mehanna has drawn strong, public support from friends and students he taught at a Muslim school in Worcester.

Mehanna's father, Ahmed Mehanna, teaches at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy's campus in Boston. He did not respond to requests for comment.

The school's revised "identification policy" reads that for "reasons of safety and security, all students must be readily identifiable while they are on campus and/or engaged in required off-campus activities. ... Therefore, any head covering that obscures a student's face may not be worn, either on campus or at clinical sites, except when required for medical reasons."

The policy would effectively ban face veils, as well as burqas and niqabs, which either cloak the entire
body or cover everything but the eyes. Ibrahim Hooper of the Council on American-Islamic Relations said he has contacted school officials about providing a religious exemption, and said it's required because the policy makes a medical exemption.

He said the revision was aimed at two female Muslim students who wear face veils due to their religious beliefs. Hooper said a minority of Muslims believe that covering the face is required, but that stopping them from practicing their faith is "un-American."

Hooper said strong security can be maintained at a college without sacrificing religious freedom.

"If you can get on an airplane wearing a face veil, you can go to class at Massachusetts College of Pharmacy wearing a face veil," he said.

Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Forum and a frequent critic of militant Islam, applauded the college for the policy change, noting numerous terrorist attacks have been committed by people hiding themselves and their weapons under veils.

"I think the college was alerted to the dangers that could come from its student body by the arrest of Tarek Mehanna ... and realized that it needs to take preventative steps to protect itself, its student body, its staff," he said.

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Associated Press reporter Bob Salsberg contributed to this report.

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Harvard Teaching Hospitals Cap Outside Pay

By DUFF WILSON

The owner of two research hospitals affiliated with the Harvard Medical School has imposed restrictions on outside pay for two dozen senior officials who also sit on the boards of pharmaceutical or biotechnology companies. The limits come in the wake of growing criticism of the ties between industry and academia.

Medical experts say they believe the conflict-of-interest rules at the institution, Partners HealthCare, go further than those of any other academic medical center in restricting outside pay from drug companies. The rules, which became effective on Friday, impose limits specifically on outside directors who guide some of the nation's biggest companies.

Senior officials at the two hospitals, Massachusetts General and Brigham and Women's Hospitals in Boston, must limit their pay for serving as outside directors to what the policy calls "a level befitting an academic role" — no more than $5,000 a day for actual work for the board. Some had been receiving more than $200,000 a year. Also, they may no longer accept stock.

Criticism has been mounting in recent years as the conflicting roles of some medical leaders have been disclosed through Congressional investigations, lawsuits and reports in the news media. Those disclosures have raised questions about bias and the cost and quality of patient care at the nation's medical institutions.

Harvard, in particular, has come under scrutiny from Senator Charles E. Grassley of Iowa, a leader of Congressional inquiries into the influence of money in medicine.

Partners HealthCare is also forbidding speaker's fees from drug companies for any employee, including nearly 8,000 with Harvard faculty appointments. Some other medical schools have taken similar actions in prohibiting faculty members from being paid by drug companies to speak about their products.

But no other academic medical centers have so restricted participation in boards of directors.

"We're the first to go in this deep, and we're still into it only up to our knees," said Dr. Eugene Braunwald, a Harvard professor and former Partners chief academic officer who was chairman of the policy-writing group. He said the group had "a very spirited debate" before announcing its compromise in general terms in April, much of it effective in 2010.

"We thought it was a very good idea to have institutional officials serve on boards, but we did not want to have personal enrichment," Dr. Braunwald said.

The ban on speaking fees was one reason Partners wanted to take a strong stand on the issue of directors, he added. It would seem unfair, Dr. Braunwald said, to restrict outside pay of junior faculty but not senior leaders.

Among the senior officials affected by the policy is Dr. Dennis A. Ausiello, chief of medicine since 1996 at Massachusetts General and the Partners chief scientific officer, who serves on Pfizer's board. He was paid more than $220,000 by the company last year. Dr. Ausiello said he would continue in both roles.

Dr. Ausiello said Pfizer and other companies were crucial to translate academic research into drugs that benefit...
patients. At Partners, he has oversight of a research, ventures and licensing office that seeks to commercialize the hospitals’ intellectual property.

“T’m very proud of my board work,” he said. “T’m not there to make money. I certainly think I should be compensated fairly and symmetrically with my fellow board members, but if my institutions rule otherwise, as they have, I will continue to serve on the board.”

The proper pay for time spent on board meetings under the new policy was calculated at $500 an hour for a 10-hour day, said Christopher Clark, a senior lawyer at Partners and director of a new office for interactions with industry. Stock and options were banned because they tie the director’s fortunes to company profits.

Some say the restrictions are too tough on well-meaning hospital leaders. Others say they are too weak to control conflicts of interest, arguing that corporate directors should not be overseeing research, managing educational programs or determining elements of patient care.

“I think that’s a gross conflict for an official of an academic medical center to be on the board of a pharmaceutical company,” said Dr. Arnold S. Relman, former editor of The New England Journal of Medicine and Harvard professor emeritus who has written about conflicts of interest.

“It’s happening more and more around the country,” he added. “If it isn’t stopped, I think the academic institutions are going to lose the confidence of the country and the government and they will no longer deserve the tax exemption or anything else. They will be part of industry itself.”

Ann C. Bonham, chief scientific officer for the Association of American Medical Colleges, said other academic centers were considering restrictions on director pay from zero to $10,000 a day. “They’re all taking this very seriously and moving as quickly as they can,” she said.

Thomas Donaldson, a professor of business ethics at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, said: “It strikes me as a breath of fresh air in a room that’s getting progressively more stale. I hope this will set a standard for others — hospitals, medical schools.”

Professor Donaldson, who advises large companies on corporate governance, said dual roles in a hospital and at a drug maker were “dicey at best” because a director’s duty is to look out for the corporation’s financial interests.

Senior faculty in leading teaching hospitals are in high demand on medical product boards, but corporate filings show that Partners and Harvard Medical have a disproportionate share.

For instance, Dr. Samuel O. Thier was president of Partners when he was named to the Merck board in 1994. He is now retired from Partners.

Dr. Joseph B. Martin, dean of the Harvard Medical School from 1997 to 2007, was named to the board for Baxter International in 2002. Dr. Thier and Dr. Martin each receive over $200,000 a year from the corporate boards.

Dr. Martin, a professor of neurobiology, declined to comment. Dr. Thier did not return calls seeking comment.

Dr. Daniel K. Podolsky was the original chairman of the Partners policy commission in 2007, when he was the chief academic officer at Partners and a $191,000-a-year board member at GlaxoSmithKline, the pharmaceutical company based in London.

Dr. Podolsky, who left in 2008 to become president of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, said: “It is possible to find an approach that separates the potentially distorting effects of the personal benefit, but more importantly the perception of that, and still work in a constructive way as a board member.”
Dr. Braunwald, who succeeded him as chairman, also had industry ties, as a director of Astra Pharmaceuticals 20 years ago and as a science adviser to at least six companies more recently.

"In all fairness," he said, "what was O.K. three years ago is not O.K. now."