THE DAILY CLIPS

February 14, 2008

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by the East Carolina University News Bureau from:

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ECU student eliminated from 'American Idol'  

By Kathryn Kennedy  
The Daily Reflector  

Thursday, February 14, 2008  

She won't be the next Kelly Clarkson or Carrie Underwood, but an East Carolina University student competing to become an "American Idol" returned from Hollywood positive and optimistic.  

Wilmington native and sophomore Emily-Louise Minor was eliminated on Tuesday night's show. She finished in the top 80.  

Minor said the judges deemed her "cute and sweet with a good voice," but it wasn't enough.  

"I think I was too normal," she said. "I didn't really have a story. I'm just a normal college student and sorority girl. That's not really what they were looking for."  

Minor's TV appearance lasted a good bit shy of her 15 minutes — she was only seen in a line of contestants who'd just been eliminated.  

Her performances of Aretha Franklin's "Until You Come Back to Me" and country music group Sugarland's song "Stay" weren't featured on the program.  

"A lot of people don't realize (I've been cut) yet," she said. "They came home to Wilmington with me and filmed a whole thing but never even showed it."  

Nevertheless, Minor made the most of the California life. Because they let her go midweek, she changed her plane ticket and saw the sites: celebrity homes, the Hollywood stars, Rodeo Drive.  

"That was the best part, to be honest," she said with a laugh.  

Also beneficial was the time spent during rehearsal with a voice coach and pianist, she said. And even her competition was encouraging.  

"Everyone's really supportive of each other," Minor said, recounting the tale of how they all rallied around a girl who lost her voice.  

"It's kind of hard to make friends because you really are competing," she added. "You don't know how long you'll have to get to know them."  

Judges Paula Abdul, Randy Jackson and Simon Cowell also got rave reviews from Minor.  

"When the camera's not rolling it's great," she said. "They'd sit and talk to us Paula was adorable." However, Simon's still her favorite.  

For now, Minor says she'll stay in school and continue singing with local group the Johnny Dollar Band.
But as for the future? She may give the competition another go.

"It's going to be on for a long time," she said. "American Idol's not going anywhere."

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Find this article at:
http://www.reflector.com/local/content/news/stories/2008/02/14/IdolOut.html
Letter: Heart Month provides gift of hope

The Daily Reflector

Thursday, February 14, 2008

February is American Heart Month and a good time to remind the increasing number of heart patients in Greenville and Pitt County that they are not alone in their recovery.

Mended Hearts, affiliated with the American Heart Association, is a national non-profit organization offering the gift of hope to heart patients, their families and caregivers for more than 50 years.

Locally, Mended Hearts Chapter 23 has local volunteers, heart patients themselves, who are trained visitors and offer this same gift of hope in partnership with Pitt County Memorial Hospital.

One might say "we've been there, done that" when it comes to successfully managing the challenges of this often overwhelming disease. We invite any heart patient, family member or caregiver to let us know if we can help, either through a visit or by attending our regularly scheduled meetings on the first Thursday of every month, except during the summer.

Mended Hearts may be reached locally by phone or by visiting the national Web site.

BOB DOUGHER

president, Chapter 23

Greenville

Find this article at:
http://www.reflector.com/opin/content/news/opinion/stories/2008/02/14/FORUM_Dough.html
Wis. College to Give Bikes to Freshmen

RIPON, Wis. — A tiny liberal arts college here hopes it has found an answer to a nagging shortage of campus parking: a bicycle giveaway.

If incoming freshmen promise not to bring a car to campus for a full year, Ripon College will give them a Trek 820 mountain bike, a helmet and a lock — a $400 value.

"We're a residential college with a beautiful, historic campus in the middle of a small town," said President David Joyce, an avid cyclist. "Paving it over was not an option I was willing to consider."

He hopes the 1,000-student campus' "Velorution Program" will protect it from building more parking lots.

"We obviously live in a car culture. That's not about to change," Joyce said. "But if a significant number of students learn that a car isn't a necessity at this stage of their lives, that's good enough for me."

Last fall, for the first time in Ripon College history, the number of parking permit applications exceeded the 400 permits available, Joyce said. The city approved a measure to close overnight street parking on every street through and adjacent to the campus.

The college, founded in 1851 and located about 70 miles northwest of Milwaukee, teamed with Fond du Lac/Oshkosh Cyclery, Trek and other companies to start the bicycle program.

Friends, trustees and alumni donated about $60,000 to buy 200 bicycles to give away to an expected 300 incoming freshmen, said Cody Pinkston, a spokesman for the school.

Historically, about 100 freshman arrive without cars, so accepting the bike will be a "no-brainer" for them, he said.

"There is not a strong bicycle culture here with students. That is what we are trying to engender."
Canine caregivers
Highly trained dogs offer new life to autistic children

By Gracie Bonds Staples
Cox News Service

Thursday, February 14, 2008

Atlanta — Matthew Plunk pulls away from Ajax but can't go more than 2 1/2 feet, the length of the tethering strap securing him to the Great Pyrenees-boxer mix.

This, his parents say, is just one of the benefits of having an assistance dog to help their mildly autistic son navigate not just their Norcross, Ga., home but the world outside.

Before they got Ajax, Jennifer Plunk said, Matthew was prone to darting away, especially if he became frightened or upset. And when he was in the middle of a meltdown, behavior common in children suffering from Asperger's syndrome such as Matthew, he was inconsolable.

Not with Ajax. The dog is trained to recognize the situation, and he moves in to nuzzle 7-year-old Matthew to avert the behavior.

Matthew was diagnosed with Asperger's at age 3. He was socially aloof and moved constantly, Plunk said. When the family ventured away from their home, people stared at him, and Plunk imagined they saw just another over-indulged brat — and a mother badly in need of parenting classes.

Now people see Ajax tethered to her son and are less judgmental and more empathetic, she said.

When she saw a news special about assistance dogs, she knew then that "this could be something huge for Matthew."

Within months of receiving Ajax last year, Plunk said, Matthew started to change.

"He's more calm and comfortable in his skin," she said. "He's interested in what's going on around him, more in tuned with people."

Kelly Martin hopes her son Carter can be so lucky. She believes an assistance dog could help him live a more regular life, too.

That freedom, however, comes with a $13,000 price tag, the price charged by 4 Paws for Ability. The Ohio-based nonprofit, where the Plunks got Ajax, trains service dogs for children and adults with various disabilities.

"It would be his own personal guide into this crazy world we live in," Martin said. "This dog will give Carter and my family back a lot of freedoms that we've had to forego because it is too hard for Carter to do normal things."

Getting a diagnosis
Kelly Martin first noticed her son was different during the summer of 2006. Carter was 2, but unlike other kids his age, his vocabulary was limited to "mom," "dad," "bubba," "mine" and "no." "That was the extent of it," Martin said. "No sentences."

That summer, the high school teacher and equestrian coach began investigating why her son wasn't talking, why he preferred playing alone and why he was having constant meltdowns.

A series of tests confirmed his mother's suspicions: Carter has, among other things, severe attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism.

Though Carter doesn't entirely fit the mold of a typical autistic child — he bonds with adults and shows emotion — his communication and social skills are almost nonexistent.

Therapeutic animals

While looking for ways to help Carter, Martin enrolled her son in a therapeutic horseback riding program at Sonrise Camp in Gainesville, Ga.

In the hours and days immediately following his therapy sessions, Martin said, she noticed Carter had fewer meltdowns.

She wondered about the possibility of having that kind of therapy available continuously.

Martin was investigating the impact of dog therapy on children when she came across testimonials, including one from Plunk, on the Internet.

"They were moms just like me with kids just like mine," she remembered. "I said, 'Oh my gosh, that can be Carter. I can take him to church without people staring at me, to the grocery story without him having meltdowns.'"

Martin filled out an application, and in December, 4 Paws called to say she'd been approved.

"That was the best day ever," she said.

Disrupting behavior

To qualify, children must have a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act that can be mitigated by a dog, be able to financially care for the dog and guarantee the animal's safety in their home, said Karen Shirk, executive director and founder of 4 Paws for Ability.

Costs depend on what the dog is trained to do, Shirk said, and can range from $13,000 to $26,000. Training can take up to eight months.

Dogs generally are trained to disrupt behavior, tether and track a missing child. For instance, if Carter is hand flapping, the dog is trained to touch him in such a way that disrupts his thought process and thus the behavior.

"We teach the child how to use the dog to self-regulate their emotion," Shirk said.

And because autistic children often become prisoners in their own homes or dart away from their parents, dogs also are trained in tethering so that a child is able to walk freely. If he bolts, the dog braces himself so the child can't get anywhere.

In addition, if Matthew Plunk were to get out of his house or doesn't respond to his name, Ajax is trained to search for and rescue him.

No one tracks the number of autistic children who go missing each year, but Shirk said that last year
alone, she read eight stories of such children dying after wandering away from their parents or other caregivers.

"This is not just a service dog that can help," she said. "It's a service dog that can actually save a child's life."

Her agency has placed 250 dogs since its founding in October 1998. Of those, nearly 70 percent were paired with autistic children.

'Convinced they could help'

Like Martin, Deanna Nowell is hoping for the same results. Soon.

"We're waiting for the final fund-raising numbers to come in," Nowell said.

Her son Erik was diagnosed with autism and seizure disorders two years ago. She knows how quickly such children can disappear.

Nowell said that once while playing outside the family's home in Cumming, Ga., she turned around for a moment and Erik was gone.

By the time she and police found him, he had walked a half-mile down the driveway and crossed the road into nearby woods.

"I was sure he was having a seizure somewhere," she said, "that something bad had happened."

Nowell said police found her son unharmed an hour later, but she was determined "this can never happen again."

When she found 4 Paws, she said, "I signed up with a little bit of trepidation, but after talking with families who'd gotten dogs, I was convinced they could help my son."

Kelly Martin shares her conviction and hope.

Find this article at:
http://www.reflector.com/feat/content/features/stories/2008/02/14/canines.html
Ultrasound eases fibroid agony

New tumor treatment lets some avoid hysterectomies

BY JEAN P. FISHER
STAFF WRITER

Women with noncancerous tumors that cause pain and profuse bleeding are beginning to seek out a new, nonsurgical treatment that spares many from having a hysterectomy.

The tumors, called uterine fibroids, affect up to 80 percent of women at some point in their lives, and they can be particularly troubling to women during childbearing years, often causing infertility. Many women opt to have hysterectomies, which can cost more than $40,000 and require a six-week recovery.

The new treatment, now available in North Carolina only at Duke University Medical Center, uses focused ultrasound, which aims high-intensity sound waves on the tumor to create heat that destroys the tissue. The procedure requires no surgical cuts, and patients can go back to normal activities immediately. It's also half as expensive as a full hysterectomy, although insurance coverage is still not assured, despite the procedure winning approval from the Food and Drug Administration in 2004.

Other area hospitals, including UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill, are evaluating the technology but have not committed to establishing programs. It's available at fewer than 20 hospitals across the country.

Dr. John F. Steege, an obstetrician at UNC-Chapel Hill, said the procedure would benefit only a subset of patients — women past childbearing age, whose fibroids are in certain parts of the uterus, and who have few tumors.

"It's going to be a niche solution," he said.

But the prospect of a surgery-free solution was enough to lure Jackie Grissom, 51, to come from Kannapolis to Durham for treatment.

Last week, Dr. Millie Bechera, a Duke obstetrician and gynecologist, used the ultrasound procedure to kill the 3-inch tumor inside Grissom's uterus. Grissom, who learned about the procedure and Duke's new center on the Internet, went from the three-hour appointment to lunch and househunting with her 23-year-old daughter, who lives in the Triangle. She expects her insurance to pay for the procedure.

SEE FIBROIDS, PAGE 16A
"As soon as I got off the table, nothing hurt," said Grissom, whose fibroid had become so uncomfortable she was spending most evenings on a heating pad. "Nothing's hurt since then."

Doctors don't know why fibroids develop, but they do know the tumors are common, affecting a third of women of childbearing age. African-Americans are even more prone to them.

Often, fibroids are small and don't cause problems. But about a quarter of women with the tumors experience symptoms such as heavy menstrual periods, abdominal pain, a need to urinate often and problems with infertility. Some women bleed so freely they become anemic. A few even need transfusions.

There are many ways to treat fibroids, but most have drawbacks. Burning off the lining of the uterus controls heavy bleeding but renders a woman unable to bear children. A procedure that cuts off the blood supply to fibroids is effective but it can also enslave a woman's ovaries of blood, causing them to stop working. Surgery to remove tumors, while leaving healthy tissue intact, takes a week or more of recovery, and typically dictates that any future pregnancy be delivered by cesarean section.

Focused ultrasound isn't perfect either. The technology is relatively new, and it's not clear what unforeseen effects it may have on the uterus.

**Nothing is permanent**

No treatment, however, including ultrasound, offers a permanent solution. Tumors grow back in up to 30 percent of women, requiring repeat procedures.

That's why hysterectomy, in which all or part of the uterus is surgically removed, has remained popular, despite being radical. Removing the uterus ensures the tumors won't come back. Fibroid treatment accounts for about one-third of the 600,000 hysterectomies done in this country each year, according to the National Women's Health Resource Center.

"It's the only definitive solution," said Behera, the Duke doctor. She is director of Duke's focused-ultrasound treatment program for fibroids.

Grissom, who experienced heavy periods that led to anemia, said the gynecologist she initially saw was adamant that hysterectomy was the best option for her. "He was rather cut-and-dried about it," Grissom recalls. "He didn't offer anything else as a possibility."

Grissom did not want a hysterectomy. She had no desire to rush into menopause — removing the uterus triggers the change — and she did not want to leave her work as a family and individual counselor for six weeks to recover.

Many other women have similar objections, Behera said. She thinks ultrasound will be an attractive option for some of them.

"There's no one right answer for all women," Behera said. "But it's great to have the opportunity to offer it."
It’s the least he can do

Wickedly witty and dead serious, Libertarian really wants to be governor

BY MATT DEES
STAFF WRITER

DURHAM — If you believe government exists to improve people’s lives, Michael Munger thinks you’re naive.

“To think that government could ever be other than selfish and venal and manipulative is a mistake,” he says.

Someone with such a low opinion of government might seem like an odd choice to lead one. But the Libertarian, who also is chairman of the Duke University political science department, wants to be the next governor.

And he thinks he’d be an excellent one precisely because of his fervent mistrust of nearly everything government does.

Munger wants to create a robust school-voucher program, end the death penalty, curb cities’ power to annex property, slash many state departments and generally be a thorn in the side of a legislature he sees as corrupt and wasteful.

He’d govern, no doubt, with the same irreverence and sharp wit that has made him a popular professor.

Munger also seems to relish lobbying verbal grenades at his would-be opponents, often flashing a Cheshire-cat grin as he does.

In a recent interview, he called Democratic candidate Bev Perdue a “Stepford wife,” a reference to the movie about robot housewives. He called the fundraising practices of her main rival, Richard Moore, “repulsive.”

He gave equal time to the Republicans, saying the state GOP has a history of trotting out “cir-

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MUNGER
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cus clowns" to run for governor.
"I'm claiming the [Republican] candidate in November will have big orange hair and a rubber nose," he says.
Munger, 49, studies politics for a living, so he understands that third-party candidates are long shots.
Perrel Guillory, director of the Program on Public Life at UNC-Chapel Hill, doesn't think recent scandals in state government, most notably the corruption case that landed former House Speaker Jim Black in prison, will be enough to sweep a third party into the governor's mansion.
"It would take a level of corruption that embarrases the state more than we've had," Guillory says, though he added that Munger would be "a fascinating candidate."
Munger, of course, disagrees. The state used to engage in 'soft corruption," he says.
That's changed. "We're becoming more like Louisiana, where corruption is wholesale."
A classic example of this, he says, occurred when Black, an optometrist, pushed through a measure requiring all kindergartners to get comprehensive eye exams, a provision that was dropped after it sparked protest. Black since has been sent to prison for accepting under-the-table campaign contributions.
If elected, of course, Munger would have to deal with a legislature made up of people from the two major parties.
He says that means he would do much of his governing via news conference, using his bully pulpit to call out those he sees as inappropriate uses of government power and/or taxpayer money.
"To the extent that I'm able to be a free agent...I'm actually in a good position to be a broker for the people of North Carolina and provide leadership by asking embarrassing questions."
But, first, he has to get in the race.

MICHAEL C. MUNGER

Age: 49
Born: Gotha, Fla. Grew up on an orange farm
Family: Wife, Donna M. Gingeirella; sons, Kevin, 18, and Brian, 15
Current job: Chairman of the Department of Political Science, Duke University, since 2000
Education: B.A. in economics, Davidson College, 1980; M.A. in economics, Washington University (St. Louis), 1982; Ph.D. in economics, Washington University, 1984.
Career history: Staff economist, Federal Trade Commission, 1984-85; visiting economics professor, Dartmouth College, 1985-86; government professor, University of Texas, Austin, 1986 to 1990; political science professor, later director of Master of Public Administration Program at UNC-Chapel Hill, 1990-97; political science professor, Duke University, 1997-present.

GETTING ON THE BALLOT

The Libertarian Party of North Carolina will hold its convention April 12-13 at the La Quinta inn in Burlington.
Munger is the only announced candidate, but he hopes he has competition to generate media interest.
The party needs to collect 6,000 to 8,000 more signatures to have enough to get on the ballot.
Munger raised $20,000 for the petition effort and has about $8,000 for his own campaign so far.

ONLINE
Munger official campaign site munger4ncgov.com
N.C. Libertarian Party site www.lpifc.org

Getting on the ballot

Third parties face a high bar to get on the ballot. State law requires them to gather signatures equal to 2 percent of the votes cast in the last gubernatorial race. This year, that number is 69,733.
Barbara Howe, chairwoman of the N.C. Libertarian Party, says party workers actually have to collect more than 100,000 signatures to achieve that, because many are invalid for various reasons. They're about 6,000 signatures shy of that goal now.
A ballot petition drive costs $100,000 to $150,000, according to a lawsuit filed by the Libertarians and the Green Party seeking an end to the petition requirement. The suit was continued indefinitely after a brief hearing Monday. The plaintiffs hope to be back in court next month.
The petition requirement, Munger says, ensures that third parties are "gasping at the starting line"—and that, he believes, has been bad for the state.

Because Republicans have been so ineffectual, he says, North Carolina is a one-party state.
The people in power, he says, "are not Democrats, they're autocrats. They're people who have run the state government and done so for a long time."

A plan for the schools

Some of Munger's positions, however, buck Libertarian orthodoxy, especially his views on education.
"A lot of Libertarians think, and they're entitled to this view, that any educational system in which the government is involved at all is equally bad," Munger says.
"Well, it seems to me anytime you have a goal, you should try to achieve what you can. Trying to achieve more than you can means you achieve nothing.
So Munger is an incrementalist. He wants to freeze per pupil funding at its current level. Then he would steer all the state lottery proceeds to a program that gives families vouchers worth $2,000 a child, to be applied toward attending the school of their choice—whether a private school or just a different public school.
Munger also favors pay raises for teachers and other state employees he views as essential. He'd pay for those raises by cutting many administrative jobs.
Munger says he would need to lead a full-scale audit of state departments as a whole to see what should get the ax.
He says he would start from scratch in at least one department: the Division of Motor Vehicles.
"The DMV has become the private fiefdom of people who pay off cronies," Munger says. "Their job is not service. There, I think I would just fire a lot of people and start all over."
Munger also favors a constitutional amendment to tighten the rules for when cities can annex properties or use eminent domain to acquire them.
He says the system is abused now, with some cities annexing affluent areas to increase their tax bases, while passing over lower income areas.
Ellis Hankins, executive director of the N.C. League of Municipalities, dismissed Munger's criticisms of annexation by saying that because Libertarians "oppose government in general, it's not surprising that he would oppose annexation."
Munger hopes voters won't pigeonhole him this way. He says he's running as a reformer, as a check against a concentration of power in Raleigh.
His model is Jesse Ventura, the former professional wrestler who shocked the political world by winning the Minnesota governor's office in 1998.
"When [Ventura] was first elected, everybody thought it was a joke," Munger says. "But he was a pretty successful governor in a difficult state. In some ways that would be the model I would use. I would be Michael 'The Body' Munger."

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