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ECU making plans for honor college
By JOSH HUMPHRIES
The Daily Reflector
Saturday, March 6, 2010
Officials at East Carolina University are going forward with plans to open an honors college on campus by the fall.
ECU Provost Marilyn Sheerer said a search committee has been formed to hire a dean for the college and officials are looking for a place to house the program on campus.
The Mamie Jenkins building, which is currently being renovated, may house the program, Sheerer said.
The university’s three-to-five year plan would place about 400 students in the honor’s college and increase faculty and funding for the college.
Sheerer said students will be accepted into the college this fall.
The creation of an honors college, an upgrade from the school’s current honors program which includes about 900 students, will allow the university to recruit better students and faculty, Sheerer said.
The university loses about 100 students every year with GPAs above 3.0. Sheerer said some of those students choose to leave ECU because they are not challenged enough.
“They may come here and get a good academic average and then go on to a school that they perceive has a better academic reputation,” Sheerer said. “But we need to turn that around to keep them with us.”
An honors college with more creative and challenging classes will attract and keep top students at East Carolina, she said.
“We will get a number of really good students here, and we will be able to keep them with us and appreciating the experience we have to challenge them intellectually,” Sheerer said.
ECU’s honors program admits students with SAT scores of 1200 or better and a high school GPA of 3.5 or better.
ECU students with a GPA of 3.3 also are admitted to the program.
Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@reflector.com or (252) 329-9565.
Assault on Taft could have been random, police say

RALEIGH -- A day after a state education board member was found seriously injured inside the home of a Raleigh attorney, police said they could not rule out a random assault in a normally peaceful neighborhood of modest homes inside the Beltline.

N.C. Board of Education member Kathy Taft, 62, was taken to WakeMed on Saturday after being found injured in the home of John Geil, a local tax and divorce attorney described as her romantic partner by a former colleague of both.

On Sunday evening, Raleigh police spokesman Jim Sughrue said Taft's injuries were serious and that she remains in the hospital. Sughrue did not give further details about how she was assaulted except to say investigators hadn't eliminated the possibility of a random attack. WakeMed spokeswoman Keicha Berzins said the hospital would not release any information on Taft's condition Sunday.

Geil could not be reached for comment.

Taft, 62, lives in Greenville. She was found injured in Geil's home at 2710 Cartier Drive, just off Oberlin Road, in Raleigh, police reported.

Taft and Geil served together on a now-defunct committee that advised the state school board on charter schools. Sandy Carmany, the former chairwoman of that committee, said she thought the couple had been dating for several years.

"It appeared to be an ongoing relationship," she said.

Geil's 1,427-square-foot home sits among other small homes valued at about $300,000 in an inside-the-Beltline neighborhood near Daniels Middle School.

"It's like the best neighborhood in Raleigh," said Deborah Bondurant, who lives down the street from Geil's home. "It's almost like being in the country."

Sughrue said police were releasing few details about the crime to prevent potential witnesses from parroting what they read online or in the paper or see on TV.

"Information is being rather tightly held right now," he said. "It assists detectives in validating information that they might learn. The information that people are providing is being provided firsthand rather than being something that they've seen or read. When more can be said publicly, the department will release additional information."

On Sunday afternoon, police were still blocking Cartier Drive on both ends, preventing anyone who did not have a residence there from entering the street either on foot or by car. Neighbors attempted to go about their business but said the episode had been disruptive.

Still, despite the recent events, Bondurant said she feels the neighborhood is safe. "We all look out for
each other," she said. "That's what's so strange about it. No one saw anything."

According to the state Department of Public Instruction's Web site, Taft's board term ends March 31, 2011.

Before being appointed to the state Board of Education by former Gov. Jim Hunt in 1995, Taft was a former vice chairwoman of the Pitt County Board of Education. She is a founding member of the Pitt County Communities in Schools Program and is a graduate of East Carolina University.

Bill Harrison, chairman of the state Board of Education, said Taft is one of the longest-serving members of the board and heads the committee charged with making sure North Carolina students are academically competitive.

"She brings a perspective of where we were, how we got to where we are now and, really, what we need to do to get to where we want to be in the future," Harrison said.

Harrison said he has not spoken to members of her family.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with her and her family," Harrison said.

Taft ran for a state Senate seat in 2008. Her former husband, Tom Taft, is a former state senator from Greenville. The Tafts are longtime friends of former Vice President Al Gore and his wife, Tipper.

Police are asking anyone with information that might assist in the investigation to call Raleigh Crime Stoppers at 834-4357.

sue.stock@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4649
ECU Notes: ECU 'tops out' Family Medicine Center
ECU News Service
Saturday, March 6, 2010

East Carolina University marked a milestone in the construction of its Family Medicine Center with a “topping out” event March 2.

“This building will change regional health care for the next 40 years,” said Dr. Kenneth Steinweg, chairman of family medicine at ECU, as sounds from construction of the $36.8 million building echoed in the background. Nearby, a white-painted steel beam awaited signatures from those in attendance before a lift hoisted residents into place on the structure.

The facility will educate primary care physicians to provide care in a time of critical shortages and an aging physician workforce, Steinweg said.

“We have a huge challenge ahead of us,” he said.

The new center, beside the East Carolina Heart Institute at ECU, will have more than 60 exam rooms, a pharmacy, laboratory, a geriatric center, better parking and other amenities. It’s projected to open later this year, and officials expect patient visits to climb by 8 percent once open.

Among those signing the beam were members of the Monk family, state legislators who helped secure funding for the building, and family medicine faculty members who will provide care and teach medical students and residents in the building.

A $2.5 million gift from the Monk family is helping fund the Frances J. and Robert T. Monk Sr. Geriatric Center as part of the Family Medicine Center.

ECU education journal wins national award
The College of Education at ECU has received national recognition for its electronic periodical, the Journal of Curriculum and Instruction.

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education selected JoCI’s editorial board as the recipient of the 2010 Edward C. Pomeroy Award for Outstanding Contributions to Teacher Education. The award was presented to Patricia Anderson, chair woman of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, and Terry Atkinson, associate professor, on behalf of the editorial team Feb. 19 during the AACTE’s 62nd annual meeting in Atlanta.

The editorial team includes Atkinson, Amy Broemmels, Diane Kester, Katherine O’Connor, Diane Rodriguez-Luterbach, Sue Steinweg, Dr. Elizabeth Swaggerty and Guili Zhang.
The Pomeroy Award recognizes distinguished service to the teacher education community for the development and promotion of outstanding practices in teacher education at the collegiate, state and national level. JoCI is one of the first electronic, peer-reviewed, open-access journals in education. Its purpose is to disseminate scholarly work and research on teaching and learning in the PK-12 environment. The journal is available online for free. Many researchers with a desire to impact and advance knowledge are choosing to publish in open-access journals to make their research more accessible to the public. Since its inaugural issue in 2007, the journal has developed a loyal following of thousands of educators around the world. This is the second time the AACTE has recognized the ECU College of Education. In 2007, the college received the Best Practice Award for Collaboration with Community Colleges. Issues of JoCI are available at www.joci.ecu.edu.

**Pediatric Healthy Weight Summit slated**

The effects of families, friends, churches and other social factors on childhood obesity will be the topic of the seventh annual Pediatric Healthy Weight Summit. The event will be from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on March 26 at the East Carolina Heart Institute, 115 Heart Drive. It is hosted by the ECU Pediatric Healthy Weight Research & Treatment Center and aimed at health care professionals.

The two lifestyle habits that most strongly influence the development of obesity, eating and physical activity, are typically formed in childhood,” Yancey Crawford, program coordinator at the center, said. “For many children, their families, neighborhoods, faith-based organizations, schools and even virtual communities, such as Facebook and the Internet, can have an enormous impact on the lifelong weight-related habits they establish as well as their thoughts and perceptions about food, activity and their bodies.”

The one-day program aims to increase awareness among participants of the importance of the social environment in treating overweight youth and provide practical ways to use the social environment to promote healthy behaviors.

ECU Chancellor Steve Ballard will offer opening remarks, and Dr. Laura Koehly from the National Human Genome Institute at the National Institutes of Health will deliver the keynote address, “The Social Context of Adolescent Obesity: Thoughts on a Social Network Approach to Intervention.”

Registration is $95 before Friday and $115 afterward. Online registration is available at http://www.cpe.ecu.edu. Summit sponsors include the Pitt Memorial Hospital Foundation, the ECU departments of exercise and sport science, physical therapy and continuing studies, and RTI International. For more information, contact Crawford at 252-744-5061 or crawfory@ecu.edu.

**Singers to perform at ACDA convention**

The ECU Chamber Singers have been selected to perform at the American Choral Directors Association’s (ACDA) Southern Division Convention in Memphis on Thursday as part of their spring tour. The chamber singers, conducted by ECU Director of Choral Activities Daniel Bara, are ECU’s premiere choral ensemble.

The choir has been chosen for the Southern division premiere performance of this year’s Raymond W. Brock Choral Commission, for which a nationally recognized composer writes a choral composition to perpetuate quality choral repertoire. This year’s commission is “All the Works of Love,” written by American composer Joan Szymko. The singers will perform before an audience of more than 900 choral conductors and choral musicians from the nine-state Southern region.
Additional tour stops include Charlotte and Nashville. The Charlotte performance is Monday at 7:30 p.m. at Providence United Methodist Church and is co-hosted by The Charlotte Children’s Chorus, who will also perform.

The chamber singers will perform at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday at Christ Church Cathedral in Nashville. The concert is hosted by Michael Velting, director of music at Christ Church, and his assistant organist and choirmaster Jon Johnson, an ECU graduate.

Repertoire on the tour program includes works of Frank Martin, Elliott Carter, William Harris, Charles Wood, Samuel Barber, Richard Rodney Bennett, and several folk song and spiritual arrangements.

The Chamber Singers’ first professional recording, “Greater Love,” is available on iTunes. Their second recording, “Eternal Light,” is scheduled for release this spring.

All concerts are free and open to the public. For more information about the ECU Chamber Singers, contact Bara at barad@ecu.edu.

**Library hosts ‘Three Cups of Tea’ exhibit**

Work created by the ECU Ceramics Guild will be exhibited in J.Y. Joyner Library throughout March. “Three Cups of Tea,” an exhibition of teaware, marks the visit of author Greg Mortenson to campus.

After reading “Three Cups of Tea” by Mortenson during the summer of 2009 as a part of the “Pirate Read” program at ECU, members of the ceramics guild in the School of Art and Design decided to make a contribution to the Central Asia Institute (CAI). Members provided time, material, and talent to make teacups, which were sold at a fundraiser in September 2009, raising more than $2,000 for CAI.

This spring, members of School of Art and Design created the teaware exhibition to honor Mortenson’s efforts and the mission of CAI. The original exhibition poster was designed by Lisa Beth Robinson and Craig Malmrose of the ECU School of Art and Design and hand-pressed in limited production. All exhibition pieces are handcrafted with some available for purchase.

Contact Seo Eo at eos@ecu.edu or 227-0321 for a price list.

“The library is more than a place which houses books,” Larry Boyer, dean of Academic Library and Learning Resources, said. “Joyner Library appreciates the opportunity to showcase the talents and hard work of East Carolina’s students and faculty while giving the community another opportunity to experience art, culture, history, and connection.”

The exhibition will continue through March 31 on the library’s second floor.

**College of ed hosts math conference**

The ECU College of Education hosted its first Mathematics Education Conference on Feb. 27. The ECU student chapter of the N.C. Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the ECU Department of Mathematics, Science and Instructional Technology Education hosted the event. The more than 350 attendees selected from more than 50 presentations by classroom teachers, mathematics education consultants, Web-based tool developers, assessment evaluators and university faculty.

Educators from across the state shared proven strategies for mathematics instruction, new ways to use technology, and new tools for learning mathematics.
Robert Monk III, Paul Grimes — grandsons of Robert Monk — Randy Williams and Dr. Kenneth Steinweg, from left, sign the beam as ECU Chancellor Steve Ballard watches at the Family
Terry Holland discusses ECU basketball
By Tony Castleberry
The Daily Reflector
Sunday, March 7, 2010

The search is on for East Carolina University’s fourth new men’s basketball coach since the 2004-05 season following Mack McCarthy’s resignation after Saturday night’s home loss to Southern Miss.

ECU Athletics Director Terry Holland said McCarthy will coach the team at the Conference USA tournament later this week and, in an informal meeting with media members Sunday night, indicated McCarthy could maintain control of the team until a new coach is hired, then move into a fundraising job with the Pirates.

Holland addressed the timing of the university’s decision to announce McCarthy’s resignation even though he still has at least one game as ECU’s coach when the Pirates play Houston on Wednesday.

“(McCarthy’s) taken on a lot of different roles here in this athletic department for us and this is another role that we think is critically important to us in the long term,” Holland said of McCarthy, who joined East Carolina as an assistant on Ricky Stokes’ staff in 2005 before being elevated to acting head coach prior to the ’07-08 season, then becoming the head coach in the ’08-09 campaign. “But it is very different from being a coach on the floor. Certainly I understand his apprehension about taking that particular position for that reason.

“But as we continued to talk about it, we had to bring more and more people into the circle, which meant that sooner or later, it was going to get out. Rather than have people finding out about it piecemeal, (and) even though it was not great timing since we only had a week left in the season, (we decided) to go ahead and make the announcement at this particular time.”

McCarthy, 34-56 during his time in charge of the Pirates, has three years remaining on a five-year deal approved by the ECU Board of Trustees in July 2008. Holland said McCarthy’s base salary of $225,000 per year will not change once he moves into his fundraising role.

According to a statement released by the school Saturday night, McCarthy’s new job in the athletic department will consist mainly of trying to raise money to finance an on-campus basketball practice facility. During his resignation announcement on Saturday, McCarthy said he’d “do anything” he can to help the Pirate program move forward while also admitting that the decision for him to step down might not have been 100 percent his to make.

“I’ve done nothing but coach,” said McCarthy, who’s been a head coach for 19 seasons and has been involved in coaching in some capacity for all but two of the last 36 years. “I know there’s going to be a void there that’s difficult to fill.”

When asked if it was a mutual decision, McCarthy replied, “I don’t really know how to answer that. It became mutual.”

McCarthy and Holland each said they’d found common ground on McCarthy’s future with ECU last Thursday. McCarthy informed his players of the decision after Saturday night’s game.
One of ECU’s players said the announcement surprised him and his teammates. “There were some pretty shocked faces around the (locker) room,” said the player, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Although the ECU release stated that the coaching search would move along quickly, Holland insisted that there was no concrete timetable for making a hire. The AD even said that a new coach might not be in place “probably until after the NCAA Tournament” since potential candidates may either be coaching or assisting teams involved in the postseason.

Former ECU coach and current Kansas assistant Joe Dooley has been linked with taking over the Pirates, but Holland said Sunday he’s still trying to finalize his list of candidates. “At this stage, nobody’s turned us down,” Holland said. “I’d say that, as we discuss it, favorites will pop up to the top and then, for whatever reason, maybe 24 hours later, that whole list has changed a little bit, sometimes drastically.”

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ECU's McCarthy stepping down
By Tony Castleberry
The Daily Reflector
Saturday, March 6, 2010
Greyson Sargent's final game in Minges Coliseum proved to be head coach Mack McCarthy's as well.
Following East Carolina's 75-65 loss to Southern Miss on Saturday, McCarthy, who presented Sargent — the team's only senior — with a framed photo prior to tip-off, announced he's stepping down as head coach after ECU's participation in the Conference USA tournament next week. The third-year coach will move into a fundraising role aimed at helping the program get an on-campus basketball practice facility, according to a press release from East Carolina.
Pirates' Director of Athletics Terry Holland will address the media tonight at 6 in the Murphy Center. Holland indicated in the release that the search for McCarthy's replacement will be done in a swift manner and a source close to the situation said Saturday night that the new coach could be named as soon as this afternoon.
"The candid conversations that coach McCarthy and I have had over the last few weeks have allowed me to begin thinking about the search process for finding a new coach," Holland said in the statement. McCarthy said he's looking forward to opening a new chapter in his ECU life, but admitted that stepping away from coaching after 19 years in the business will be difficult.
"When you're a coach, you don't ever really want to stop coaching," said McCarthy, who has posted a 34-56 record during his time as head coach of the Pirates. "But it seems like the right time to hand this off and contribute in another way. ... Coach Holland and I have talked some about what we could do to build on the momentum that we've started and this is what we've decided on."
McCarthy's teams won a program-best five C-USA games in each of his first two seasons. The loss to Southern Miss dropped ECU to 10-20 this campaign and 4-12 in league play heading into next week's tournament game against Houston.
Golden Eagles coach Larry Eustachy sympathized with McCarthy's plight after McCarthy took over an ECU team that had numerous problems on the court and in the classroom.
"Mack's had a very difficult situation here," Eustachy said. "He came in here with his hands basically handcuffed. ... I've seen Mack and what a great coach he was at other places. I feel for him. I really do."
ECU's fifth conference win this season seemed plausible on Saturday until it hit a cold spell offensively late in the game and Southern Miss (18-12, 8-8) began to take control.
With about 8 minutes left to play and the Pirates leading 54-53, a 10-3 Eagles' run, capped by a pair of Maurice Bolden free throws with 4:37 remaining, gave USM a 63-56 lead.
That proved to be the game's decisive stretch as ECU couldn't make a final push. A Brock Young free throw pulled the Pirates within three — 64-61 — at 2:58, but they got no closer.
“(The Eagles) really kept us from getting into the offense,” McCarthy said of the way USM closed the game. “I think we could have done a better job of executing it, but (the Eagles) had a lot to do with that. There’s no question that our lack of offense created their offense.”

Southern Miss raced out to a 17-5 lead to open the game, helped by a 15-2 run after Jamar Abrams’ 3-pointer made it 3-2 ECU. Abrams had three fouls — including a technical — less than 4 minutes into the game.

But even with Abrams and Young, still nursing an injured ankle, on the bench for a big chunk of the first half, the Pirates roared to life after the Eagles’ initial onslaught. DaQuan Joyner scored eight points during a 16-2 ECU run and gave the Pirates a 21-19 lead with his putback at the 9:32 mark.

East Carolina led 26-23 before Southern Miss charged back to take a 32-31 lead in the half’s waning seconds. Corvonn Gaines’ putback with 3 seconds left until halftime put the Pirates up 33-32 at the break.

Young scored 15 to lead all players while Darrius Morrow and Joyner added 13 and 10, respectively, for ECU.

R.L Horton scored 14 to lead five Eagles’ players in double-figure scoring.

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Author, humanitarian knows the power of words

Humanitarian and author Greg Mortenson knows the power of words. His best-selling books, “Three Cups of Tea” and “Stones into Schools” have drawn worldwide attention to his efforts to build schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

As fans and reporters waited with pens poised to record Mortenson’s thoughts at East Carolina University last week, he told audiences at Minges Coliseum and Mendenhall Student Center about the profound effect the words of others have had in his life.

“The way I direct my life? I have about 100 powerful quotes in my head and my heart,” Mortenson said. “One of them (by Judith Campbell) says, ‘When your heart speaks, take good notes.’”

As Mortenson spoke, I may not have recorded 100 powerful quotes, but I did try to take good notes. Here are some that I found most memorable:

■ On following your heart: “The best decisions I make are usually when I was thinking from my heart ... The worst decisions are the ones I made in my head.”

■ On learning from elders: “I think it’s one of the greatest tragedies of our country that we’ve lost the tradition that we can learn from our elders. It’s so important that we somehow learn to connect more with our elders.”

■ On leadership: “A lot of amazing leaders not only think outside the box, they live outside the box.”

■ On helping others: “What’s more important than helping people is empowering people. If we really want to help people, we have to empower them.”

■ On the contributions of ordinary people: “I’ve met thousands of people, college students, high school, junior high, even elementary students who are doing some major things around the country. They’re all normal people. They’re not special. They’re not brilliant.”

■ On making a difference in the world: “You don’t have to do these amazing things. If you can plant one tree ... We try to make our goals too big. Start out small. First go out and do something. Make it a habit. Your ideas will start coming.”

■ On inner strength: “If you want to go out and change the world, first you have to make yourself a strong person. If you’re a train wreck, you shouldn’t be going out into the world and trying to help the world.”

■ On democracy: “You can’t plug in democracy. You have to build democracy.”

■ On America: “This is great country, not because of our commonality but because of our great diversity.”

■ On inequality in education: “We can drop bombs. We can put in roads. We can put in electricity. We can put in computers. But if girls are not educated, nothing will change in the society.”

■ On peace: “The real hope for peace is really with our kids.”

■ On failure: “We all fail. Next time you fail, think of this beautiful Persian proverb that says: ‘When it is dark, you can see the stars.’”

Kim Grizzard is a features writer and editor of Go! Family. Contact her at kgrizzard@reflector.com or at (252) 329-9578.

“The only way we can really solve poverty is we have to touch poverty and we have to smell poverty and we have to hear poverty and we have to taste poverty and we have to be with poverty. We can never solve poverty from a think tank in Washington, D.C.”

Greg Mortenson
ECU makes move

McCarthy to step down

East Carolina coach Mack McCarthy will step down as coach after the Conference USA tournament to take a fundraising job in the school's athletic department.

The school announced McCarthy's decision Saturday night, after the Pirates' final regular-season game against Southern Miss.

McCarthy has a 34-56 record since the 2007-08 season, when he spent a year as acting head coach before getting the permanent job at the end of the year. East Carolina is 10-20 this season.
Catawba County among rural N.C. sites attracting food jobs

Pierre Foods to add 500 jobs over next 3 years as it expands Claremont plant.

By David Bracken
david.bracken@newsobserver.com
Posted: Saturday, Mar. 06, 2010

North Carolina, a state that once relied on tobacco, textiles and furniture to employ its low- and moderately skilled workers, is increasingly turning to the food processing industry to replace those long-lost jobs.

In recent months, food makers have announced plans to add hundreds of jobs in places plagued by high unemployment rates even before the recession began.

The latest example came Friday as Cincinnati-based Pierre Foods said it would add 500 jobs over the next three years as it expands its Claremont plant in Catawba County.

Food companies are being drawn to North Carolina by what the textile and furniture industries left behind: a large pool of unemployed workers with manufacturing experience, and municipalities and counties with an abundance of unused water and sewer capacity.

Like textile and furniture manufacturing plants, food processors require a lot of water to operate. And counties and towns, which have spent heavily to build up their infrastructure, want to add customers.

In Randolph County, where cereal maker Malt-O-Meal opened a plant in Asheboro, economic development officials are using their water and sewer capacity as a major selling point in trying to recruit more food processing companies.

Most food processing jobs are low-skill and pay annual wages below $30,000. The Pierre Foods jobs will pay an annual average wage of $26,467 with benefits.

Such jobs are unlikely to prevent rural counties from losing their most talented workers, but they are a natural fit for the work force that exists today.
"Maybe it's not the best-paying job, but there's going to be a group of people that really don't have the skills for the real good jobs," said James Kleckley, director of the Bureau of Business Research at East Carolina University.

No worries of outsourcing

The jobs are also a good long-term bet in areas that have seen thousands of jobs head overseas in recent years.

"It's very hard to ship food from offshore. It tends to get aged before it gets eaten," said Scott Millar, president of the Catawba County Economic Development Corp. "That's probably something that you can count on to be a more stable economic base."

Michael Walden, an economist at N.C. State University, said food processing has become one of the state's five growth areas for jobs along with technology, pharmaceuticals, financial services and motor vehicle parts.

The size of the state's food processing industry has increased 30 percent over the past three decades to 52,000 workers, Walden said. The amount of food being processed at facilities in the state has tripled during that time.

Those numbers are likely to continue to grow if recent population trends continue. The relocation of many households from the Northeast and Midwest to the Southeast has made North Carolina only more attractive as a distribution center.

"North Carolina, being in the middle of the East Coast, can still service those Northeast and Midwest markets as well as the growing Southeast markets," Walden said.

Pierre Foods makes ready-to-eat sandwiches, the kind sold in vending machines. The company's Friday announcement comes just six weeks after Reser's Fine Foods, an Oregon company that makes potato salad and other prepared food, said it would add 500 jobs at its Halifax County plant.

"We were looking for a place on the East Coast that we could service easily with good transportation services and sewer and water," Ed Reser, the company's CEO, said of the move.

Reser's and Pierre received state grants of $1 million and $600,000, respectively, from the state's One North Carolina fund. Both companies also have arrangements with local community colleges to train new workers.

Walden said due to the higher cost of labor and land in the Triangle, food makers are likely to target rural counties for future expansions. "Especially rural counties that have access to transportation to interstates," he said.

A small bit of good news

For Catawba County, which in the 1980s had the highest percentage of manufacturing jobs in the country, the Pierre Foods announcement represents one victory in a long-term effort to bring down unemployment.
The county has had its share of good news, including the opening of a Target distribution center that now employs more than 600 people, but its unemployment remains stubbornly high - a sign that many areas of the state continue to shed more jobs than they create.

"We've had some success but our unemployment is still 14.5 percent," said Millar of the Catawba County Economic Development Corp.
March 7, 2010

Job Market Stabilizes for Business Students

By ROBBIE BROWN

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — For two years in a row, Kwame Yankson, a business school student at the University of Virginia, has sent a flurry of résumés to investment banks. He has cold-called Wall Street recruiters. And he has landed coveted interview slots.

But the difference in the outcome each year was stark. Last year, Mr. Yankson was turned down for summer internships by about 15 recession-plagued banks and ended up working for an education nonprofit organization. This year, as he sought a full-time job, Wells Fargo quickly gave him the response he wanted: When can you start?

“The banks this year kept saying, ‘It’s a good year,’ ‘We just approved a lot of hiring,’ ‘The market is clearing up,’ ” Mr. Yankson said. “It was a completely different experience.”

With banks climbing out of the recession, more business students across the country are finding banking jobs and internships, enrolling in finance clubs and going on class trips to Wall Street, universities say.

Unemployment is plaguing millions of families, and the public may still be seething about bank bailouts and eight-figure bonuses. But business students and career advisers see a job market that is quickly stabilizing.

Aspiring bankers know their career choice comes at an awkward time. Ben Phelps, an M.B.A. student at Duke who is going to work for Bank of America Merrill Lynch after graduation, was shouted at by a stranger on Wall Street during a summer internship. He and his classmates joke that they would sooner describe themselves as “bank tellers” than “investment bankers.”

“A lot of people lost their savings, and I can understand those people being angry,” Mr. Phelps said. “But I wish sometimes that their anger wasn’t directed just at bankers.”
Still, he said, the public perception of banking was not a factor when he accepted the job that he calls “the reason I came to business school,” in the bank’s mergers and acquisitions division. He expects the work to be fast-paced, intellectually challenging, financially rewarding and helpful in building a career — the same reasons given by many aspiring bankers.

On a recent interview day at the University of Virginia’s Darden School of Business, students in pinstriped suits and polished shoes waited anxiously for meetings with representatives from J. P. Morgan and BB&T Capital Markets.

The competition would be steep — with dozens of students applying for each internship — but less selective than in 2009. The number of banks interviewing at Darden this year increased 20 percent, and the number of job offers so far has risen 33 percent, the school said.

“There’s reason for students to be optimistic,” said Tracy Handler, a spokeswoman for the M.B.A. Career Services Council, an association of business school career advisers. “Any signs of recovery are modest. But business schools are looking ahead and seeing a light at the end of what is now a pretty short tunnel.”

A survey by the career council in December found that 39 percent of business schools expected internship opportunities to increase this summer, while 26 percent expected them to decrease.

At Duke University, for instance, the business school career office reported last month that the number of students with investment banking internships had doubled compared with last year. Four new banks went to Duke this year to interview, and the number of Duke students submitting résumés to banks increased 37 percent. The number of students participating in the school’s Week on Wall Street trip also rose, to 90 from 60 last year.

“Ironically, this can be a superb time to enter banking,” said Jeff Fischer, the director of career management at the business school at the University of North Carolina, where the number of investment bankers visiting campus has risen 67 percent since last year. “The M.B.A. population is like the end of a whip. When cycles swing up and down, students are the ones who swing up and down the most in terms of employment.”

Though some banks are still cautious, business school counselors are telling students to be persistent. Banks under-hired during the market collapse, the counselors say, and will soon be creating more full-time positions than former interns can fill.

Top banks declined to release hiring statistics for this article, and many business schools said it was too early to predict hiring results because job offers can continue through the spring. But in interviews with two dozen students and administrators at several business schools across the country, there was growing optimism about banking jobs. Many students said Wall
Street remained a dream destination, even if they occasionally had to explain their dream to friends.

"The answer is the level of knowledge that can be gained at such a young age," said P. J. Martin, a first-year M.B.A. student at the University of North Carolina who is interning at Barclays Capital next summer, explaining his interest in investment banking. "You have access to top-level management, to the top minds in the finance field."

But many students admitted a twinge of guilt about landing jobs and internships while so many classmates — and much of the country — remain unemployed.

"I feel lucky," said Mr. Phelps, from Duke. "My timing ended up being perfect, and it could easily have not been. Lots of friends are struggling and not finding jobs."

The speed of the turnaround in banking has not surprised Ben Bloomfield, a first-year M.B.A. student at Darden. Business students, he said, expect cyclical markets, but know that banking will remain prestigious.

"I don’t think any business school student was disillusioned enough to think, ‘Oh, Goldman Sachs on my résumé is not going to be valuable,’ ” Mr. Bloomfield said. “It was more, ‘Goldman Sachs is going to come to campus, and I’m not even sure they’re going to hire anybody.’ "

That patience seems to have been rewarded. After a tough round of interviews, Mr. Bloomfield just received an internship at Bank of America Merrill Lynch.