THE DAILY CLIPS

January 8, 2010

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Public benefit

WUNC anniversary highlights its value

This week, U.S. Rep. Walter B. Jones Jr. joined the chorus of voices calling for negotiation of the federal health care reform legislation to be broadcast on C-SPAN, following a request made by that station in December. While some have used this issue of transparency to discredit work on this bill, others correctly contend the debate would cultivate a more informed electorate.

Channels like C-SPAN and others operated in the public domain serve a tremendously important purpose in this technological age by giving the public greater access to government. They therefore deserve continued support and a fervent defense in this time of economic recession and shrinking public budgets.

Fifty-five years ago, the first public television station south of Washington, D.C., broadcast for the first time. Found in Chapel Hill, the appropriately named WUNC-TV would grow over the years to include 11 transmitting stations, including WUNK in Greenville, which began in 1972. That allows public broadcasting to reach from Murphy to Manteo, providing educational and state-based programming to millions of viewers.

Though many residents may take public television for granted, stations like WUNC provide an invaluable benefit to communities across the state. In a similar fashion, C-SPAN should be used to broadcast hearings on the health care bill, since misinformation has been a constant drawback of the process thus far.

Locally, channels available in Pitt County — like those for local government, education and public access — provide viewers with board meetings, lectures and original programming that serves the general interest. That brings citizens into City Hall, onto the East Carolina University campus and into community meetings at their convenience and without leaving their homes, the very intent of television at its inception.

In difficult financial times, such a service might be overlooked or condemned as an extravagance. The pledge drives that provide the needed funding for public television fail to collect sufficient funding, and the small appropriations that keep local channels afloat may be targeted by budget hawks.

But this 55th anniversary of WUNC-TV should remind North Carolina that public broadcasting deserves fierce support, particularly at this time of economic hardship. Public television should continue to be viewed as a necessity, not a luxury, that provides transparency in government, fosters learning among children and serves as a place that promotes honest and informed discourse on issues of importance.
Performance traces evolution of bluegrass instrument

The Daily Reflector

Peace, love and respect for everybody is the motto of the African American Dance Ensemble.

Based in Durham, the ensemble will perform at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in East Carolina University's Wright Auditorium. Led by founder and artistic director Chuck Davis, the dance ensemble will perform Davis' "BlueGrass/Brown Earth: From Africa to Bluegrass" for the S. Rudolph Alexander Performing Arts series event.

Davis is considered one of America's 100 dance treasures and his "BlueGrass/Brown Earth" is the story about the migration of the akonting—folk lute of the Jola people from West Africa. "BlueGrass/Brown Earth," which premiered in 2007, traces the akonting's journey from the shores of Africa to the mountains of western North Carolina and Tennessee, where the instrument is now known as the banjo.

The ballet features original choreography by Davis fused with an energetic blend of African dance, rhythms, traditional banjo and bluegrass music.

Davis travels to Africa every year to study native African dance and culture and brings it back to North America, choreographing works like "BrownEarth" to celebrate the African cultures. In addition, Davis hopes to encourage interracial cooperation, cross-cultural understanding and societal analysis through his work.

A native North Carolinian, Davis founded the African American Dance Ensemble in 1984. He gained a reputation as one of the foremost and accomplished choreographers and teachers in the traditional techniques of African dance.

But before the African American Dance Ensemble, Davis first founded the The Chuck Davis Dance Company in 1968 in New York City. That group established itself as one of the nation's foremost African American dance companies, and in 1980 the group accepted an invitation to the American Dance Festival in Durham.

The company returned each year, and each year the participants in Davis' outreach program grew. By 1983 it became obvious to Davis that a core group of dancers in Durham had attained a proficiency close to the professionals from whom they were learning.

Thus, the African American Dance Ensemble was born.

Davis' new dance group gave its first full concert as an independent professional company in February 1984.

The following year, the African American Dance Ensemble took its place among other established dance companies when it premiered two new Davis works, "Saturday Night, Sunday Morning" and "Drought," both commissioned by Durham's American Dance Ensemble.

Davis attended Howard University and majored in theater and dance. He studied African dance under Babatunde Olatunji, Eleo Pomare and the Bernice Johnson Dance Company.

Davis has received numerous awards including the North Carolina Artist Award in 1990 and the North Carolina Order of the Long Leaf Pine. In 1992, he received the North Carolina Award in Fine Arts, the highest honor bestowed in the arts.

The City of Durham declared Aug. 5, 2002, as Chuck Davis Day in recognition of his accomplishments and contributions to the arts; and again on Jan. 1, 2007, in honor of Davis' 70th birthday.

IF YOU GO!

What: Chuck Davis' African American Dance Ensemble
When: 7:30 p.m. Thursday
Where: Wright Auditorium
Cost: $10-$32
Call: 328-4788
Visit: www.ecu.edu/srapas
Edith Webber (1920 - 2010)

Edith Webber

Edith Hill “Edie” was born March 30, 1920, in Willows, county seat of Glenn County, Calif. the oldest of four children of Harry K. Hill and Dorothy Belleville Hill. Her father – genial, and a truly independent thinker – born in the Sierra Nevada gold mining country, started hammering beehives together at age nineteen in 1906, until he had built enough to become one of the large beekeepers in the Sacramento Valley. Her mother grew up near Pittsburgh and was herself an amazing person – in Willows a prolific gardener, a visitor to the sick, a project-pusher, a teacher of neighborhood children, a nurturer subject to both epiphany and righteous indignation, then in Berkeley after Harry’s death in 1956 a war resister finally jailed despite her age, a female Socrates “corrupting the youth.” Dorothy lived her final years in Greenville, dying here March 14, 1981.

Her two-years-younger brother, Oliver, tells of the day in his childhood when some neighborhood bullies were beating him up; Edie arrived and took charge of the situation – the bullies ran, Edie chased them. In high school she played cello and was member of the girl’s athletic club (playing basketball). She graduated from Glenn County High School in 1938 as valedictorian, then traveled out of California for the first time to visit relatives around Pittsburgh and in New Hampshire and maybe Maine.

After three semesters at San Jose State College majoring in Library Science, in 1940 she transferred to “Cal” (U.C. Berkeley)’s English department. Came the war and she came home to the bee business where, besides working in the field, she kept double-entry books for her dad and worked in a grocery store, saving enough money to return to Cal in 1946 and move into International House just off campus. Her husband-to-be Carroll Webber had also moved into “I-House”, and soon discovered the First Unitarian Church of Berkeley, a few blocks down Bancroft Way, where Edie taught Sunday School. International friendships and a common church turned out to be only the first of more and more common interests and ideals. On June 9, 1947, they were engaged. That summer, together they took an intensive Russian language course at Cal, and on Sept. 3, 1947, were married under a pepper tree outside her Willows home. She wore a simple blue wedding gown that Carroll bought in Sacramento.

Back at Cal for one more year, in June 1948 she and he obtained both General Secondary (teaching) Credentials and M.A.s (hers in English, his in Physics). Then, out of a hat full of teaching choices, they picked Surprise Valley Union High School in Cedarville (pop. a few hundred), in the isolated northeastern corner of California. White-faced Hereford cattle country. Four grades, 85 students in all. She taught all four years of English and kept the library. The students sometimes ran over her, though they knew she cared for them. That teaching try made a pretty miserable year for her; but she and Carroll had been planning to start a family then anyway (of six children, they then dreamed). The summer of ’49 they took a super, individually-tutored course of Spanish in Saltillo, Mexico (she got straight A’s, he got A’s and some B’s). That fall, the teacher job-market unexpectedly collapsed, so they moved back to the East Bay where Carroll substitute-taught in Oakland, Berkeley, and Richmond. Next spring the eminent John B. Condiffe invited them into his graduate seminar in International Economics (she got A, he got B). Their first child, Alice, was born in Willows in the fall. Lacking a substantial job in their chosen field, they came east, where Carroll’s parents in New Jersey came to know Edie well and to love her deeply. Then the bee business needed help, and from 1953 to 1956 they worked for her father, but his heart failed him one final time on August 16, 1956. Carroll declined taking over the bee business and instead returned to Cal, shifting from Physics to Mathematics. Their other daughter, Eleanor, was born in Willows in the fall, and soon there were four Webbers living in student housing in Albany (adjacent to Berkeley). For the next five years Edie worked in the parents’ co-op nursery alongside other student mothers, adding activities like door-to-door work for Democratic candidates and reading Great Books before going to a Great Books group. Summers she and Carroll helped work bees.

In 1959 he got his other M.A., in Math, then taught part-time at College of the Holy Names while trying to reach the Ph.D. In 1961, need to finance a growing family brought the four to Greenville’s East Carolina College (E.C.C.) in response to pretty good college salaries available from funds from Gov. Terry Sanford’s expanded sales tax. In 1962 Eleanor started first grade and Edie was hired by E.C.C.’s English department, where she taught for the next 23 years. Edie taught composition and grammar. Then she became one of the department’s specialists in teaching hard of hearing students, learning some of the basics of American Sign Language. When the East Carolina Gay Community needed a faculty sponsor for their on-campus activities, Edie was there for them.

She worked for peace and for justice and for the environment in this county and in this world, and on several fronts. She was one of the cofounders of the Greenville Peace Committee (GPC), with its major focuses against continuation of the Vietnam War and for the abolishing of nuclear weapons. It was affiliated for its first years with Mobilization for Survival, and she went to a number of its organizing conferences over the years, and offered public witness at scores of demonstrations in which GPC joined – including especially those at Seymour Johnson AFB, at the Greenville P.O., and at the Pentagon. She helped bring anti-war speakers to Greenville, among them Harold Johnson and Bill Sholar (from the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (C.O.s), Russell Ford (a C. O.), and John Swomley (professor of social ethics). She alone kept the minutes of GPC meetings and clipped media reports, her eleven GPC scrapbooks are now in the vast Peace Collection at Swarthmore College Library, at their request. She was on the board of Meadowbrook Daycare Center, the first center of its kind in eastern North Carolina, and drove a van to pick up children to carry them there in the morning. She taught in the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship Sunday school in the Y-Hut on campus in its halcyon days there. She bicycled to the United Nations for its first and second Special Sessions on Disarmament (1978, 1982). She walked (mostly, with some bicycling) from Belgium to Czechoslovakia (May 8-June 12, 1985) on the California-to-Moscow Walk of the People’s West German leg. She was arrested for joining the group protesting the School of the Americas’ murderous alumni, when the group “crossed the line” onto Fort Benning, Georgia. She co-edited “STEPS TOWARD PEACE”, Andy Rector's...
diary of the Buddhist-led walk which left New Orleans Jan. 1 and reached the United Nations June 7, 1982. That trek culminated June 12 in Central Park in the largest peace demonstration in history up to then – Edie was there.
(See http://www.clis.com/candetwo/homepage.html)

She served on Greenville's Bicycle Task Force's Education Committee and on its Recycling Committee for a number of years. She helped to allocate funds for emergency needs for Church Ministries United for several years.

On the Greenville Town Common today stands a large live oak tree, unlabeled. It's our community's Peace Tree, planted as a seven-foot sapling on Easter Sunday, March 30, 1986, in a ceremony with nearly a hundred gathered around, half of them having walked two to fourteen miles from six points of the compass. There were representatives of Catholic, Protestant (white and black), and Jewish congregations, as well as a Greenville Councilman and one of Congressman Walter Jones Sr.'s staffers, supporting Jones's telephoned message "May the peace movement flourish like this tree." The event had begun in the mind of Edith Webber, who'd learned the previous year of western Europe's Easter Star Walks. By happy coincidence, it was Edie's 66th birthday. Living without a car for fifteen or twenty years, she shopped by bicycle. Tandem trips with Carroll included some long ones not mentioned above: Madrid to Dublin to Amsterdam, Missoula to Indianapolis, Cheddar (England) to Hedingham Castle, Ejsberg (Denmark) to Copenhagen, Stuttgart to Geneva, Aosta (Italy) to Venice, Ljubljana (Slovenia) to Zagreb (Croatia), Budapest to Vienna, and Boise, Idaho to Corvallis, Oregon.

She was a born Unitarian, member since 1961 of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Greenville. She received the Citizens Community Service Award of Pitt County Concerned Citizens for Justice in 1995. She received the Best-Irons Humanitarian Citizen Award from the city of Greenville's Human Relations Council in 1998. The Little Willie Center's (LWC's) library is named the Edith Webber Library in recognition of her more than fifteen years with latchkey kids, mentoring, reading and listening to reading, helping with homework, and walking to the library with them. She rode her bicycle, or walked, from east Greenville to the LWC in west Greenville five days a week during those years. Aside from reading, leaders at the LWC credit her for raising their consciousness about nutrition and about the environment.

We turn, at last, to Edie's character and persona. One facet of her personality is shown in an incident of June 1984. She and Carroll, returning by tandem from Mobile, Alabama, visited Fort Benning's army museum. Cycling away, they were picked up and "detained" for showing a sign reading "PEACE WALK COMING TO WASHINGTON AND MOSCOW." A large olive-green pickup carried them and their bike to some headquarters deeper in the base, where they had to stand in a large room, some eight feet lower than a gruff officer on a platform. Carroll was scared and answered his questions in a shaky voice. Edie looked steadily at him and answered him in calm tones, at times using the phrase "I believe we have the right." After ten or fifteen minutes, they carried us clear out to the entrance gate and said that "Advertising is strictly forbidden on this base." Carroll long thought about – but never wrote – a letter to the Columbus Ga. newspaper explaining to tourists that they had to tear off their bumper stickers before driving into Fort Benning to avoid being arrested. Edie's quiet, natural bravery was shown again when she was the only one on the Walk of the People to vote for continuing across the Iron Curtain at the Rudolfstein Bridge, even though we hadn't yet found East German hosts on the other side.

But Edie's central strength, in the opinion of this writer, was her loving cheerfulness. It was magnetic. It was visible from a distance, for when she joined a group, one quickly saw that group smile and laugh and gesture actively. (This is what first struck Carroll and moved him to try to get acquainted when he looked across the dining room in I-House before he ever met her.) She loved being around people, and they of course sought her company. Many troubled men and women sought her out. On an eleven-deck cruise ship last month, even when she was rolling in a wheel-chair, often wordless from aphasia, Carroll, time and again, saw people look at Edie and smile back. He and members of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation have been blessed to have her nearby. The Unitarian minister J. Raymond Cope, who understood the human condition in its breadths and depths, joys and sorrows, depravity and nobility, better than anyone this writer has ever met or read about since Shakespeare, in his last letter to Edith and Carroll, described her in three words: "model of maturity." She died following heart-weakening pneumonia, at 1:03 p.m., Dec. 26, 2009, in the Intensive Care Unit of Imperial Point Medical Center, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Her bodily presence will be terribly missed, but her memory will live for a long, long time. And we are going to remember her and celebrate her life at a memorial service at 2 p.m. this Sunday, January 10th, at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation's meeting house, 131 Oakmont Dr., Greenville.

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UNC system officials review proposed tuition increases

Posted: Jan. 7 12:26 p.m.
Updated: Jan. 7 6:58 p.m.

The University of North Carolina Board of Governors on Thursday reviewed requests for tuition increases from the system's 16 campuses.

The annual process is somewhat different this year because the General Assembly set guidelines for tuition increases as part of negotiations last summer to erase a record deficit and reach a budget agreement. Usually, schools make requests based on their needs, and the Board of Governors makes adjustments.

Under the General Assembly's guidelines, a UNC campus must raise tuition for the 2010-11 school year by the lesser of 8 percent or $200. The extra money would go back to the state's General Fund, not the schools.

UNC President Erskine Bowles has proposed an alternative that would send the money to the schools, with half of it earmarked for need-based financial aid.

"The people getting squeezed are those in the middle," Bowles said, noting many middle-class families don't qualify for some forms of financial aid and wind up struggling to pay for their children's college education.

UNC-Chapel Hill has requested a $200 increase for in-state students, while North Carolina State University has asked for $150 and North Carolina Central University has requested $113. Fayetteville State University has asked for a $124 tuition increase, while East Carolina University requested a $90 increase.

The proposed tuition increases don't include the student fees each campus also charges.

Despite the fact that UNC-Chapel Hill and N.C. State are seen as offering some of the best values among U.S. universities, officials said more students are seeking financial aid, so the schools need the extra money from any tuition increase.

"If we don't get the 50 percent that's set aside for need-based aid, then we are going to have a much harder time meeting the need of the students," UNC-Chapel Hill Chancellor Holden Thorp said. "In fact, we may end up actually using more than 50 percent for need-based aid because that's the biggest hole we've got in the budget right now."

UNC-Chapel Hill has seen a 23 percent increase this year in the number of students applying for
financial aid, Thorp said.

Bowles would like the other half of the tuition increases to pay for various needs at the UNC campuses. The university system has cut its budget by almost $300 million in recent months and slashed administrative costs by more than 18 percent because of the state deficit.

"I think it is something that is unfortunately probably necessary," UNC-Chapel Hill senior Erik Russ said of a tuition increase. "You have to raise the money somehow, and unfortunately, tuition is probably the best way to do that."

UNC system administrators will review the requests before presenting them again to the Board of Governors next month for a final vote. Lawmakers would have to sign off on the increases later this spring before they could take effect.

Reporter: Erin Hartness
Photographer: Pete James
Web Editor: Matthew Burns

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NCSU supporters curious about chancellor pick

RALEIGH -- One of the most popular search terms on computers Thursday at N.C. State University - and at alumni keyboards, too - was "William R. Woodson" as the Wolfpack Nation scrambled to learn more about the man who is expected to be named chancellor today.

Many were cautiously optimistic about the pick, despite finding little on the Internet to satisfy their curiosity about Woodson, who rose so rapidly through the ranks at Purdue University that he didn't build a long track record in any leadership role.

"I discussed it with a few people, and he seems to be a fine pick. But that's largely based on hope, because there's very little to go on right now," said Richard H. Bernhard, a longtime professor in the Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering.

That hope is based on faith: in the NCSU search committee, several of whom Bernhard knows; in UNC-system President Erskine Bowles, who nominated Woodson to the Board of Governors from among the three finalists; and in the likelihood that Purdue, one of the most respected land-grant universities in the country, would surely have picked a good provost, Woodson's current job.

"Purdue is a good institution, and one that we like to be listed with," Bernhard said.

U.S. News & World Report ranks Purdue's engineering school 12th in the nation versus 31st for NCSU, for example. And, unlike NCSU, it's among the 62 members of the Association of American Universities, considered the top group of research universities in the U.S. and Canada.

Some on campus were planning to go a little farther than Google and the initial media reports.

"We're scholars, so we do our research, going to the Web - Googling him, basically - then we look on the Web of Science to learn more about his scholarly output," said Carol Hall, a professor of chemical and biomolecular engineering.

The Web of Science includes databases of scholarly research. Hall planned to log on Thursday night to learn more about Woodson's work on plant science.

Marie Davidian, a statistics professor, was writing a grant Thursday and could take time off only briefly to do a Google search for Woodson. She didn't find much, mainly his biography on Purdue's Web site, which she didn't find satisfying.

"I'm more interested in finding out how he operates, and I do have some buddies at Purdue I plan to check in with this weekend," she said.

Range of reactions

Postings on Web sites frequented by alumni also had more questions about Woodson than facts. Some worried that he didn't seem to have any ties to NCSU, or even North Carolina, or enough experience.
Others said that there didn't seem to be anything wrong with him and that he should be given a chance. Some said tapping someone outside the university was a good thing after the debacle over former state first lady Mary Easley's job last year that led to the resignations of Chancellor James Oblinger, the provost and chairman of the board of trustees.

At least one professor on campus Thursday who didn't have big questions about Woodson was E.Barclay Poling, a professor of horticulture. He worked with Woodson on the board of the American Society for Horticultural Science. Poling was leaving the board as Woodson was coming on as the president.

"My interactions with him were terrific," Poling said. "I think we're headed in a really good direction now."

jay.price@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4526
A big job

Amid all the controversy surrounding N.C. State University in the last year, it's been important to remember that the university has been, and will be, an important force for good in Raleigh, the Triangle, the state of North Carolina and, with its cutting-edge scientific research, the nation and the world. To serve the university as chancellor is to carry a monumental weight, and to have a high honor.

The next chancellor, as reported yesterday, is to be William "Randy" Woodson, Purdue University's top academic officer as provost and a 52-year-old veteran of posts at all levels of academia. Beginning in 1985 as a horticulture professor, Woodson moved up the ladder quickly, and in fact one faculty member observed that because he has been so successful, he has not spent a lot of time in one job. He has been provost since 2008.

This is a time for optimism at N.C. State. Purdue, in central Indiana, shares many of the same academic specialties with NCSU. It's a large public university, with sciences a strong suit. Woodson appears to understand the ways of the academy - the need to emphasize both teaching and research, the task of bringing strong-willed faculty members together.

His administrative experience is somewhat thin, and in the N.C. State job he takes a very significant challenge. With 31,000 students and 8,000 faculty members, he'll be running a major academic enterprise, and the university's Centennial Campus is a public-private partnership with special missions within the university mission. There are entrepreneurial ventures. There is a massive athletics program. And there are the usual pressures from alumni groups that a chancellor feels more keenly than any other person on faculty or staff. A strong personality is needed.

And yes, at NCSU, there is some troubling recent history. This opportunity came available for Woodson because of the forced resignation of former Chancellor James Oblinger, who was caught up in the process (a rather peculiar process, as it turned out) of hiring former North Carolina first lady Mary Easley under influence from former Gov. Mike Easley and his allies. A provost resigned as a result as well. The episode has been tangential to federal and state investigations.

But even with all that said, the job of chancellor in Raleigh is a spectacular opportunity for anyone who wants to make a mark in leadership in higher education. N.C. State has ambition for further greatness and strong faculty members to make that happen. It has a community surrounding it that takes pride in the institution and wants to support its endeavors. It has a large and enthusiastic alumni corps.

It is in need of not just competent leadership, but inspiring leadership, someone with a passion for appreciating what the university has done and a vision to see what more it can do. That is no small task, no routine challenge.

Because the chancellor selection process was secret, depriving the university community of the chance to get a closer look at finalists for the position in advance, Woodson now will undergo close scrutiny. In choosing someone outside the campus for the job, University of North Carolina system President Erskine Bowles lengthened the learning curve, although given the difficulties the university has had
(more the making of individuals, not the institution) an outside choice may prove prudent.

Woodson will need to carefully familiarize himself with North Carolina's political culture and the university's history. In that, he'll doubtless get advice from two NCSU alums: Jim Hunt, the former four-term governor, and William Friday, UNC system president emeritus. For now, the university community has reason to be optimistic about the leadership of Randy Woodson.
When Play Means Pay: Video Game Jobs On The Rise

by JOSHUA BROCKMAN

January 7, 2010

Imagine having a boss who encourages you to play games during the workday.

It's a reality for many people in the video game industry, including Todd Howard. At midday on a recent Friday, he was playing Fallout 3 in his office. When Howard, 30, first started at Bethesda Softworks in Rockville, Md., 15 years ago, his parents told him to have a backup plan.

He didn't need one.

Now he's the company's game director. Howard oversaw the creation of Fallout 3, a popular coming-of-age video game. As he demonstrates the game to a visitor on his Xbox 360, his avatar, a 10-year-old boy, is treated to a birthday party.

A woman's voice chimes in and remarks: "He's growing up so fast."

The company — a division of ZeniMax Media — is also having a teenage growth spurt of its own.

"For our company, there are certain areas where we are hiring very aggressively because we are growing rapidly," Howard says.

The recession forced some game studios to close or make sizable layoffs. But ZeniMax nearly doubled in size during the past year, growing from about 250 employees to more than 400, in part owing to its acquisition of another video game company.

Finding a job in the video game industry is a dream come true for many people who grew up playing games on computers and consoles. And the field is swiftly expanding as people turn to mobile devices like the iPhone and social networking sites like Facebook for entertainment.

Emerging From Adolescence

Analysts and developers point to a common thread: The entire video game universe is maturing.

"I'd say game industries are sort of coming out of their adolescence," says Drew Davidson, the director of the entertainment technology center at Carnegie Mellon University. "They're in their late teens and so there's still a lot of growing to do."

Game Developer Research says there are about 45,000 total employees in the U.S. video game industry, with an average salary of close to $80,000. Salaries can reach into the six figures, and programmers are among the highest-paid. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that employment for computer software engineers, some of whom develop video games, will grow by nearly a third in the next decade.

Video Gaming Degrees

Davidson says colleges around the country are tuned in. "We're seeing a huge upswing in terms of universities trying to offer degrees that focus around games or interactive media ... just because they're so popular."

More than 200 institutions from MIT to DigiPen Institute of Technology are offering courses or degrees in video games, according to the Entertainment Software Association, a trade group for the video game industry.

"The U.S. is the No. 1 video game market in the world," says Michael Gallagher, the chief executive officer for the ESA. "So, here at home we have a very strong market for employment in video games."

The hubs for the industry include Austin, Texas; Boston; Los Angeles; San Francisco; Seattle; North Carolina; and the Washington, D.C., metro area.

The job market is growing because of mainstream demand. Just look around — you can see people of all ages playing games on mobile phones. Social networking games are also wildly popular on Facebook. Some of the companies focused on this niche include Playdom, Playfish and Zynga, which..."
created the popular game FarmVille.

Broadband access and new digital distribution channels for games have also made it possible for small teams to develop games by working out of a coffee shop or someone's garage, Davidson says.

A Casual Culture

Howard, of Bethesda Softworks, says people also want jobs in the video game industry because a day at the office is casual — not corporate.

"Sometimes I equate it to an organized fraternity," Howard says. "We play games at lunch, we have a giant movie theater in the building, we have a pool table, and we have multiple video game set up.s"

They also have their own chef. So, employees effectively live at the office. It's an industry that values creative collaborations among artists, designers and programmers. The majority of jobs are full time with benefits, and it's a fluid career with people moving across the country, or the world, to take on new projects. But recruiter Mary-Margaret Walker says these patterns may change.

"I think we will see more consulting and more contracting and more virtual working," Walker says.

That means video game development teams may no longer work and play in the same physical space.

At the Bethesda Softworks headquarters, Howard works near his team of nearly 100 developers.

With an Xbox 360 controller in his hands, he says, "The greatest feeling in the world is making a game and then going to the store and seeing someone buy it. It's very special."

The journey from start to finish for a big console game can easily take about three years and cost more than $100 million. These high stakes — and new gaming platforms — are among the reasons smaller, independent companies are taking root to produce games for the future.

Related NPR Stories

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