THE DAILY CLIPS

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Ice day for a swim
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, January 21, 2010
The 14th annual “Polar Bear Plunge” was held Thursday at the East Carolina University’s Student Recreation Center. ECU students, faculty and staff jumped into the icy waters of the outdoor pool.
The Polar Bear Plunge started in 1997 as a part of the grand opening of the Student Recreation Center with 35 students taking the plunge. The event has grown significantly each year. The number of jumpers surpassed 500 in 2008 and closed in on 600 in 2009.
All jumpers were encouraged to take a canned food item and “Feed the Bear” with all donations going to the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina. Student participants received a raffle ticket for prizes, including a $150 Dowdy Student Stores gift certificate. And students donating a canned food item received a second raffle ticket. The first 500 jumpers received a T-shirt.
Following the jump, food was available for participants on the Student Recreation Center concourse while prizes were drawn and distributed.
Students also had the opportunity to learn about programs, activities and organizations at ECU through the “Get A Clue” involvement fair, which was held on the SRC basketball courts. The event was sponsored by Campus Recreation & Wellness, Campus Living & Dining, and University Unions.
Pirates reach into program's past to move ahead
By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, January 21, 2010
East Carolina University chose someone from its past to lead the school into its football future.
A week-long search by the university for a new head football coach ended Thursday with the hiring of 51-year-old ECU alum Ruffin McNeill as the next man to lead the Pirates and the 20th football coach in school history. McNeill most recently was the interim head coach at Texas Tech, where he guided the Red Raiders to a victory over Michigan State at the Alamo Bowl on Jan. 2. Before that, McNeill served as Tech's defensive coordinator under head coach Mike Leach.
McNeill replaces Skip Holtz, who announced he was leaving ECU last week to become the next head coach at South Florida. Holtz's late departure put considerable pressure on ECU athletic director Terry Holland to make a smart but fast choice in a market with few available candidates.
"You're always worried this late because you run into student-athlete recruitment and assistant coaches get taken, so the bowl becomes more shallow. But I had confidence we'd find the right person because I knew what Terry was doing and who he was evaluating," ECU chancellor Dr. Steve Ballard said after the ECU Board of Trustees made the new hire official shortly after a 5 p.m. emergency meeting inside the Spilman Building on campus.
"I was a little concerned about the timing, but when I saw the people we were evaluating, I thought we'd be fine," Ballard said.
After Middle Tennessee State head coach Rick Stockstill removed his name from consideration for the job on Tuesday morning, Holland appeared to have narrowed his search to four candidates by Wednesday night — McNeill, Oklahoma offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson, ECU offensive line coach Steve Shankweiler and Jacksonville Jaguars quarterbacks coach Mike Shula.
Wilson reportedly interviewed Wednesday night, while Shankweiler likely interviewed last Saturday. McNeill, a former ECU defensive back, defensive line coach and a 1980 graduate of the university, interviewed Thursday morning, and it was that interview which seemed to pave the way for his hire.
"His human skills and his interpersonal skills are A-plus, and I think you'll see that the minute you talk to him," Ballard said of McNeill. "I had a great hour-and-a-half with him today. I did my own referencing on these people,
and everybody who knows Ruffin says the same thing about him.” Holland, who made the second football coach hire of his six-year tenure at the school, joined the trustees meeting via teleconference. Holland fired John Thompson toward the end of the 2004 season before hiring Holtz in December of that year.

“Coach McNeill’s interview revealed his strong commitment to doing things the right way and his love of coaching young men to grow in every part of their lives,” Holland said. “His excitement for what ECU football can become in the future was contagious and his deep and abiding appreciation for what East Carolina University has meant to him and his family was truly moving.”

McNeil was named the interim coach at TTU after Leach was fired for the mistreatment of a player.

The first black head football coach in ECU history, McNeill will be introduced at a press conference at 11 a.m. today.

McNeill’s contract runs through the 2015 season. He will be paid a base salary of $200,000, but will also be compensated a minimum of an additional $200,000 for season ticket sales this year, with the amount increasing $25,000 each year. Pirate Club funds will add an additional $100,000 to the deal this year, also increasingly by $25,000 each year. There are also incentives based on academic progress, radio and television appearances and postseason appearances and performances.

Prior to his arrival at Texas Tech in 2000 as a linebackers coach, McNeill made coaching stops at Fresno State, UNLV, Appalachian State, ECU, North Alabama, Austin Peay and Clemson.

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@reflector.com or (252)329-9595.
ECU picks alum coach

East Carolina has chosen Ruffin McNeill - who worked as Texas Tech's interim coach in the team's recent bowl victory - to be its football coach, athletic director Terry Holland announced Thursday.

McNeill, a 51-year-old Lumberton native and former ECU defensive back, replaces Skip Holtz, who resigned Jan. 13 to become coach at South Florida after leading the Pirates to four bowl games and two Conference USA championships in five seasons.

The executive committee of the ECU Board of Trustees, acting for the full board, approved the appointment Thursday evening. The board will consider McNeill's contract at a regular meeting next month, according to a news release.

"Coach McNeill's interview revealed his strong commitment to doing things the right way and his love of coaching young men to grow in every part of their lives," Holland said in a statement released Thursday night. "His excitement for what ECU football can become in the future was contagious and his deep and abiding appreciation for what East Carolina University has meant to him and his family was truly moving."

McNeill took over as interim coach when Texas Tech fired coach Mike Leach for allegedly mistreating a player. The Red Raiders eventually selected former Auburn coach Tommy Tuberville as the permanent head coach, and McNeill was not retained on the staff.

Since playing for the Pirates in the late '70s, McNeill has worked as a defensive aide at eight schools, including ECU in 1992, Clemson for two seasons in the mid '80s and Appalachian State in the mid '90s. He went to Texas Tech in 2000 and was promoted to defensive coordinator in 2007.

ECU plans a news conference to introduce McNeill as coach this morning, according to media relations director Tom McClellan.

McNeill landed the job after overtures with several established coaches didn't pan out. Middle Tennessee State coach Rick Stockstill was believed to be interested earlier in the week but eventually withdrew from consideration.

McNeill led Texas Tech to a 41-31 Alamo Bowl win over Michigan State earlier this month.

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Murder-mystery dinner fits Brook Valley to a 'T'
By Kelley Kirk
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Thursday, January 21, 2010

If you’re a consumer of fast-paced comedy and enjoy it with a side of murder, then “Murder on the 19th Green” is on the menu.
ACATS, which stands for Actors, Clowns and Troubadours, will present “Murder on the 19th Green” at 7 p.m. Saturday and 1:30 p.m. Sunday at Brook Valley Country Club. The event is a dinner-theater performance. Fictional golf pro Sam Nibblick has met his demise in “19th Green,” and it’s up to a cast of six to figure out “whodunnit.”
“We want the audience to have fun and enjoy themselves,” said Ernie Lubiani, who co-wrote the play with Bob Gurganus. Lubiani added that the show — which is partially improvisational — will last about 45 minutes and that the audience may be put in the hot seat for questioning about Nibblick’s untimely death.
“We chose Brook Valley because they have the right kind of dining room,” Lubiani said.
Attendees of the show will enjoy dinner or lunch, depending on which day they attend, before the theater portion begins.
On the menu for Saturday is whole-grain mustard crusted Atlantic salmon, rosemary pork loin, whipped red potatoes, green beans amandine and dessert. Sunday’s meal includes bronzed tilapia, artichokes, citrus caper butter chicken forestiere, rosemary roasted potatoes and a vegetable medley. Close to the end of the meal, the audience will have their theater appetite whetted as “Murder on the 19th Green” begins.
Lubiani said the cast members are all local residents with many years of theater experience. He himself plays a bumbling lead detective — a Colombo type — who seems ill-prepared to solve a crime, let alone a murder.
The other actors include T.J. Walker, Julianne Huff, Tonya Furtado, Kathryn Page and Colleen Tetterton.
“Julianne went to the Nebraska School of Theater. T.J. is an ECU graduate in theater who lead the improv group at ECU for eight years,” Lubiani said. Page recently played one half of the “Odd Couple” production by the Ayden Community Theater.
ACATS was founded in 1995, originally as a marketing and PR company. Lubiani says there are goals to bring live theater to eastern North Carolina.
“We have developed a circuit theater group that can travel to Roanoke, Goldsboro and Elizabeth City to do performances as well as assist in developing local theater, including establishing a children’s theater for the area,” Lubiani said.

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If you Go!
What: “Murder on the 19th Green”
When: 7 p.m. Saturday and 1:30 p.m. Sunday
Where: Brook Valley County Club, 311 Oxford Road
Cost: $25 for members, $30 for others
Call: 756-4400
Duke research, Hollywood glory

DURHAM -- Only 5 years old, Clay Bowden isn't aware of the drama surrounding the drug that keeps him alive.

But he can watch the movie, which is released today.

"Extraordinary Measures," starring Harrison Ford and Brendan Fraser, tells a fictionalized account of how a real drug came to market in 2006 and saved hundreds of youngsters, including Bowden, afflicted with the rare metabolic disorder Pompe disease.

And though movie trailers boast that the film is inspired by a true story - Fraser's character, John Crowley, is real - the drug development occurred at Duke University by scientists who look and behave nothing like the crotchety loner Ford plays.

"I'm incredibly proud of what we've done," said Dr. Priya Kishnani, a pediatric geneticist who helped lead clinical trials at Duke that resulted in the drug's regulatory approval.

She is frustrated that Duke was written out of the movie, but Kishnani said she's pleased that attention is being drawn to Pompe disease, which had been a childhood death sentence before the drug was available.

In the movie, credit for the drug's development goes to Ford's character, Dr. Robert Stonehill, a make-believe angry scientist whose genius is unappreciated until Crowley arrives.

The movie character and real-life Crowley is a Harvard-educated bio-tech executive and father of two children diagnosed with Pompe. After his children grew sick, Crowley quit his job and raised venture capital money to sponsor what he thought was a promising drug candidate.

In fact, the drug Crowley backed never made it out of the laboratory. Instead, Genzyme, the pharmaceutical company that bought Crowley's start-up, pressed ahead with a more effective therapy based on Duke's science.

That treatment replaces an enzyme that people with Pompe disease do not produce at all, or at severely low levels.

The enzyme prevents the buildup of the starch glycogen, much as insulin prevents the buildup of glucose. As glycogen accumulates, it degenerates muscles.

Babies born with Pompe were destined to die within their first year. It was also eventually fatal to older children and adults whose disease surfaced later.

Effort takes flight

Duke researchers began pursuing treatments for Pompe disease in the 1990s, led by Dr. Yuan-Tsong
Chen, a pediatric geneticist who used DNA technology in the ovary cells of Chinese hamsters to produce the missing enzyme.

The Duke team first tested the drug in quail that were so impaired they couldn't stand or even roll over. The enzyme worked, and one of the birds flew.

In 1999, Duke began clinical trials in humans. Three children were enrolled; one responded well, and the other two eventually died. Given the lethal nature of Pompe, those odds of survival were a huge improvement.

Overwhelmed with interest from desperate parents - including Crowley, who breached ethical considerations with unsuccessful attempts to get his children enrolled in the early tests - Duke led a second trial. Again, it showed promise.

"With the experience we gained from the earlier trials, we learned several lessons," Kishnani said. "The earlier we started, the better the results."

The third and largest clinical trial had the strongest results, and the Food and Drug Administration granted approval for the drug, Myozyme, in 2006.

Kishnani said it was a heated time. Parents throughout the world called Duke or simply showed up in Durham seeking the enzyme infusions to save their children. But the drug was difficult to make and in short supply, so it was reserved for clinical trial participants and a few babies who would otherwise have died.

Clay Bowden, of Cumberland County, was among the lucky few. Born before the drug was approved, but too late to participate in the clinical trial, Clay received Myozyme at the age of 3 months under a so-called compassionate use waiver from the FDA.

The road to help

Now, five years later, he makes a two-hour trip with his grandmother, Rebecca, from Linden to Duke every week for infusions. While Clay plays video games and watches movies, an intravenous line drips Myozyme into his body through a port on his stomach. It's a regimen he'll keep for the rest of his life.

A spirited kindergartner, he has a speech impairment and wears braces on both feet. But he plans to playT-ball again this spring.

"It's a miracle for him," Rebecca Bowden said.

Kishnani said work on the drug continues, as researchers try to find ways to boost its effect and get it to babies sooner. The Duke team is also working to get Pompe disease added to the battery of metabolic disorders screened for at birth.

The movie, she said, could help in that effort.

"It brings about great exposure," she said, even if the picture doesn't tell the full story.

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Campus togetherness

It has always made sense, this notion of N.C. State University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill joining forces in some areas. And indeed, it's already happening among faculty members who work on research projects and papers cooperatively. Now, trustees from each school have appropriately gotten together to talk over additional ways their institutions can work together.

One example cited by Bob Winston, chair of the UNC-CH trustees, is the standardization of computer systems that deal with human resources and finances. Each university estimates there may be savings of $1 million apiece and perhaps more in streamlining information technology.

Both universities have large student bodies and large faculties, and though NCSU is perceived as primarily a school of science, engineering and agriculture, it also has a large liberal arts range of study. In Chapel Hill, liberal arts have been a foundation but the sciences obviously are plentiful in courses of study and substantial in the number of students enrolled.

The idea of getting together for some cost-saving collaboration came to bloom last summer with a call from N.C. State trustees' chairman Lawrence Davenport to Winston. With the university system's budget looking at relatively big cuts thanks to the economic downturn, its component institutions are trying to find savings.

The good thing here is that many scholars and administrators at the two campuses know each other and can share ideas in a rather seamless way. Those kinds of ideas don't wear school colors or sit in the stands or play on a team. They're all nonpartisan and uniformly encouraged by true leaders. And for those who believe the occupants of "the academy" keep their heads in the clouds, here's a chance to show that when it comes to practical application of scholarship and principles of good management, they're right here on Earth.