Red Cross drive seeks heroes
By Michael Abramowitz
The Daily Reflector
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When Jose and Maria Henandez and their six children lost their Ayden home and all their possessions to a Jan. 24 fire, Hernandez stood outside his burning house and said, “Life is like that; the Lord will help us.”

The next person Hernandez met was a Red Cross volunteer who arranged shelter, food and clothing for his family. Red Cross volunteers also were among the first responders when fire destroyed two other county homes the next day, and relocated hundreds in Pamlico, Bertie, Beaufort, Martin and Pitt counties following disastrous floods in 2010.

Coping with disaster is never easy for those affected by it, and helping them gets harder each year, Summer Woodard, executive director of the Pitt County chapter told a room of guests Wednesday at the Ronald G. Michels Center in Greenville.

To replenish its coffers, the Red Cross launched its annual Heroes campaign on Wednesday, which runs through March. The organization set a goal of $50,000 to support the disaster and military services work of the Pitt and Greater Pamlico chapters, serving a total of seven counties in eastern North Carolina.

“Many people mistakenly believe that local Red Cross chapters receive federal funds to do their work. The fact is all funds come from donations from local community residents and private grants and foundations,” Woodard said.

Each individual or group at the “heroes” level in the campaign commits to raising at least a thousand dollars in the community through bake sales, car washes and other activities.
That amount covers, on average, the total cost of food, clothing and shelter for a weekend for a family of four, Woodard said.

East Carolina University baseball coach Billy Godwin took time from his active coaching season to be guest speaker at the kick-off luncheon.

“One of the first things I talk to my players about is service to the community. It's tremendously important for people to help the Red Cross. We can't ever take their presence for granted, especially in tough economic times,” Godwin said.

Emergency services director Tonya Furtado knows the difference volunteers make to the community, and the challenges of providing hope for those in need on a moment's notice.

“Anything worthwhile in life is a challenge, but life is what you make it. Right now, we are in dire need of volunteers. It requires time, training and commitment, but the rewards are phenomenal. When you give a stuffed toy to a child who is standing in the cold looking at the loss of everything they have, you feel a sense of pride in helping,” Furtado said.

For more information about Red Cross services, volunteer opportunities or to donate, call 355-3800.

Contact Michael Abramowitz at mabramowitz@reflector.com or (252) 329-9571.
The fears over public safety that emerged after a 2009 shooting of two young men in downtown Greenville prompted city officials to direct significant law enforcement resources to reassure patrons of the bars and restaurants in that area. The resulting cost of that deployment contributed to a cost overrun in last years' police budget and those businesses have declined requests for contributions to offset the expense.

It therefore seems perfectly reasonable and fiscally responsible for the City Council to pursue a special-use tax for those downtown establishments which benefit from the additional consumption of public funds. The assurance of safety allows business owners there to profit and it seems fair that they shoulder some additional burden beyond what taxpayers throughout Greenville already provide.

The public outcry that followed a deadly shooting two years ago led to intense discussion involving citizens and public officials about the city's crime problem and how to address it. The solutions that resulted focused mainly on the downtown district, where the incident took place, and created a training program for bouncers led by the Greenville Police Department and established stricter requirements for where bars and restaurants could be located.

The city also began redirecting traffic away from Fifth Street and some nearby roads, as well as deploying additional officers downtown on evenings each weekend in that area. Limiting vehicular traffic and better monitoring of the patrons downtown, it was thought, would restore confidence in public safety and protect the city's reputation as a welcoming place for entertainment in the region.
The influx of officers had its intended effect, as those frequenting downtown expressed support for the changes. However, that came at a great cost to the city, which absorbed a larger police budget in that first year. Last year, however, an independent auditing report found a cost overrun of $291,000, with at least one officer logging 600 hours in overtime. It may be small compared to the entire city budget, but it still represents an added expense to taxpayers.

On Monday, the council responded with a 5-1 vote to ask the General Assembly for permission to levy a tax on the downtown bars and restaurants that serve alcohol. While all citizens share responsibility for funding police protection, there is no question that the beneficiaries of this additional expense — the downtown bar and restaurant owners — should be willing to help offset that burden in some small way.
BELHAVEN — A sign from the N.C. Department of Transportation, a welcome banner across Main Street, a caravan from the Pitt-Greenville Airport to Belhaven, green, yellow and purple balloons strategically placed throughout a banquet hall and community members all came together to welcome home a Super Bowl star.

Wednesday marked a special day in Belhaven as native C.J. Wilson, a former defensive end at East Carolina, returned home as a Super Bowl champion as part of the Green Bay Packers.

The town of Belhaven hosted a recognition dinner for Wilson, one of the NFL's standout rookies.

The Wilkinson Center became standing room only as kids and adults alike anxiously waited for Wilson's arrival, many holding tight to footballs and pictures for Wilson to sign.

Wilson was welcomed by a standing ovation, before taking a front and center seat as the “This is Your Life” program began.

“I feel good and am thrilled and tickled by tonight's turnout,” Wilson said as he finished his meal catered by the Belhaven Fire Department. “I feel like my family is here. It is this support that keeps me going. I was drafted late and was disappointed, but my family and friends kept encouraging me. I thank God.”

Wilson was drafted in the seventh round of the 2010 NFL draft and the fact that today he is a Super Bowl champ is something he said is “sinking in more and more” with each passing day.
“I'm spoiled right now. If we don't win next year I'm going to be mad,” he said, smiling. Wilson, who played as a running back at Northside High, said he was considered the “runt” in his family. He is one of nine children.

“I played offense and then in college they put me on defense and I got bigger, now I'm overweight, or I feel I am. It has been a learning process,” Wilson said, adding that his first start against the Minnesota Vikings is the most memorable moment during his first year in the National Football League.

Wilson also sacked Jon Kitna of the Dallas Cowboys on Nov. 8, 2010. “That was the greatest feeling,” he said, smiling.

Leaving the Belhaven-Greenville area and making Green Bay home was an adjustment for Wilson. “This morning there was snow on the ground. The snow was up to my knees, I was like, ‘I got to go, I got to get out of here,’” he said, as he pretended to stomp through the snow. Wilson said he loved every minute of it, but his teammates hazed him.

“We would go to practice and the coach would say, ‘Be back at noon or pay a $10,000 fine.' My teammates were hungry, so we would drive to get food. One guy would order 30 wings, another 20 wings. My bill was always $200 … on the plane ride we would get served anything we wanted — steak, salmon, but they still wanted wings. We would get on the bus — one guy would take up four seats. There were no traffic jams, if there was traffic, we would (be escorted) through it. I would listen to my music, gospel, of course, and we would pull up to a five-star hotel, met by fans with signs and being asked for our autograph.

“Inside, a guy would say, ‘Rook, get my room key.' So I'd go get his room key and another guy would say, ‘Where's mine?' so I would go get his. The vets got the big rooms filled with candy. My room would have two beds,” he said, followed by laughter from the audience.

“Then we would go to the stadium. That's when the blood would start flowing. In the locker room it was quiet. Everyone was focused. Two hours before the game everyone would start putting on their gear, like we were in the army. I didn't put on anything, [the athletic staff] did it. The guys would say, ‘It's time to go.' Then, I was no longer a rookie. We would loosen our neck, jump and hear the crowd. They are so loud … Go Pack go.” Wilson counted to three and the audience shouted, “go Pack go … go Pack go … go Pack go.”

“(The coach would say) ‘do something,' but I was nervous, facing a 6-8, 340-pound (opponent) who was about to kill me. Then my mind goes blank, I can't remember anything. It was my rookie year and it was like that all year,” Wilson said.

As a rookie, Wilson had one sack, 12 tackles and assisted in six tackles.
Wilson said he is glad to be back in his hometown and is looking forward to relaxing. “I look forward to spending time with my family. I am very family oriented. I will be in North Carolina for a while,” he said.

He said he also looks forward to serving as a role model for today’s youth. “For the young kids, I have one word, stand. Stand for what you believe in … I had a dream, not to play football. I wanted to be a fireman, but as I got older I realized that wasn't happening — I didn't want to get burnt up. Stand for your dreams and believe in them ... if you are not working for your dream, don't expect it to happen,” Wilson said. “I want to use football to help inspire others. I want to give back to my community. God has a plan for all our of lives, but God said to be humble … believe and keep God first. With God all things are possible.”

John Smith, the former principal at Northside High School, said as he prepared his speech for Wilson he found himself asking, what happened to our heroes.

“Jackie Robinson, Satchel Paige — oh, you're too young to remember,” Smith said to Wilson. “But the Lord said to me, C.J. you're my hero. I believe there are three characteristics that make a hero. A hero sees no self-importance … everything they are a part of they make better. At Northside, you came to school with a big smile and made everybody happy. You made a difference. A hero makes a difference for the better. And third, a hero knows where they are going and moves with confidence. C.J., you know where you are going. God has a place in your heart. I hope you know that you are a true hero, who knows where you are going and how to get there.”

Wilson is a talented man with a “high degree” of integrity, according to Dr. Addison Bass, a retired coach at Northside High School.

“I am tremendously excited to be here and I stand here on behalf of my best friend, Bing Mitchell (Wilson's late high school football coach) He loved and admired C.J, as I do. It didn't take us long to understand we had a talented young man and we knew he would go somewhere. Even at ECU, we knew he would take another step and he did. C.J. was the most coachable kid I ever coached and I've coached a lot of kids,” Bass said. “I am so excited for you and I credit this community and I credit your family.”

Harold Robinson, an eight-year member of the football staff at East Carolina, said if he was able to recommend anyone for the NFL it would be Wilson.

“C.J. Wilson will not be a problem. We only read bad things (about players in the NFL). (Players) on the front page, we won't see him,” Robinson said as the audience cheered in agreement. “Belhaven, do you know how lucky you are? How many communities can say one of their sons made it into the NFL and played at the highest level and played in the Super Bowl and won?”

Statistics show, according to Robinson, that every five years a million seniors graduate from high school. Less than 8,000 of those earn a Division I scholarship.
“That is one percent,” he said, adding that of that 8,000 less than 3,000 are evaluated by the NFL.

Of that 3,000, less than 250 players are invited to the combine in Indianapolis.
Belhaven to honor Packers’ C. J. Wilson

C. J. Wilson in the purple and gold when playing for the ECU Pirates his senior season. (File Photos)

By EDWIN MODLIN II
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Staff Writer
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As Belhaven’s favorite son, C.J. Wilson returns home after playing in the Super Bowl. The town is celebrating his return with an evening of celebration tonight.

Mayor Adam O’Neal and the Belhaven Town Council have put together a welcome-home celebration for Wilson, who just finished his rookie year in the NFL with the Green Bay Packers. The festivities are open to the public.

Events begin with a barbecue dinner at 6 p.m. at the Williams Building on West Main Street. The main program, which has a “This Is Your Life” theme, begins at 7 p.m. The program features several of Wilson’s former teachers and coaches and others who influenced his life in positive ways.

Harold Robinson, who is associated with East Carolina University’s football program and worked with Wilson while he was at ECU, will talk about Wilson, who was a standout while playing football at Northside High School and for ECU’s Pirates. Before going to ECU, Robinson was head football coach at the now-defunct Williamston High School, a frequent Northside
opponent.

Wilson is the first ECU player drafted by the Packers.

Town Manager Guinn Leverett noted that Wilson was named ECU’s Defensive Player of the Year in his final season with the Pirates.

“When C.J. went to ECU, there was speculation that he would be an academic liability,” Leverett said, “but he buckled down and had one of the highest GPAs on the ECU football team.”

Wilson not only had one of the highest GPAs on the team, he also made the dean’s list for three of his four years at ECU.

“He’s our hometown son, and we are thrilled about C.J.’s accomplishments,” Leverett said. “We’re thrilled someone from our small town has achieved so much.”

Leverett said Wilson is a good person.

“He’s always done what coaches and teachers have asked of him,” Leverett said. “And he comes from a really good family with really good family values.”

“We not only want others to know, but we want C.J. to know how much we love him and how highly we think of him,” O’Neal said, “as well as how much we appreciate his accomplishments and his family.”

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Richard Oliphant, 61, said if there is an experience that’s relevant to his story, it’s one where he found himself sitting at a table in a casino in Tunica, Miss., losing at a card game of craps.

Oliphant, of Cedar Point in Carteret County, said he was “getting his clock cleaned” in the game, but no matter. He said he felt just fine anyhow. That was nine days after he went through a surgical procedure at CarolinaEast Medical Center at 2000 Neuse Blvd. in New Bern, for a heart condition that his physician had told him put him in danger of sudden cardiac death.

Oliphant received an implantable cardioverter defibrillator, or an ICD device, which monitors and regulates heart beat and can deliver an electrical shock in the case of an abnormal or life-threatening rhythm, according to a news release from CarolinaEast Health System.

Oliphant said he felt better after the procedure, and was told that he looked it, too. He said that now, he mostly forgets that he has the device, although he said he can’t go through the metal detector at the airport, or use a jackhammer. “Who wants to use a jackhammer?” he said.

Dr. Angela Park, a cardiologist and electrophysiologist at the CarolinaEast Heart Center, said that since she started working at the heart center in January of 2006, she’s implanted about 500 implantable cardioverter defibrillator devices, called ICDs. They are implanted in the chest wall in front of the patient’s shoulder, mostly on the left-hand side, she said. Park said that when she started, no one was implanting the devices in the area. She said the heart center was recruiting a physician in her specialty in order to expand its cardiology services.
She said that now, patients have had greater access to the technology. She said she’s seen there are many people who still have questions about it along the lines of, “what can I expect from this?” she said. She also said that when the ICD delivers a shock, the experience has been described as “a mule kicking them in the chest.”

“They do understand that the reason for that is to basically save their lives from a life-threatening rhythm,” she said.

Park said one of the benefits of a presentation that will be offered Monday at CarolinaEast Medical Center is that patients with those devices will have a chance to air their concerns.

Sam Sears, a professor at East Carolina University in the departments of psychology and cardiovascular services, is slated to speak on coping strategies for patients with ICDs. Sears is an expert in the area of cardiac psychology, and he said he is also director of a doctoral program in healthy psychology that’s in its fourth year at the university.

He said the first human implant of the device was in 1980, and it was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 1985. The technology has undergone rapid development since then, he said, leading to smaller and lighter devices.

“The patients who will be at this group are among the pioneers of medicine,” Sears said. “They are the first group of people to live successfully with a condition that leads to potentially spontaneous life-threatening arrhythmias and they do that by depending on devices that will provide a high-energy shock to save their lives.”

Sears said the implantation of the device can be psychologically demanding for patients, with psychological side affects including anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder from cardiac arrest followed by resuscitation, or from the electric shock.

He said he will talk on Monday about coping mechanisms that include helping patients see themselves as survivors rather than victims, or helping them recognize people they can count on emotionally for support or information.

Joseph Osenni, catheterization lab manager at CarolinaEast, said in the release that if there is enough interest, the system will form a support group for people with the devices.

“The whole idea of it was very frightening to me,” said Oliphant, who recalled that the hardest part of his experience getting the implant in January of 2007 was the initial fear. Part of what made him feel fine while losing at cards at that casino was that he no longer had any fear. He already had the device, and liked it. “I’m losing at a craps table, and going, ‘I feel great,’” he said. “It was really that I felt better.”

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Jury still out on new baseball bats

BY JAVIER SERNA - Staff Writer

Regardless of how college coaches and players feel about the change in the composition of baseball bats this season - and many are not happy about it - anxiety lingers over how the new bats will alter the game.

They realize the specifications the NCAA handed down to bat manufacturers in 2008, to be instituted this season, are going to reduce power in the college game. Whether the new bats will affect the game in other ways remains unclear, coaches said.

"We don't know," said N.C. State coach Elliott Avent, no fan of the new bats.

Avent is hopeful his team isn't the only one in the country losing power (his team still managed to hit three home runs on opening weekend).
Baseball America college baseball writer Aaron Fitt said there's plenty of unknowns regarding the new bats.

"The jury is still out on whether it'll be good or bad for college baseball," Fitt said.

Proponents of the new bats thought there have been too many home runs in recent seasons.

NCAA Division I statistics show that from 2006 to 2009, the average number of home runs per game rose from .68 to .96. Even with the moratorium on composite bats, though, that average dropped only slightly to .94 home runs per game last season.

But opponents don't understand why the game, which has seemingly reached the height of its popularity, needed to change.

**Multiple reasons**

Duke coach Sean McNally thought there were several reasons for the change, including safety, rising power numbers and a desire to shorten the length of games.

But North Carolina coach Mike Fox said the changes are unnecessary. "There's not a coach I've talked to think the bats needed to be changed," Fox said. "And we really don't know why they were changed honestly."

Bat manufacturers were informed of the change, which took effect this season, in a September 2008 memorandum that stated the reason for the change was "increasing offensive performance particularly in home runs and runs scored ... in large part, to the kind of bats in use today."

But UC Santa Barbara coach Bob Brontsema, who chaired the committee that instituted the changes, told Baseball America last fall that the No. 1 reason for the change was player safety.

Heading into the 2009 postseason, the Baseball Rules Committee sent another memorandum to athletic directors and baseball coaches, noting that several companies were altering non-wood bats to increase performance aluminum bats, calling this a violation according to NCAA bylaws and
warning that the NCAA planned to collect and test bats at many sites of the NCAA Baseball Championships.

Two months later, the committee announced a moratorium on composite barrel bats in the Division I game because testing of bats during the Baseball Championships found 80 percent of the bats tested failed the NCAA performance standard, meaning that those bats either changed after repeated use or were altered.

Both composite bats and aluminum bats that met the old testing standard, known as Ball Exit Speed Ratio, had a trampoline effect, or a bounciness that changed over the life of the bat or, as mentioned, could be altered to perform better. The new bats are designed to perform consistently throughout their life cycle and don't produce a trampoline effect, making their performance much closer to that of wooden bats.

**Hitters no fans**

East Carolina outfielder Trent Whitehead said his team, long known for its hitting, will have to focus more on playing a small-ball game less reliant on home runs.

"I don't like them as much," he said of the new bats. "There's times when I wished I had the old bat."

McNally said he's seen plenty of well-hit balls in batting practice that should have been home runs.

"I think they've dialed it back too much," McNally said. "Nobody wants a four-hour game. If you're up 12-5 in the eighth, you shouldn't have to feel like it's a one-run game. ... But to go from over there to way over here, I think you should be able to drive balls out of a ballpark at a practice."

N.C. State third baseman Andrew Ciencin said he's trying not to dwell on the new bats.

"If you square it up, it's still a metal bat," he said. "It's still going to go somewhere. I try to take all that out of consideration and still try to hit. ... If you focus too much on the bats, you're going to get away from hitting."
North Carolina sophomore infielder Tommy Coyle said, "I don't think they're as bad as everyone says," but he's glad hit balls will have less velocity.

"Some of the composite bats, it's scary to be so close with pretty much grown men swinging the bats," he said.

Duke two-way player Marcus Stroman said he is no fan of the new bats.

"They stink," he said. "They're bad. It's almost like we've gone to the wood game."

**Pitchers don't mind**
But the pitcher in Stroman doesn't mind at all.

"As a pitcher, I'm going to love them," he said. "You have to put it right on the barrel and you have to have your best swing to get it out of the park."

East Carolina ace pitcher Seth Maness said coaches are stressing that, in the changed game, there will be a premium put on good defense, and, from the other side, walks.

"The big strong guys are still going to hit their home runs, but those little weaklings, who hit eight or nine homers every year, aren't going to be able to," he said

East Carolina coach Billy Godwin, a former pitcher, said the game didn't need changing, but he has no problem with the changes.

"I think what the fans are going to see is teams that are fundamentally sound are going to execute baseball, baseball at a higher level - not get out on your front foot on a pitch down and hit it 420 feet," he said.

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Perdue plan shelters schools, while GOP wants deeper cuts

BY LYNN BONNER - Staff writer

Legislative leaders talking about the budget have turned the phrase "everything is on the table" into an overworked cliché. Turns out it was true.

Legislative budget writers want significant spending cuts in all areas of government and want lawmakers working on the details to consider: capping university enrollments, closing or consolidating prisons and consolidating or eliminating the early education and health programs More at Four and Smart Start.

Republican leaders said they will spend significantly less than the $19.9 billion Gov. Bev Perdue proposed last week. In five broad categories, Republican legislative leaders want to spend $1.4 billion less than Perdue's budget proposed.

Republicans have a narrower target because they do not want to keep the temporary sales tax increase that Perdue included in her budget, which would raise $826.6 million in revenue. Legislators also decided they would not push millions in expenses on to local governments as Perdue did, said Sen. Pete Brunstetter, a Republican from Winston-Salem and a budget committee chairman.

No direct comparison to Perdue's budget is possible at this stage. The chief budget writers are leaving some big decisions for themselves, and the figures made public Wednesday do not include money that could be set aside for savings or spending on capital improvements and debt payments.

Budget committee chairmen said they want lawmakers working on the detailed plans to take a fresh look at all state spending and assume that nothing is immune.

"It's important that it's built from the bottom up, not the top down," said Harold Brubaker, an Asheboro Republican and chief House budget writer.
The lead budget writers challenged legislators to look hard at what the state pays for and determine whether it's a core government service or something someone else can do, Brunstetter said.

"Everything means something to somebody, so things do get politically charged," he said. "Nobody's promising it's going to be easy or pretty."

Democrats blasted the proposals, saying the cuts would devastate education. Some potential targets are already defending their programs.

Republicans cannot take $763 million out of Perdue's proposed education budget without damage, said House Minority Leader Joe Hackney, an Orange County Democrat.

The cuts would mean destruction of the state's good business climate, he said, because "it is so heavily dependent on excellence in universities, training in community colleges, and having schools people want to bring their families to North Carolina for. People don't want to come to a state and do business where those things aren't present."

**Perdue fears more cuts**

Chrissy Pearson, Perdue's spokeswoman, said they were worried that cuts deeper than Perdue proposed would cost teachers and teacher assistants their jobs and weaken mental health services and job creation programs.

Some cost-saving ideas mirroring the budget writers' interests are already being considered. For example, the university system is already thinking about linking funding to performance markers such as graduation rates. And slowing enrollment may already be in play because Perdue's budget proposal would provide just half of what UNC leaders say they need next year.

Hannah Gage, chairwoman of the UNC system's governing board, has said that the university may be open to easing enrollment growth if money's tight.

The state already promotes two years of community college as a low-cost stepping stone to universities.

If legislators want to widen that path, the question is whether the state would provide added funding so community colleges could handle substantial
enrollment growth, said Linda Weiner, a vice president at the community college system.

"If we have the resources that we can work worth with in order to accomplish this goal, we can do it," Weiner said. "We just need the resources to go along with it."

Perdue's budget proposal would fund community college enrollment growth at 52 percent of the system's request of $34 million. That is essentially an immediate cut because community colleges are funded a year after students are served.

Smart Start, an early childhood education, health and family support program, and the preschool program More at Four are constant targets for cuts. Last year, legislators considered combining the two programs. Smart Start has a broad statewide network and plenty of supporters who will testify to its importance and effectiveness, said Stephanie Fanjul, president of the N.C. Partnership for Children, the organization that oversees the programs.

"I think we're eager to tell our story," she said. "That's what I'm thinking will make a difference."

Staff writers Jane Stancill, Rob Christensen and Eric Ferreri contributed. lynn.bonner@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4821

**Where the savings would come from**
Republican spending targets are much lower than those proposed by the governor's budget.

Republican leaders suggested items for its appropriation subcommittees to consider when paring back. Overall guidance included: eliminating obsolete programs, eliminating or reducing funds to nonprofits, consolidating programs, reducing layers of management, maximizing federal funds and privatizing services.

Here are the items the budget subcommittees will consider:
Education
Consolidate/eliminate Smart Start and More at Four
Determine alternative salary schedule based on performance
Cap university enrollment
Reduce or eliminate higher education funding for less essential classes/degrees
Fund higher education based on performance such as graduation rates
Health and Human Services
Consolidate divisions
Medicaid parity with State Health Plan/Health Choice
Consider closing facilities
Restructure the organization to streamline services
Justice and public safety
Eliminate/modify programs or services
Reduce inmate medical costs
Shift/consolidate medical treatment to State Health Plan or DHHS
Close or consolidate facilities
Natural and economic resources
Consolidate Commerce and Employment Security Commission
Restrict land and equipment purchases
Analyze economic development programs (JDIG and One NC)
General government
Consolidate human resource functions
Consolidate other functions such as police, budget/management
Eliminate optional offices
Eliminate grant programs
Sell state property
Sell surplus state property
Telecommute
Privatize purchasing

2011-2012 Budget: Two proposals
Comparing spending targets of the current budget vs. Republicans’ and Perdue’s budgets

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SOURCE: Joint Budget Team Fiscal Research Division, N.C. Governor’s Office
The News & Observer
Duke wraps up settlement over cost of lacrosse scandal

BY JESSE JAMES DECONTO - Staff Writer

DURHAM–Duke University has settled a lawsuit against its insurance company over costs associated with the Duke lacrosse scandal.

Duke had been wrangling with the National Union Fire Insurance Co., an affiliate of insurance giant AIG, over whether the company should reimburse the university for costs tied to the confidential settlements of lawsuits with three former lacrosse players and the former lacrosse coach.

Duke agreed to dismiss the suit, and each party will pay its own attorneys' fees, according to a document filed in U.S. District Court in Greensboro this week. The terms of the settlement have not been made public.

Initially, AIG said it was left in the dark and shouldn't have to pay for any of the settlement costs. It said university officials violated the contract by not telling the company about the settlements with the players until after the fact.

The university argued that it was barred from disclosing information because of the settlements' confidentiality clause.

The case stems from rape allegations that an escort-service dancer lodged against three players after a lacrosse team party in March 2006. Before all the facts were gathered and any criminal charges were filed, Duke suspended the team's season.

In April 2007, state Attorney General Roy Cooper dismissed all charges and declared the players innocent. In June 2007, Duke entered a settlement with three players.

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NCCU to foster intellectual climate

BY ERIC FERRERI - Staff Writer

DURHAM—In Charlie Nelms' vision for a more intellectually robust university, an English major should be savvy about more than Shakespeare and a music student should care about more than melodies.

That's the motivation behind an initiative at N.C. Central University - where Nelms is the chancellor - aimed at improving the intellectual climate. Nelms wants more high-minded conversation about immigration, global warming, world hunger and whatever hot current event is brewing. Your area of study, he believes, shouldn't matter.

"We need a more holistic approach to educating people," he said. "There are these issues out there larger than just one's major. We're trying to achieve a higher level of dialogue."

Still in the embryonic stage, this initiative will look for new ways to get students more involved in intellectual pursuits on and off campus. It will include a new series of campus programs of broad interest, starting this week with a series of appearances by Khalil Gibran Muhammad, the new director of the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Muhammad is the great-grandson of Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam, and the son of Ozier Muhammad, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer with the New York Times.

Raising standards
The intellectual climate initiative is Nelms' latest attempt to raise expectations at NCCU, a public, historically black institution with lagging graduation and retention rates. He raised admissions standards and graduation and retention goals and shifted resources into programs to aid struggling students.

The initiative may take some time. UNC-Chapel Hill took on a similar project in the late 1990s. A task force on that campus spent a year studying
the issue and produced a 68-page report that called for a series of sweeping changes and improvements. A decade or so later, that initiative's fingerprints can be found all over campus.

It created first-year seminars and a summer reading program for new students. The seminars gave freshmen a small-class oasis amid the typical first-year lecture hall courses. And the summer reading program, which assigns all incoming students the same book to read, injected some academic rigor into that traditionally lazy summer before the first year of college.

It posed other ideas as well, like more campus coffee joints where students and faculty could gather, and even the simple act of unbolting seats from classroom floors so students could rearrange themselves.

"There was a whole lot of really good stuff to come out of it," recalled Richard "Pete" Andrews, a public policy professor who led the UNC-CH faculty from 1997 to 2000. "People did some really creative things."

**What students think**

At NCCU, Nelms' vision for a higher-minded campus is already resonating with students, said Brian Kennedy, a junior from Charlottesville, Va. Kennedy likes that the university is recruiting students with better academic pedigrees, and he is encouraged that it wants everyday life on campus to be more demanding as well.

"If you hold students to higher expectations, they'll work towards them," he said.

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