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UNC leaders' message: NC's future depends on your support

BY JANE STANCILL AND JAY PRICE - jstancill@newsobserver.com or jprice@newsobserver.com

As the UNC system enacted a controversial tuition increase last month after a 15.6 percent state budget cut, the bad news just kept coming.

Several stalwart UNC supporters announced their retirement from the legislature - including House Minority Leader Joe Hackney, an Orange County Democrat, and Sen. Richard Stevens, a Cary Republican who co-chairs the appropriations committee. Those exits followed the departure last year of decades-long UNC champion Marc Basnight, the former Senate leader, and in 2009, Sen. Tony Rand.

In a state with a long history of generous taxpayer support for higher education, people began to wonder: Who will now speak up for the university in the halls of power?

The answer isn't entirely clear, and the legislature is headed for even more turnover with this fall's election. But universities are already crafting a new message they hope will help them win friends among the unfamiliar faces.
"We cannot take for granted that people understand why we're important and why we're valuable and why it is wise to invest in us," UNC President Tom Ross said in an interview last week.

UNC campuses are emphasizing their relevance to the state's future prosperity. They are also changing the way they operate to make the most of a smaller bank account and make a case to their new bankers.

North Carolina taxpayers spent nearly $2.5 billion on the UNC system last year, about 12.5 percent of the state budget. In a period of scarce resources, there is more accountability demanded of anyone seeking state dollars, said Hannah Gage, chairwoman of the UNC Board of Governors.

"We didn't always have to explain to everyone or justify every single thing that we were doing," she said. "It's not necessarily a bad thing that we have to now, but it is a new reality. It's part of the sea change."

**Defending research**

Two weeks ago, Senate leader Phil Berger, an Eden Republican, visited UNC-Chapel Hill, where he toured a genetics facility housing thousands of mice used to study disease.

Before the economic downturn, UNC backers in the legislature created a cancer research fund for UNC-CH that grew to $50 million a year. The state fund is unusual, because most research is fueled by the federal government.

"Part of what I was interested in is how is that money being used and what's it being used for," Berger said. "I think they were interested in providing me with that information."

For the past year, members of the new Republican majority in the legislature have spent more time visiting public campuses and talking to chancellors and trustees. It's their duty to learn as much as they can, Berger said.

Apparently the session at UNC-CH was persuasive. Berger said the research money remains in the budget. And because the state's finances have improved, "I don't see why we would want to change that at this point," he added.

Educating lawmakers on the work of the university is one way for UNC leaders to win support. But they have to be willing to listen and learn, too, said Jim Woodward, who retired after 16 years as chancellor of UNC Charlotte.
"That's not so say you don't debate ... with them," Woodward said. "But it is critical that we understand, and that we not just assume going in that we are going to tell them everything that's wrong with their views. That's stupid."

Measures of success

North Carolina legislators are taking a tougher look at UNC spending at a time when there is a national focus on cost containment in higher education. In January, President Barack Obama announced plans to tether federal student aid dollars to universities that meet affordability standards.

"The inflationary problems we have seem more pronounced in higher education," Berger said. "Year after year after year, it seems that the expenditures and the costs go up, and many times out of proportion to what's going on in the larger economy."

Ross said the university is figuring out how to do things differently to be able to make progress with no significant new money on the horizon. Some of that began under former UNC President Erskine Bowles, who streamlined administrative operations, saving millions. The system also toughened admissions standards in an effort to improve graduation rates.

In the months ahead, UNC is refining performance measures for doling out money, rewarding schools that achieve their goals. The emphasis should be on degrees awarded, said Bill Daughtridge, a UNC board member and former Republican legislator.

"Instead of just saying, 'Bring them in, everybody come on in,' the real results we want to see is how many people can we graduate?" he said.

This year, UNC Pembroke was not allowed to expand its freshman class beyond current budget levels, and both UNC Greensboro and Western Carolina were restricted in their growth.

Higher admissions standards and growth limitations are significant changes that won't bear fruit immediately, Gage said.

"Fayetteville State has one of the strongest freshman classes it's ever had," she said. "You won't see the impact of that for four years. That's a challenge to convey that to the legislature because they want to see quickly, you know, 'Show me the improvement.' "

Campuses reorganize

Beyond the systemwide rules, individual campuses are doing their own version of restructuring, consolidating departments and dumping some academic degree programs that are deemed unproductive.
At N.C. State University, divisions and departments are being combined, and the university is mulling the future of more than 270 academic programs that could face elimination, downsizing, or in some cases, growth. UNC-CH focused on administrative changes that sliced $50 million from its budget. N.C. Central recently announced the merger of two colleges and several academic departments, along with the elimination of five degrees, including French and sociology.

"We see that the reality that we've had here is not likely to return in the next five to eight years, maybe longer, maybe never," said Steve Ballard, chancellor at East Carolina, where the campus is studying more than 50 options for altering its academic structure. "We've tried to look at reality and say, 'Let's get ready for it, let's not be in denial here.' "

Last week, the campus wrapped up a series of forums that were emotional at times. The process is painful but healthy, said Ron Mitchelson, a professor of geography at ECU who leads a program prioritization committee.

The cuts of the last few years have been mostly unplanned, executed during a budget emergency. It's better to build a road map for consolidation that makes sense, he said.

Proving a good faith effort to lawmakers is one thing, Mitchelson said, but the reorganization is really for students.

"The last thing we want to do is keep hammering our students with more tuition and fees," Mitchelson said. "This region has a hard enough time as it is."

Alumni, others can help

Some of the savviest university advocates think the real work has to be done outside Raleigh, among them Basnight, the Manteo Democrat who stepped down last year.

"What I see now is a serious need for the university alumni, trustees and Board of Governors educating the members that represent them," Basnight said. "That does not mean emailing the members in Raleigh, or going there, but going to their homes or businesses with a full understanding of the needs and functions and purposes of their individual school.

"They can change the dynamic tomorrow, because members listen to the wishes of constituents," he added. "If they do that, they can get the resources they need. But if they sit on their butts, the cuts will occur."

Out of the ivory tower
Some university leaders have already been proselytizing to alumni and business leaders themselves.

A little more than a week ago, NCSU Chancellor Randy Woodson traveled to several eastern counties to meet with alumni and local leaders and visit companies that employ NCSU grads. For part of the trip, he was joined by Ross, the system president.

Woodson makes such trips once or twice each month, speaking to chambers of commerce and Rotary clubs, encouraging alumni to give, explaining the relevance of the university and learning what the businesses and communities need from it. The UNC system had already suffered consecutive cuts in state spending when Woodson arrived, and from almost his first day, he has pushed for stronger fundraising..

In Washington, N.C., at an educational center dedicated to estuaries, Woodson stepped onstage in a small auditorium, looked out at the audience of about 50 business leaders and alumni and launched into his version of a politician's stump speech. He talked about how the university's industrial extension service has worked with small manufacturers to save or create 2,200 jobs in this fiscal year alone. He said companies spun off from NCSU in recent years have created more than nearly 7,000 jobs, not counting those at the two largest spinoffs, SAS and Cree.

Such visits are standard, but the tough climate for higher education has sharpened his message.

"I need all of the alumni excited about the university," Woodson said. "I need them contributing to us financially, but most importantly I need to have them feeling a sense of pride about the job we do in research and education. The more we're out there keeping people connected to what we do here, keeping them proud of what we do here, the more stories they're able to tell when they're in that setting with the local member of the General Assembly, in that coffee shop or whatever."

**220-year-old mission**

Rand, the former Democratic state senator from Fayetteville and a university backer, said support for the system is out there in all those places. He cited the $3.1 billion in higher education construction bonds that every county in North Carolina supported in 2000.

It is a time of potential peril for the system, Rand said, but many in the legislature understand that North Carolina's system of public higher education has helped it rise above other states.
"There is no issue more important," he said. "And you have to hope that each generation understands and protects those things that are irreplaceable, because you can destroy in five or six years what has taken more than 220 years to build."

**Return on investment**

As some make an argument about the university's role in the state's history, others point to the future and the fact that more and more jobs require a higher education degree.

In a report presented to the UNC board last month, NCSU economist Mike Walden estimated the future economic benefit and earnings of 2009 system graduates to be $6.1 billion, resulting in 52,000 jobs in the state. Out-of-state students who came to UNC campuses added about $400 million and 10,000 jobs, he said, and research brought $1.5 billion and 29,000 jobs to North Carolina in 2010-11.

Bottom line, Walden said, for every dollar the state spends on public universities, there is a return of $3.65.

The study is likely to be cited in the days and months ahead, as supporters point to the university system as an economic engine. Whether that argument gets traction is unclear.

"There's a case that can be made for that," said Berger, the Senate leader. "Whether or not the weight to be allocated to that case is still an open question. I think it's important. How important, I think, is a judgment call."

Berger gave a talk to Citizens for Higher Education, the political action committee started by wealthy UNC-CH supporters. The group gave $190,000 to candidates in the last election cycle and donated $8,000 to Berger since 2010.

The political committee also invited Berger to attend a basketball game at the Dean Dome in Chapel Hill. Berger, who earned his law degree at Wake Forest University, declined.

"The new normal means there aren't going to be any slam dunks anymore," said Gage, the UNC board chairwoman. "You have to tell your story over and over, and you have to justify every penny. And that's what we'll do."

Stancill: 919-829-4559
County aims to attract more biotech
By K.j. Williams
Saturday, March 3, 2012

Identifying the biotechnology industries best suited to this area is a crucial step in attracting that sector and creating more jobs, an official with the Pitt County Development Commission said.

The recent award of a $42,000 regional development grant from the N.C. Biotechnology Center has funded the cost of a New Jersey consulting company’s planned analysis of Pitt County’s assets. The study will get under way this month, and its findings should be ready by this summer.

In addition to providing the grant for the county to fund an analysis, the center also is hosting a free networking event for the region called Eastern BioNight 2012 at the Hilton Greenville at 6 p.m. on March 15. It will showcase the biotechnology sector with exhibits and demonstrations.

The biotechnology sector develops technology based on biology, using cells and biomolecular processes. The related field of life sciences refers to the broader use of living organisms.

The field is wide-ranging from technology, including those that may rely on agriculture like biofuel or the biomass used in renewable energy
technologies, to biomedical devices. Pitt County already is home to several industries in the arenas of biotechnology and life sciences.

Kelly Andrews, the commission’s associate director, said the analysis will be used to improve Pitt County’s chances at recruiting industry.

“By targeting the sectors that best match our core strengths, we can market and recruit more effectively,” Andrews said.

The biotechnology sector in North Carolina is growing, with about 530 companies statewide. The state ranks third nationally, Jim Shamp, the center’s spokesman, said. The state’s biotech industries employ more than 57,000 people, and support another 226,000 jobs related to the sector. Overall, the sector has a $64.6 billion effect annually in North Carolina, including the federal research grants obtained by universities.

Shamp said the Legislature created the center to buttress the economy due to expected declines in other sectors ranging from textiles to tobacco.

“Since the state decided in 1984 to focus on the life sciences as a job creation engine, the universities have played a key role in making that happen,” he said.

For eastern North Carolina, the center’s website lists the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University as a core provider of laboratory facilities supporting the life sciences and biotechnology-related fields of study. The other listed facility for this region is the Duke University Marine Laboratory.

Andrews said that ECU research is a key driver in the industry.

“ECU has a growing bio-research community in diverse areas such as regenerative medicine, vaccines, nanotoxicology and biomedical devices,” she said.

And it is expected that technology will continue to “spin out of the university and be commercialized,” Andrews said.

“This is part of the inventory of strong assets that collectively make us a strong contender for biotechnology projects,” she said.

In addition to enlarging the county’s tax bases and the investment dollars these industries bring, they also bring high-paying manufacturing jobs, she said.

“You have your engineers and scientists, but you also have production jobs as well, which, again, can run the gamut of skill and pay,” Andrews said.
The final analysis of Pitt’s potential markets also will draw on a previous biotechnology asset inventory produced last year by ECU’s Office of Engagement, Innovation and Economic Development.

Andrews said recruitment of biotechnology industries is competitive, but Pitt has an edge in some areas when compared to the Research Triangle Park in Durham County.

When promoting Pitt, its cost-savings assets are stressed, including a lower cost of living and a less expensive cost of doing business, Andrews said, adding that the area’s health care facilities and ECU also figure as significant benefits.

To register, go to upcoming events on the website at www.ncbiotech.org. Contact K.J. Williams at kwilliams@reflector.com or 252-329-9588.
Emergency room visits for many easily prevented dental problems are increasing nationwide, according to a new report.

The study by the Pew Center on the States was based partly on hospital data from 24 states. Its findings do not mention every state that was studied, but provided information about certain places where the cost or growth rates are high.

North Carolina was among the states mentioned.

Dental visits to North Carolina emergency rooms totaled more than 69,000 in 2009 — the 10th most common reason for ER treatment in the state.

However, at Greenville’s Vidant Medical Center, emergency physician Dr. Theodore Delbridge said that the number of visits hasn’t appeared to increase during the last six years.

He said that dental problems always have been a top reason for emergency room visits, ranking them somewhere between 10th and 15th at the hospital, where he’s chief of emergency services.

Sometimes, there has been acute trauma to the tooth that is caused an injury, but it’s often due to dental problems that haven’t been addressed like abscesses or gum disease.

While the emergency staff can provide antibiotics and painkillers as needed, the overall problem needs to be addressed by a dentist, said Delbridge,
who’s also chair of the Emergency Medicine Department at East Carolina University’s Brody School of Medicine.

Some people make repeated emergency room visits for the same concern. “It’s really not fixing the problem; it’s really only temporizing it, and they still need to see a dentist,” he said. “Poor dental health and hygiene is a contributor to other diseases with far-reaching health-care implications.”

Delbridge said that lower-income patients also can seek follow-up treatment at providers including the James D. Bernstein Community Health Center or at ECU Physicians’ Family Medicine Center.

Here’s a look at some other states with significant increases:

- In Florida, ER visits for dental trouble totaled more than 115,000 in 2010, resulting in more than $88 million in charges. That included more than 40,000 Medicaid patients, a 40 percent increase from 2008.
- Dental visits to the ER by Oregon Medicaid patients totaled 12,402 in 2010, a 31 percent jump from 2008.
- South Carolina ER dental visits increased nearly 60 percent in 2009 from four years earlier.
- Tennessee ER dental visits totaled more than 55,000 in 2009 — five times more than for burns.
- Georgia’s 60,000 ER visits for dental problems and oral health in 2007 cost more than $23 million.
- In New York, ER or surgery center treatment for tooth decay-related trouble in young children cost more than $31 million in 2008, 32 percent higher than in 2004.
- In Illinois’ Cook County, including Chicago, ER dental visits totaled nearly 77,000 from 2008 to 2011.
- In Maine, dental problems were the main reason for ER visits among Medicaid patients and uninsured young people in 2006.
Fundraiser helps to fill empty bowls  
Sunday, March 4, 2012

Two East Carolina University groups partnered to combat hunger in the Greenville area with a fundraising project Friday to benefit the Greenville Homeless Shelter and the Greenville Food Bank.

ECU’s Campus Living and Dining Services and the ECU Ceramics Guild raised the funds with an Empty Bowls fundraiser in Mendenhall Student Center’s Great Rooms.

The Empty Bowls Project is an international grassroots effort to fight hunger. In exchange for a cash donation, guests participated in a simple meal of soup and bread and were asked to keep a handcrafted bowl as a reminder of all the empty bowls in the world. The bowls for the fundraiser were created and donated by the ECU Ceramics Guild.

For additional information about the project, visit www.emptybowls.net or contact ECU Campus Living and Dining Services at 328-2883.
A large majority of Greenville residents have little or no fear of crime in their neighborhoods, and even more are very satisfied with the service provided by their police department, according to a survey conducted at city expense by East Carolina University.

The Community Fear of Crime Study was conducted via phone questionnaire of 386 responding residents from all four Greenville policing districts between September and November by the ECU Criminal Justice Department. It will be presented Thursday to the City Council by department chairman William Bloss.

The data showed that, citywide, approximately 92 percent of respondents expressed little or no fear of crime in their respective neighborhoods.

Study participants ranked their greatest crime fears as speeding and reckless driving (37.8 percent), burglary (28.4 percent) and loud parties (21.2) percent.

Visiting a neighborhood park or playground registered the highest fear level among a list of 13 types of activities, with 61.5 percent of people saying they were afraid or very afraid. Next on the fear list, 35.6 percent said they were afraid or very afraid of shopping or dining in the downtown area at night. In comparison with other areas of the city, four of the top five fears registered by residents were connected to downtown activities, but, contrary to some expectations, none amounted to a high fear of crime in that area, the study indicated.

“Based on conversations we had beforehand with city leaders and task force members, there was a perception that it would be an area of great concern,” Bloss said.

The police department also asked the researchers to study residents’ level of satisfaction with police service and performance.

Measures of officers’ professionalism and trustworthiness drew an overall 84-93 percent satisfaction rate. More than 62 percent believed the police are effective at preventing crime, 72.5 percent believed they effectively
investigate crime and nearly 69 percent said they solve crimes quickly, the authors reported.

Local television and newspaper media were the most relied upon sources of information (more than 75 percent) used to formulate opinions about the police, the researchers said.

The crime study was commissioned in April 2011 on a recommendation from the Special Task Force on Public Safety. The researchers were asked to explore facets of the fear of crime perception in the city’s four policing districts and citywide, Bloss said in a phone interview on Friday.

They studied people’s perceptions of the crime risk in their neighborhoods and in the downtown area, and asked people what information sources contributed to their crime risk perceptions, Bloss said.

Data also was collected about the people who participated in the study. About 70 percent were women and about 76 percent owned a home, according to the report demographics. About 70 percent of those interviewed were white. College graduates made up about 48 percent of the demographic and 56 percent either were unemployed or retired.

Bloss said the number and diversity of the responding study subjects (6,000 were contacted and 386 responded) were “scientifically valid and sufficient” to provide reliable data for the department’s report. He said having well-trained expert criminologists conducting the study assured its objectivity.

“We have a number of years of experience studying crime from different points of view,” Bloss said. “While you never know what the findings will be until you collect and analyze the data, some of the findings and measurements were consistent with what the body of research has shown in other places.”

The chairman said some outcomes were not a surprise to the research team, but found the high level of regard for the police department services and performance particularly remarkable.

“That’s a very high percentage,” Bloss said. “That doesn’t mean there aren’t things in the report the police department can learn from regarding citizens’ concerns. There are areas in the report where the people felt the police can do better, but I’m confident the police leadership will recognize that and work to do better.”

Bloss avoided political speculation, but acknowledged that, combined with recent statistics that show an overall drop in serious crime levels, his
department’s report about crime perceptions confirms the success of former police chief William Anderson’s efforts at community policing and strengthening the relationship between police and the people of the community they serve.

“At the end of the day, it’s more about perception than reality,” Bloss said. “If people feel unsafe even when the data show they’re not, they’re unsafe. A leader who is insensitive to public perceptions about risk of crime just doesn’t get it. You have to be responsive to the things that affect quality of life and a sense of well-being.”

Contact Michael Abramowitz at mabramowitz@reflector.com or 252-329-9571.
Arthur J. Rich of Garland, a Republican candidate for lieutenant governor, made the first stop on his campaign trail last week in Greenville — the perfect place if your campaign signs are purple and gold.

“Except for my hometown, Greenville is my favorite place to be,” said Rich, a 2004 graduate of East Carolina University. “I couldn’t think of a better place to start my bid for lieutenant governor.”

Rich, one of five people vying for the state’s second highest office, spent Wednesday and Thursday on campus recruiting student volunteers.

“The response I got here in Greenville was amazing,” Rich, a native of Bladen County, said. “I want to get young people involved in my campaign, and the students were very excited.”

Rich said he received a lot of support from his former professors as well.

“A few of them told me that they always saw me going into politics,” he said. “But I wouldn’t have ever taken this step without the guidance I received here at ECU. I want to thank them for that.”

Rich, 34, said that he wants to be the first ECU graduate elected to the office of lieutenant governor.

“I would also be the youngest lieutenant governor by a few weeks if I get elected,” he said.

A self-employed tax accountant and tax consultant, Rich said that he doesn’t see him self as a “traditional politician.”
“I’m definitely not your typical candidate,” said Rich, who filed for office on Tuesday in Raleigh. “And I don’t want to be. We have enough career politicians in our country. We need something different.”

His campaign slogan, “Jobs Development Now,” reflects one of the most important issues to voters not only in North Carolina, but across the United States.

“It all boils down to jobs,” Rich said. “If we can’t get people back to work, we are not going anywhere.”

Rich said that his approach to job development in North Carolina differs from most politicians because it is based on “old-fashioned common sense.”

“My grandfather once told me, ‘If you can’t find a job, invent one,’” Rich said. “We have to invent new employment opportunities in our state.”

Rich’s strategy for creating jobs, the Bootstrap Job Development Plan, calls for North Carolina to develop new products instead of competing with other states for manufacturing jobs.

“Economic development has devolved into a catalyst for the transfer of unemployment among states,” Rich said. “When we gain 500 jobs, another state loses 500 jobs. There is no such thing as ‘job creation.’

“To invent new jobs, we must offer consumers new products and services.”

The Bootstrap Job Development Plan, which was developed by Rich, AES-International and the Research Institute of the South, proposes that new products could be developed and manufactured in each of the state’s 100 counties using existing factories, some of which sit idle.

“We have all the resources we need, we just need to put them to work” Rich said. “Our country needs a new industrial revolution, and we can start the revolution right here in North Carolina.”

Rich said that finding new products to manufacture isn’t hard to do — more than 20 patents came out of East Carolina University alone in 2011.

“The new ideas are right there,” Rich said. “We just have to manufacture them right here.”

Rich also has developed the Rich Housing Revitalization Act Proposal, which he claims could stimulate the housing industry and create 500,000 jobs in the United States.
“I have submitted this plan to the National Homebuilders Association and to several members of the U.S. Senate,” he said. “They all agree that this plan can work.”

Rich’s plan involves giving several tax incentives to homebuyers, which would help absorb the excess of homes on the market and resurrect thousands of industry-related jobs.

“Basically, the plan boils down to making the down payment on buying a home tax deductible,” Rich said. “This gets new and foreclosed houses off the market and brings back careers ranging from real estate sales to contracting, jobs which disappeared after the market hit bottom.”

Rich said through these two proposals, North Carolina can reverse unemployment and stimulate the economy, which he says will have a “domino effect” across the state.

“When North Carolina starts generating more revenue, more money can be invested in our schools or improving our roads, which leads to even more jobs in those areas,” Rich said. “All of this starts with job development and we have the tools right now to make that happen.

“I just want to help make our state the best it can be.”

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Undergraduate art exhibit opens at ECU
Sunday, March 4, 2012
ECU Notes

The annual exhibit featuring works created by East Carolina University undergraduates will continue through March 31 at the Wellington B. Gray Gallery at the School of Art and Design.

School of Art and Design faculty selected the works for the show from more than 600 undergraduate submissions. The more than 100 pieces in the exhibit reflect the hard work and talent of students at ECU, said Tom Braswell, interim gallery director.

“As always, the show has a lot of exquisite metal design work because we have one of the best metal design work programs in the country,” he said.

“When you walk into the gallery, there’s foundations work, which include several beautiful drawings, and then you move into surface design and weaving,” Braswell said. “We also have several large paintings and woodcuts in print making.”
Approximately 50 pieces were selected by artist and curator Crista Cammaroto, director of galleries for the College of Arts and Architecture at UNC-Charlotte, for awards.

Cammaroto is director of galleries for the College of Arts and Architecture at UNC-Charlotte. She earned her undergraduate fine arts degree from Arizona State University and a Master of Fine Arts degree in interdisciplinary students from the University of Colorado–Boulder. She has 13 years of experience in academia, including at Queens University and Oregon College of Arts and Craft.

Her artwork is on permanent display in the Denver Art Museum, UNC-Charlotte and in the Bechtler Collection. Her work can be seen online at http://www.cristacammaroto.com/index.html.

For more information about the exhibit and gallery hours, contact Braswell at 328-6336 or visit www.ecu.edu/graygallery.

**High school students test engineering skills**

Nearly 75 high school students from eastern North Carolina crunched numbers and engaged in creative thinking exercises on Feb. 24 during a national competition hosted at ECU.

The Tests of Engineering Aptitude, Mathematics and Science (TEAMS) program is an annual event challenging high school students to work collaboratively and apply their math and science knowledge in practical, creative ways to solve real engineering challenges. The one-day competitions take place at more than 100 locations between Feb. 13 and March 12 and involve more than 10,000 students vying for local, state, and national rankings and awards.

This was the fourth consecutive year ECU’s College of Technology and Computer Science hosted TEAMS competitors. Participants were grouped into nine teams from Winterville’s South Central High School; Richlands High School; and Bertie Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math High School of Windsor.

Students answered 80 multiple-choice questions over a 90-minute period, followed by four open-ended challenges during a second 90-minute time frame. The theme this year — which participating teams knew in advance — was “Engineering Healthier Lives,” which focused on engineering applications in health care and medicine.
“It’s not a lot of hands-on playing with robots,” said Dr. David Batts, associate professor in the Department of Technology Systems and TEAMS competition coordinator. “It’s applying knowledge to real-life scenarios.”

The junior varsity squad from Richlands took home first prize on Friday. Questions vary in difficulty for varsity and junior varsity teams, but the Richlands group had the most correct answers overall, Batts said.

After racking their brains for the first half of the day, members of the college’s Student Leadership Advisory Council led visiting students on tours of Technology and Computer Science labs and the larger campus. The high schoolers were invited to ask questions about college life, classes and departments, and how majors match up with various career paths.

“A lot of students in eastern North Carolina will be first generation college students,” Batts said. “Sometimes this is the first opportunity they have gotten to be on a college campus and this shows that we’re open and that faculty and staff really work with the students.”

Batts said there is a national push to recruit students into STEM fields, and that programs like TEAMS help “build awareness of STEM degrees and careers…throughout the United States and especially in rural areas.”

For more information about the Technology Student Association’s TEAMS competitions, visit http://teams.tsaweb.org/teams/about/.

Chitwood honored in Germany

Dr. W. Randolph Chitwood Jr., a cardiovascular surgeon at East Carolina University, has been inducted as an honorary member in the German Society for Thoracic, Heart and Vascular Surgery.

Chitwood, professor of cardiovascular sciences at the Brody School of Medicine and senior associate vice chancellor for health sciences at ECU, received the honor on Feb. 12 in Freiburg, Germany. He delivered his acceptance speech in German.

Chitwood received the award from Dr. Frederich W. Mohr of the University of Leipzig.

Mohr spoke of Chitwood’s worldwide influence on the development of less invasive cardiac surgery as well as his long-standing relationship with many German cardiac surgeons and surgical centers.

Chitwood worked with specialists in Germany to develop the tools and techniques that led to robotic heart surgery in the United States.
Chitwood is the Eddie and Jo Allison Smith Distinguished Chair of Cardiovascular Sciences and director of the East Carolina Heart Institute.

**Alum association gets award of excellence**

The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) District III awarded the East Carolina Alumni Association with a prestigious award of excellence for overall alumni relations program during its recent conference. The Alumni Association received the grand award in this category in 2008 and 2009, and the Award of Excellence in 2011.

“This just lets the world know what we already know — East Carolina and her Alumni Association are true to our mission of service,” said Paul J. Clifford, president and CEO of the East Carolina Alumni Association.

“We do what we do because our alumni deserve the best, awards just validate that others are watching and approve,” he said.

Other finalists in the category were the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Western Kentucky, and Miami University. The grand award went to Western Kentucky. UNC-CH also received the award of excellence, and Miami received special merit recognition.

**Upcoming event:**

Friday: Family Fare Series will present ArcAttack!, 7 p.m., Wright Auditorium. Described as part theatrical show, part concert and a little science fair. For tickets, call 328-4788 or 800-ECU-ARTS.

See [www.ecu.edu/cs-ecu/calendar.cfm](http://www.ecu.edu/cs-ecu/calendar.cfm) for times, places and more information on these events and other ECU upcoming activities.
Scouts’ Eagle Class named for ECU surgeon
Sunday, March 4, 2012

The East Carolina Council of Boy Scouts of America recently named its 2011 Eagle Class in honor of Dr. Peter Wagner, a heart surgeon at the East Carolina University Brody School of Medicine.

Wagner, an Eagle Scout, serves on the council’s executive board, the Pamlico Sea Base Committee and as coordinator for Philmont Scout Ranch contingents.

Wagner was recognized in February at the 2012 Eagle Scout & Volunteer Recognition Meeting and Reception held in Kinston.

In addition, Al Patrick and Lexie Dean, both of Greenville, were among six adult volunteers recognized with the Silver Beaver Award, the highest award for community service a local council gives an adult volunteer.

Other silver award recipients were Paul Scarborough of Greene County, Kim Richardson of Beaufort County, Ronnie Spence of Roanoke Rapids and Don Edwards of Newport.
Bryan Tuten has been named director of Dowdy Student Stores at East Carolina University. He served as interim director since March 2010.

As director, Tuten supervises a staff of 25 full-time employees, 25 part-time student employees and numerous seasonal, temporary employees.

He is responsible for the operations and management of the bookstore on the ECU campus and the medical bookstore at the Brody School of Medicine, as well as souvenir and merchandise sales at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium, Minges Coliseum, Clark-LeClair Stadium, and other ECU athletics venues and special events.

The announcement was made by Scott Buck, associate vice chancellor for Administration and Finance, Business Services.

“Mr. Tuten is known campus and statewide for his professionalism and dedication to customer service,” Buck said in a news release. “He was overwhelmingly selected by the search committee.”

Tuten has been with Dowdy Student Stores since December 2000, when he was hired as associate director. He joined the university in 1996 as a purchasing agent with the Department of Materials Management.

“Being named permanent director of the Dowdy Student Stores is a great opportunity that I feel very fortunate to have,” Tuten said. “I’m looking forward to serving the ECU community and ensuring that Dowdy Student Stores continues its mission of great customer service and being the leader in scholarship contributions at East Carolina University.”

Tuten graduated from Mount Olive College in 1993 with a bachelor’s degree in business management and earned a master’s degree in public administration from ECU in 2004. He is a member of the National Association of College Stores and College Stores Association of North Carolina and served on the CSANC board of directors from 2008-09.

Tuten, who grew up in Pinetown in Beaufort County, is the son of Wayne and Annette Tuten. He graduated from Bath High School in 1989.

Tuten and his wife, Jennifer, live in Greenville with their son, Rylan, 5, and daughter, Katie, 2.
Zeri to serve as board president of Pitt County Medical Society
Monday, March 5, 2012

Dr. Richard Zeri, associate professor and chief of the Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University, recently was installed as board president of the Pitt County Medical Society, a physician member organization.

Zeri is certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery and by the American Board of Surgery. He received his medical degree from Georgetown University School of Medicine and completed 10 years of surgical training to develop skills for aesthetic and reconstructive plastic surgery, hand surgery and microsurgery. His training included a surgery residency at Pitt County Memorial Hospital.

Zeri also completed a residency in plastic surgery at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He undertook additional sub-specialty training as a Fellow in hand and microsurgery at the C.M. Kleinert Institute for Hand and Microsurgery in Louisville, Ky., where he also completed an aesthetic surgery fellowship. Zeri is a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons.

Also on the board are:

- Dr. Bryan Cooper, Eastern Headache & Spine, president-elect;
- Dr. Myles Reedy, Eastern Radiologists Inc., secretary-treasurer;
- Dr. Raetta Fountain, Atlantic Gastroenterology P.A., past president;
- Dr. Karen Buckley, Brody School of Medicine, Department of Surgery/Plastic and Reconstructive, at-large member;
- Dr. Nathaniel Hamilton, Eastern Urological Associates P.A., at-large member;
- Dr. Mark Manwaring, Brody School of Medicine, Department of Surgery, at-large member;
- Dr. Muhammad Saeed, Brody School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, early career representative;
- Carol Akers, medical student representative.

The Pitt County Medical Society was chartered in 1903 and serves as the voice of the physician community.
A startup that originated in an MBA class at N.C. State University is putting a 21st-century twist on the coupon books that community groups sell as fundraisers.

"We are taking that same business model and eliminating the paper from it," said Matthew Davis, chief operating officer of the Durham-based venture, Zeek, which operates in space in the American Tobacco Campus that was donated to NCSU.

Zeek has digitized the coupon books that feature discounts and buy-one-get-one-free offers from local merchants and are sold by school and church groups and nonprofits. Instead, you can call up Zeek coupons on your smartphone and electronically "clip" them as needed. Those who don't have smartphones can print out coupons from getzeek.com, the company's website.

The community groups that Zeek signs up "sell one-year memberships to our mobile and online site," said Davis. "Just like the books, it is loaded with at least $1,500 in savings" from more than 100 merchants per market.

Zeek was conceived for a class project by Jonathan Stephens, 33, an MBA student who is concentrating on high-tech entrepreneurship at NCSU. He teamed up with two of his classmates, Davis and Josh Robertson, and the co-owners of Durham Web development company Smashing Boxes - Brian Fischer and Nick Jordan - to create Zeek.

Stephens, who is CEO, and Davis are pursuing their MBAs but quit their full-time jobs in order to devote more time to making Zeek work.

"I think Zeek is at the forefront of the new world where the smartphone is going to be (a vehicle) for doing lots of things you never thought of," said Al Bender. Bender, who has been CEO of numerous startups, is one of two NCSU mentors working with the Zeek team.

Digitized coupon books have some inherent advantages. Because they're not tied to when they're published, groups can sell them year-round, and merchants can join up at any time. Merchants who are already participating can change or add deals, although Zeek requires that replacement deals must
be roughly comparable. And you don't have to worry about forgetting your coupon book - it's on your smartphone.

Moreover, the market is becoming so saturated with paper coupon books that a mobile version is a way for community groups to differentiate themselves, Stephens said.

**Testing the concept**

Last fall Zeek started signing up merchants in two test markets, Wilmington and Greensboro, and to date they have landed more than 100 in each market. They're testing the concept this spring with about 16 community groups who recently began selling Zeek memberships; eight others have committed to future sales. The groups get to keep half of the $25 price of a one-year Zeek membership.

Zeek also recently expanded into northern Virginia. The goal is to work out any kinks before the fall, which is the major fundraising season for community groups.

"Parents who use smartphones, use technology, are really into it," said Stephanie Lanier, PTA president at the Child Development Center in Wilmington, which recently started selling Zeek memberships.

Lanier has known Stephens since they were college classmates. Zeek has deliberately avoided entering the Triangle market because Stephens' sister, Holly Armstrong, and her husband own Greater Raleigh Citipass and Chapel Hill/Durham Citipass.

Certainly established coupon-book companies in the markets Zeek is entering could go mobile too, but Zeek is betting it can establish its brand before others invade its digital turf.

"Why did Blockbuster not respond faster to Netflix? Why did Borders bookstores not respond faster to Amazon," said Stephens. "It's an inertia thing."

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Instruction for Masses Knocks Down Campus Walls

By TAMAR LEWIN

The pitch for the online course sounds like a late-night television ad, or maybe a subway poster: “Learn programming in seven weeks starting Feb. 20. We’ll teach you enough about computer science that you can build a Web search engine like Google or Yahoo.”

But this course, Building a Search Engine, is taught by two prominent computer scientists, Sebastian Thrun, a Stanford research professor and Google fellow, and David Evans, a professor on leave from the University of Virginia.

The big names have been a big draw. Since Udacity, the for-profit startup running the course, opened registration on Jan. 23, more than 90,000 students have enrolled in the search-engine course and another taught by Mr. Thrun, who led the development of Google’s self-driving car.

Welcome to the brave new world of Massive Open Online Courses — known as MOOCs — a tool for democratizing higher education. While the vast potential of free online courses has excited theoretical interest for decades, in the past few months hundreds of thousands of motivated students around the world who lack access to elite universities have been embracing them as a path toward sophisticated skills and high-paying jobs, without
paying tuition or collecting a college degree. And in what some see as a threat to traditional institutions, several of these courses now come with an informal credential (though that, in most cases, will not be free).

Consider Stanford’s experience: Last fall, 160,000 students in 190 countries enrolled in an Artificial Intelligence course taught by Mr. Thrun and Peter Norvig, a Google colleague. An additional 200 registered for the course on campus, but a few weeks into the semester, attendance at Stanford dwindled to about 30, as those who had the option of seeing their professors in person decided they preferred the online videos, with their simple views of a hand holding a pen, working through the problems.

Mr. Thrun was enraptured by the scale of the course, and how it spawned its own culture, including a Facebook group, online discussions and an army of volunteer translators who made it available in 44 languages.

“Having done this, I can’t teach at Stanford again,” he said at a digital conference in Germany in January. “I feel like there’s a red pill and a blue pill, and you can take the blue pill and go back to your classroom and lecture your 20 students. But I’ve taken the red pill, and I’ve seen Wonderland.”

Besides the Artificial Intelligence course, Stanford offered two other MOOCs last semester — Machine Learning (104,000 registered, and 13,000 completed the course), and Introduction to Databases (92,000 registered, 7,000 completed). And this spring, the university will have 13 courses open to the world, including Anatomy, Cryptography, Game Theory and Natural Language Processing.

“We’re considering this still completely experimental, and we’re trying to figure out the right way to go down this road,” said John Etchemendy, the Stanford provost. “Our business is education, and I’m all in favor of supporting anything that can help educate more people around the world. But there are issues to consider, from copyright questions to what it might mean for our accreditation if we provide some official credential for these courses, branded as Stanford.”

Mr. Thrun sent the 23,000 students who completed the Artificial Intelligence course a PDF file (suitable for framing) by e-mail showing their percentile score, but not the Stanford name; 248 students, none from Stanford, earned grades of 100 percent.

For many of the early partisans, the professed goal is more about changing the world than about making money. But Udemy, a startup with backing from the founders of Groupon, is hoping that wide use of its site could
ultimately generate profits. And Mr. Thrun’s new company, Udacity, which is supported by Charles River Ventures, plans to, essentially, monetize its students’ skills — and help them get jobs — by getting their permission to sell leads to recruiters.

“We’re going to have detailed records on thousands of students who have learned these skills, many of whom will want to make those skills available to employers,” said Mr. Evans, the Virginia professor. “So if a recruiter is looking for the hundred best people in some geographic area that know about machine learning, that’s something we could provide, for a fee. I think it’s the cusp of a revolution.”

On Feb. 13, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which has been posting course materials online for 10 years, opened registration for its first MOOC, a circuits and electronics course. The course will serve as the prototype for its MITx project, which will eventually offer a wide range of courses and some sort of credential for those who complete them.

The Georgia Institute of Technology is running an experimental two-semester MOOC, known as Change 11, a free-floating forum that exists more in the online postings and response of the students — only two of whom are getting Georgia Tech credit — than in the formal materials assigned by a rotation of professors. Next year, Richard DeMillo, director of Georgia Tech’s Center for 21st Century Universities, hopes to put together a MOOSe, or massive open online seminar, through a network of universities that will offer credit.

Udemy recently announced a new Faculty Project, in which award-winning professors from universities like Dartmouth, the University of Virginia and Northwestern offer free online courses. Its co-founder, Gagen Biyani, said the site has more than 100,000 students enrolled in its courses, including several, outside the Faculty Project, that charge fees.

Experts say several factors have helped propel MOOCs to the center of the education stage, including improved technology and the exploding costs of traditional universities.

“We also now have the example of for-profit colleges that have shown that it’s perfectly possible to go to scale online,” said Kevin Carey, policy director of Education Sector, an independent policy institute.

Five years ago, George Siemens started a MOOC on what was happening in open education, hoping to do for teaching what M.I.T.’s OpenCourseWare had done for content: it attracted 2,300 participants, with a syllabus
translated into several languages. Mr. Siemens, a professor at Athabasca University, a publicly-supported online Canadian institution, said it was quickly apparent that the format created distinctive social networks, as students carried on wide-ranging discussions on their own.

“A lot of the relationships formed through that first course are still continuing today,” said Mr. Siemens, who is also a facilitator of Georgia Tech’s program. “What we found was that in a MOOC, instead of the classroom being the center, it becomes just one node of the network of social interactions.”

The current, more technically focused MOOCs are highly automated, with computer-graded assignment and exams. But there is still plenty of room for social interaction. The Stanford MOOCs, for example, included virtual office hours and online discussion forums where students could ask and answer questions — and vote on which were important enough to filter up the professor.

“In a classroom, when you ask a question, one student answers and the others don’t get a chance,” Mr. Thrun said. “Online, with embedded quizzes, everyone has to try to answer the questions. And if they don’t understand, they can go back and listen over and over until they do.” Just as a child who falls while learning to ride a bike is not told “You get a D,” but is encouraged to keep trying, he said, online classes, where students can work at their own pace, can help students keep practicing until they master the content.

“The goal should be to get everybody to A+ level,” he said.

Several students in Mr. Thrun’s class last semester, contacted by e-mail, said the MOOC worked for them.

Balakrishnan Srinivasan, 45, a computer engineer in Bangalore, said he frequently replayed the videos, which made him “feel as if I had a personal tutor.” He earned a 94.8 in Artificial Intelligence and has signed up for both Udacity courses.

Brian Guan, 44, a Malaysian-born software engineer who lives in Palo Alto, Calif., offered his own utopian vision in an e-mail interview: “I wish that the always-available, always-replayable and free nature of this style of learning can help to elevate education/knowledge for all of human kind.”
Beyond the College Degree, Online Educational Badges

By TAMAR LEWIN

What’s so special about a diploma?

With the advent of Massive Open Online Courses and other online programs offering informal credentials, the race is on for alternative forms of certification that would be widely accepted by employers.

“Who needs a university anymore?” asked David Wiley, a Brigham Young University professor who is an expert on the new courses, known as MOOCs. “Employers look at degrees because it’s a quick way to evaluate all 300 people who apply for a job. But as soon as there’s some other mechanism that can play that role as well as a degree, the jig is up on the monopoly of degrees.”

By the end of this year, Mr. Wiley predicted, it will become familiar to hear of people who earned alternative credentials online and got high-paying jobs at Google or other high-visibility companies. “Udacity may help that process along,” he said of the startup company offering two MOOCs this semester taught by prominent engineers.

Mozilla, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and others are working to devise a system of online educational “badges” certifying exactly which skills had been learned. Some companies, like Microsoft, already offer their own certificates for trained computer technicians.

Some educators doubt that such credentials will ever command as much respect as a diploma from a well-known college. And of course, to be trustworthy, alternative credentials would have to be at least as cheat-proof as traditional ones. And that is not so simple.

At Stanford University, where Jennifer Widom, the chairwoman of the computer science department, taught an online database course last semester to more than 90,000 people, some found a covert route to high scores.

“There were definitely people getting multiple accounts and using some to practice and the other to get a perfect score,” said Dr. Widom, who still has hundreds of assignments trickling in every day for grading. “There were some who completed the exam with a perfect score in three minutes and the only way they could have done that was if they had already done the
problems in another account. My philosophy was not to be concerned in the least about people who cheat. But if there’s going to be actual certification that people depend on, those problems will have to be addressed.”

At Udacity, the plan is to deal with cheating — and help ensure the validity of the credential — by offering students a global network of in-person testing centers.

At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, this semester’s pilot course in a new MOOC venture known as MITx, will be on the honor system, but officials have begun to explore the possibility of using proctored test sites.

In both cases, the courses will be free, but the testing — and the credential — will have a price tag.
Ham, Holidays and Other Puzzles as Medical College Shifts Its Religious Affiliation

By RICHARD PÉREZ-PEÑA

VALHALLA, N.Y. — New York Medical College was planning to change its affiliation to Jewish from Catholic when an employee approached Rabbi Moshe D. Krupka in the cafeteria, voice raised and finger wagging, and demanded, “When you take over, will I be able to eat my ham sandwich here?”

A nervous hush fell over the room on that day two years ago. Some students and workers had protested the impending takeover by Touro College, while others were just nervous, unsure what to expect. The college officials giving Rabbi Krupka his first tour were mortified by the confrontation, but curious about his answer.

The rabbi, a senior vice president at Touro, cut the tension with a most rabbinic reply: “It depends.”

“On what?” the man asked.

“On whether you like ham,” the rabbi answered.

Institutions of higher education switch religious affiliations, as New York Medical College did nine months ago, so rarely that there really is no playbook to follow. It has meant addressing countless wary questions as they arise, including where to install mezuzas in doorways — 108 so far — and where people may be allowed to carry a cup of coffee.

Some teachers and students worried about a loss of identity; others said Touro lacked the prestige to be a suitable sponsor. But as Rabbi Krupka’s reaction suggested in that cafeteria exchange, the shift has been subtle for most people. “There was a lot of speculating and worrying,” said Matthew Pravetz, a Franciscan priest and a professor of anatomy who has been at the medical school since 1982. In reality, he said, the biggest change may be scheduling classes around Jewish holidays, “but I don’t think anyone minds having more days off.”

Students wondered if they would find the library locked on the Jewish Sabbath, but it remains open — no one staffs it, but the lights work on
timers, and the Internet connections stay on. When officials met to choose holidays, Rabbi Krupka said, “we got to Good Friday, and people assumed we would cross it off the list.” But he added, “We decided there was no reason not to keep it.”

Ultimately, the change may be less profound for the medical school than for Touro, a move up in prestige with a well-known subsidiary and a new academic field. The medical school gained a prominent new dean late last month, with the appointment of Dr. Edward C. Halperin, previously the dean of the University of Louisville’s medical school and a former vice dean at Duke’s medical school.

The medical school takeover continues Touro’s aggressive expansion, from its start in 1971 as a 35-student college in Manhattan to one with dozens of campuses across the country and overseas, and with some 19,000 students.

Since it was founded by Bernard Lander, an Orthodox rabbi and a sociologist who served as president until his death in 2010, Touro has identified itself as a Jewish institution engaged with worldly problems. It has long had a mostly non-Jewish student body, with particular appeal to older students and immigrants.

In the past 15 years, Touro has opened a graduate school of business and three schools of osteopathic medicine, and it was a pioneer in online education, before selling that operation in 2007. Touro has been known for a bare-bones administration and for having low tuition costs for a private college — undergraduates pay about $25,000 a year in tuition, room and board.

The relative lack of structure may have contributed to its occasionally being in the news for the wrong reasons, as in 2007, when two people, including an administrator, were indicted for falsifying transcripts in exchange for bribes. Dr. Alan H. Kadish, a noted cardiologist who became president of Touro two years ago, said that acquiring the medical school was a natural expansion for a college with osteopathic schools and popular undergraduate programs in medical science, and was not about raising Touro’s profile.

“It really was the logical next step,” he said. He declined to be specific about future expansions, but said, “There are probably 10 proposals on my desk right now.”

With about 800 M.D. students and nearly as many in related graduate programs, New York Medical College, which is in Westchester County, has long been the major supplier of student doctors to its next-door neighbor,
Westchester Medical Center, and to Metropolitan Hospital in Manhattan. In its early decades, the college, founded in 1860, was unusually open to women and minorities.

In the late 1970s, facing financial trouble, the medical school agreed to be sponsored by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York. The college did not become a Catholic institution, like Notre Dame or Boston College, but a college “in the Catholic tradition,” operating with fewer church restrictions.

Touro officials said on taking over that they were surprised to discover that there were no crucifixes to take down and few doctrinal limitations on curriculum to reverse. It already taught topics like contraceptive and fertility treatments that the church opposed. Dr. Kadish said that as far as he knew, the only area the school might embark on that it shunned during its Catholic affiliation was embryonic stem cell research.

The medical school’s chapel was never church-consecrated, so no formal decommissioning was needed.

As for how Jewish to make things, officials played it by ear. Mezuzas, the little boxed Hebrew prayer scrolls mounted on door jambs, were installed at building entrances but not auditoriums or classrooms. Professors chose whether to have them outside their offices, and after the tradition was explained, some non-Jewish professors requested them.

The one area in which strict Jewish standards apply is the cafeteria, whose kitchen operates under kosher rules and rabbinic supervision. The old kitchen equipment was thrown out or blowtorched in a cleansing ritual.

Lacking space for two sets of everything — one for cooking and serving meat, the other for dairy — it was decided that this would be a meat kitchen, untouched by milk products. A griddle was set aside solely for making eggs, which can fit into either category. Pastries made in a factory that uses dairy products are acceptable, as long as they are individually wrapped, and opened somewhere else.

“This was a huge learning curve for me, and I’m Jewish,” said Todd Kurtis, the dining director.

The rules extend only as far as the cash registers, which divide the kosher serving area from the nonkosher dining commons, where any food from outside is welcome.

But about that cup of coffee.
With milk forbidden, a table was set aside in the common area for adding ingredients to hot drinks. Once milk is added to a cup, the drink may not go back across that invisible barrier into the serving area, much less into the kitchen. There is no sign to that effect, but the rule was explained. Repeatedly.

“At the beginning, a couple of times, there was almost a flying tackle of somebody,” Mr. Kurtis said. “But everyone’s gotten the message.”