THE DAILY CLIPS

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McNeill settles in

New ECU coach gets reacquainted with Greenville

BY NATHAN SUMMERS
The Daily Reflector

Goodwill recently accepted a sizable donation of Texas Tech athletic apparel and memorabilia.

After 10 years on the Red Raider football coaching staff, Ruffin McNeill said he'd piled up trunkloads of it. Not much time has passed since McNeill reunited with his alma mater, but already the new East Carolina head football coach said he's unloaded all of his Texas Tech gear, some of it going to Goodwill and some going with McNeill's wife to church to be handed out.

The handful of Texas Tech staffers McNeill brought with him to ECU have likely parted with their Tech stuff, too.

The only evidence remaining of McNeill's decade-long marriage to the TTU program, in fact, is one pair of Under Armour sneakers McNeill said he simply couldn't leave in Texas.

A Greenville resident for the third time — after playing at ECU in the late 1970s, McNeill returned for one season as an assistant coach in the '90s — McNeill is looking to start working on a pile of purple and gold paraphernalia and, he hopes, a pile of wins.

McNeill is still living out of a hotel room until his wife picks a house in town, and the coach's office is still so new to him it's practically barren, although he is quick to point out that his purple tie collection has already been started.

But even in the earliest stages, McNeill said it's nice to be back home, so much so he said he spent part of Super Bowl Sunday driving around greater Greenville and Pitt County, just to see how much has changed since the former ECU strong safety last called Greenville home.

"My dad and my home that I was raised in are still here in North Carolina," said McNeill, a Lumberton native who also has a mother-in-law, sister-in-law, two daughters and a brother still living in North Carolina.

That means the twice yearly trips by the McNeills from Texas to North Carolina will no longer be necessary.

"It was not tough to leave Texas. Moving back to North Carolina was not hard," McNeill said of his return home to coach the Pirates, his first-ever head coaching job. "We had some great times, had a lot of success out there, and all that was very, very special, and I'm

See MCNEILL, B3
not neglecting that. But this was one of the most honorable and humbling deals I could ever be a part of."

Now that signing day has passed and the March 22 kickoff of spring drills is better than a month away, McNeill is finally getting around to deciding what his new surroundings will look like, both in his office and inside Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium.

While he's able, McNeill is trying to enjoy the few free moments he's had.

"On Sunday, we had some time off, so I had a chance to get in the truck and ride around a little bit," McNeill said. "I rode out to Winterville and Ayden, and had a chance to view Greenville from a new, family perspective. I was never out of touch with North Carolina, never out of touch with the progress of East Carolina football and the athletics program."

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@reflector.com or (252)329-9595.
Public Forum

Library collections display county’s heritage

My wife and I were privileged to attend the kickoff celebration of the 250th anniversary of the foundation of Pitt County at Joyner Library on the ECU campus and were thrilled to hear and see the history of our county.

Roger Kammerer gave a tremendous chronological history of The Daily Reflector and its importance in the development of Greenville and the surrounding communities. The exhibit on the second floor of prints of photographs from the Reflector since the 1940s gave us a glimpse of the changes that have taken place. A video conversation with David Whichard and Stuart Savage tells us about the pictures and events of the time. This collection from the paper has been given to Joyner through the generosity of the Whichard family and will be a valuable source of information for future generations. This exhibit will be on display until March 29.

The third floor houses the 250th anniversary exhibit from the vaults of Special Collections and the fourth floor displays a very special 250th anniversary collection of special resources from ECU’s own North Carolina Collection. Maury York and his associates have done a magnificent job of putting together this exhibit of maps, legal documents, memoirs and other artifacts of the county’s history. These will run through July 31 and April 30 respectively. A printed brochure allows you to move through the exhibits at your own leisure.

Congratulations and thanks to Dr. Larry Boyer and his staff for their endeavors to bring Pitt County’s rich history to life. Every citizen of the county should take advantage of this opportunity to see these collections of the past. It is our heritage in review.

GREENVILLE BANKS JR.
Greenville
Private loans = better options

SOUTHPORT -- I have just retired after almost 35 years as Duke University's director of financial aid. I remain keenly interested in the landmark debate over college loans now making its way through Congress. The result of this debate could radically change the way students obtain loans for college.

The Obama administration has proposed to eliminate all private student lenders and make the federal government solely responsible for the management, processing and timely delivery of all student loans via the Federal Direct Loan Program. This would be a very serious mistake.

In a perfect world, students and parents would not be required to borrow to achieve their educational dreams. Since we do not live in a perfect world, immediate and affordable access to student loans will remain a critical aspect of our students' ability to support their educational goals.

I believe that it is critical for private lenders, including state lending agencies, banks and approved private companies, to have an important role in providing students with a variety of common sense options when borrowing for college.

First and foremost, eliminating private lending will cost students money. As currently configured, student lending is a competitive market, and private lenders compete on price and service. Over time this has saved borrowers money by reducing their costs of borrowing and, therefore, their debt upon graduation.

Second, in a market in which the federal government is the only lender, eliminating competition will lead to a reduction in services to students. In a competitive loan market, students can choose a lender based on price and the lenders' array of services. Should the federal government become the only lender, students will lose these options.

Not only will students be disadvantaged by the elimination of private lending, colleges and universities will be as well. Should the federal government become the only source of loans, institutions will be required to set up administrative structures to manage these programs locally. These services and the associated costs are now covered by private lenders. As campus costs increase, so will tuition.

The elimination of private lending will also have an effect on the federal deficit. Private lenders now provide the resources required to originate and disburse student loans. If private lenders are eliminated, all necessary loan resources will have to be provided by the government. Given the recent and alarming increase in the federal budget deficit, the additional deficit increase that will be caused by the Obama proposal can and should be avoided.

Finally, eliminating private lenders will put an end to innovation in the marketplace. Much in the way that maintaining these qualities are crucial in the health care sector, they are equally imperative in the
student loan industry.

Private lenders driven by marginal profit opportunities have worked over time with institutions to create new and innovative lending programs. At Duke, students and their parents benefited from two such programs. This kind of innovation will not be available in a market controlled solely by the Department of Education. This is evidenced by the fact that institutional participation in the Direct or Federal Lending Program dropped over time from a high of 40 percent to almost 20 percent nationally. Institutions chose to move to private lending because of the services and savings provided to students.

For students in North Carolina and around the nation, it is crucial that our U.S. senators vote to maintain the private lending option. Students and parents will benefit from the preservation of this vital program.

James A. Belvin Jr. is former director of financial aid at Duke University.
ASU's book rentals

The complaint in the Feb. 2 letter "Golden books" about textbook costs at Wake Tech could be echoed by most college students in this state. Except those at Appalachian State University. Texts are rented there each term upon presentation of students' schedules in the bookstore, then returned at the end. Since at least 2004, when our first child entered as a freshman, until 2009, when our third child entered as a freshman, we may have spent $600 total on books. These were mostly for the second child, a science major needing lab workbooks.

Instead of asking why texts are so expensive at North Carolina schools, why not ask why they are not at Appalachian State? Students, especially those at technical colleges due to job loss, would greatly appreciate being able to rent books for a class. It's been done for years at ASU.

Rane Winslow

Raleigh
N.C. students' AP test scores beat U.S. average

More than 17 percent of the state's 2009 high school graduates scored a 3 or higher on at least one Advanced Placement exam, outpacing the percentage of students nationally who performed that well.

Across the country, 15.9 percent of students scored at least a 3 on a test in which 5 is the highest score.

AP tests are a gauge of how many students take challenging courses in high school. Colleges and universities routinely offer students college credit for AP courses on which they receive a score of 3 or higher. White students are overrepresented among AP test-takers, while black students are underrepresented, say data released Wednesday by the College Board.

A little more than 60 percent of the state's class of 2009 was white, while 72 percent of the AP test-takers in that class were white. More than 29 percent of the graduating class was black, but only 12.9 percent of the AP test-takers were black.

The percentage of black graduates who had taken AP exams dropped slightly, to 12.9 percent from 13.1 percent in 2008.

June Atkinson, state superintendent of public instruction, said she was pleased with students' performance, though the gap between white and minority students "is a nagging problem for us."

"We're going to have to look at more ways in which we can support our African-American students so they can be as successful as others in scoring 3s and above," she said.

The racial differences are an example of the academic achievement gap that also has white students scoring better on state standardized tests and graduating at higher rates than minority students, said Stephen Jackson, a policy analyst with the N.C. Budget and Tax Center, part of a nonprofit that advocates for low-income families. Jackson was a co-author of a recent report on the persistence of the achievement gap a decade after the state promised to close it.

The problem can be traced to segregation within schools, Jackson said, where white students are funneled more often toward challenging courses.

"It's a huge problem that goes back to the achievement gap in the early grades," Jackson said.
Private colleges looking to rein in financial aid

By Eric Gorski, AP Education Writer | February 9, 2010

In the last year, the nation's private colleges have laid off staff, shelved construction projects, slashed sports teams and turned down thermostats to cut costs. But student financial aid has kept flowing.

Now the weak economy is forcing some institutions to limit their generosity after many of them doubled or even tripled financial aid over the last decade to attract more applicants and reduce student debt.

Two of the nation's most selective private colleges -- Dartmouth and Williams -- announced they would no longer offer aid packages that allow students of any income to attend without taking out loans. Other schools are expected to follow suit, meaning many middle-class students will have to take on more debt.

Situations vary depending on the school, but experts expect financial aid at private schools to be less generous than last year while colleges increase tuition by 4 to 6 percent.

Many colleges dipped into savings last year to substantially increase student aid out of concern their enrollments would plunge because of the economic downturn -- fears that went unrealized at most schools.

"There's a bit of a feeling that in increasing aid, maybe colleges went a little overboard because there was a lot of panic a year ago," said Roland King, vice president of public affairs for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. "I think it's going to be a more austere year."

On Monday, Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H., became the latest prestigious private institution to announce sweeping cutbacks in the wake of the recession. The Ivy League school said it will lay off about 76 staff as part of a plan to close a projected $100 million budget gap.

The Dartmouth board also approved a 4.6 percent increase in undergraduate tuition, room and board, and fees, raising the annual tab to $52,275 -- the smallest increase in the past five years, officials said.

The school said it would increase its financial aid budget 10 percent to help offset the tuition increase. But one big part of the aid program will be cut: The plan to offer loan-free financial aid for students of all income levels beginning with the class entering in fall 2011.

"The simple reality is that we just can't afford that anymore," said Dartmouth President Jim Yong Kim.

Between 30 and 40 schools, most of them private, replaced loans with grants or scholarships for students on financial aid in recent years. But that was when college endowments were posting record gains. Dartmouth's endowment lost 23 percent of its value last fiscal year, falling to $2.8 billion.

Over the weekend, the Dartmouth board voted to reinstate loans of $2,500 to $5,500 per academic year for financial aid recipients from families with incomes above $75,000. Students from families that earn less will continue to receive free tuition and loan-free aid packages.

The move comes a week after Williams College, a private liberal arts school in Williamstown, Mass., became the first school to announce it would rescind a no-loans policy, starting in fall 2011. Williams has said the neediest students will not be required to take out any loans, but it has not announced details.
"Our financial aid program will continue to be one of the most generous anywhere, as it should be, and we are convinced that Williams will remain financially attractive to aided students at all levels of income," interim President Bill Wagner wrote in a Jan. 31 letter.

Other elite private schools are sticking with their no-loan policies, at least for now. Among them is Amherst College, which has doubled its low-income student enrollment in recent years, in part through more transfers from community colleges and more international students.

"But we also have to remain accessible to the middle class, where we had under-representation and where there is so much talent," Amherst President Anthony Marx said. "Maintaining a no-loan policy seems to help us make Amherst more accessible to the middle class and also eliminate the constraints of debt on those students' career choices."

Amherst is asking students on financial aid to contribute more of their summer earnings to their education -- a step that's anticipated at Swarthmore College and other schools.

Most private schools, however, can only dream of being as wealthy as Amherst, one of 54 colleges and universities in the U.S. with endowments of more than $1 billion.

Schools facing greater financial difficulties might engage in "leveraging" -- sweetening the pot for students who can pay a larger chunk of their tuition in a bid to influence enrollments and improve their bottom lines, said Mark Kantrowitz, a financial aid expert and publisher of the FinAid and FastWeb web sites.

Lauren Asher, president of the Berkeley, Calif.-based Institute for College Access and Success voiced a similar concern.

"If you have to cut back -- and that's a big if -- then focusing your available resources on those who need it the most is the right way to go," she said. "However, some colleges may take this economic crisis as license to spend more on students with less need to attract students who are paying a larger share of their tuition dollars ... That's a real danger."

Few people pay the full sticker price at private schools, she said, and it's a positive development that some schools are becoming more transparent about how much students are expected to borrow.

Most private schools are in the process of setting their budgets for the next fiscal year and have yet to announce details on tuition and student aid projections. Some plan to offer more financial aid, in part because they plan to admit more students or raise tuition.

Rice University in Houston plans a modest tuition increase and an increase to need-based financial aid. Rice President David Leebron said the school remains committed to a financial aid package that includes eliminating loans for families with incomes of less than $80,000, and capping total loans for four years of college at $10,000.

"It's a challenging time," Leebron said. "For us, at least, it's so fundamental to who we are that we remain attractive to middle- and lower-income students, we don't contemplate major changes."

Other colleges are looking to hold the line on aid. Colorado College's endowment declined by 19 percent last year to $400 million, leading to staff cuts and elimination of the football program.

Colorado College President Richard Celeste said the liberal arts school in Colorado Springs plans an "extremely modest tuition increase" and a financial aid increase to match. But beyond that, the college will not expand aid except for setting aside extra money for existing students in financial straits, he said.
"What we want to count on for our students and our families is a stable outlook for financial aid," Celeste said. "Obviously, I'd very much like to increase it, but I need to have the money first."

(This version CORRECTS Corrects spelling of association spokesman to King, instead of Kinge. Moving on general news and financial services.)

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Does anybody meet their future mate on campus anymore?
Posted 2/10/2010 7:09 PM EST

Two stories in our paper this week and a Valentine’s Day pitch make me ask: Does anybody meet their spouse on campus anymore? First comes an explanation of how a gender imbalance on college campuses is affecting male-female romantic relationships. The question then comes a story today by my colleague Sharon Jayson, who writes that the Internet has overtaken almost all the ways people meet. (The exception: meeting through friends.) Several people who responded to Sharon’s request for "how we met" stories included college stories. But in most cases, the couples met and married years ago. Of the more recent relationships on campus, one actually began in grade school and another was helped along by Facebook. Thus, my question.

Meanwhile, one potential answer comes from a public relations representative named Bob Brody who e-mailed me with a hunch about why Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, which he represents, seems to have a "higher rate of matrimony" than other colleges. Campus officials estimate as many as six in 10 students meet their future mate on campus. (They didn’t provide data on their online school — which could be enlightening given the findings in Sharon’s story.)

His theory is based on the school’s Christian heritage. "Students at religious schools often share similar values, backgrounds and plans," he wrote. "Elsewhere, students may be more focused on career aspirations than on starting families."

I’d be interested in hearing what others think about that.

Brody also referenced research conducted in 2004 by University of Texas at Austin sociologist Norval Glenn showing that just 15% of married or divorced women who graduated from college today met their first spouse in college, a drop from 40% in the years leading up to 1955. Glenn, who analyzed data as principal investigator for a National Fatherhood Initiative National Marriage Survey, told me via e-mail that the data on men was more complicated: Until recently, he wrote, a smaller percentage of male
(compared with female) college graduates married someone they met in
college, but recently, the male percentage has become higher (about 20%, he
recalls). "The male percentage went down pretty steadily before it turned
up," he said.
Glenn agreed with me that the higher education gender gap on some
campuses probably plays a role. That, and the fact that the average age at
marriage is increasing. "College just isn’t the happy hunting grounds for
women that it used to be, but the few guys who want to marry early are in a
market that is favorable to them," he said.
Among college friends I swap holiday cards with, just two remain wed to
their college sweethearts (A shout-out here for Bob and Jane in Cincinnati
and Debbie and Mike in Milwaukee). The rest either did not meet their
future mate in college. Or, like my husband, they’re now divorced from said
person. Then again, I’ve got two 20-something nieces who are, by all
appearances, head-over-heels in love with the guys they met en route to their
bachelor’s degrees.
Readers, what do you see happening?

Mary Beth Marklein's page USA Today