THE DAILY CLIPS

March 17, 2011

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Forty students are helping families obtain simple, decent and affordable housing with Habitat for Humanity of Lake-Sumter. The students are participants in Habitat's national alternative break program, Collegiate Challenge. The students are visiting from East Carolina University, Miami Valley High School, George Mason University and Indiana University Bloomington and volunteered to work on their spring break. (Tom Benitez, Orlando Sentinel / March 15, 2011)

**Building Habitat for Humanity homes teaches students about themselves**

March 17, 2011

For months before the trip to Florida, students taking part in Habitat for Humanity's alternative-spring-break program called Collegiate Challenge spend countless hours fundraising for the trip.

Each student paid his own way to Lake County, about $125, not including meals.

But even with the cost, Chelsey Caffery, who attends East Carolina University, said it's worth it. Caffery said some of her friends paid double that amount to go to the beach for vacation. And they'll come back with nothing more than sunburns.

It wasn't all work for the groups, though. The students had some off time to explore the area, go to the beach and visit attractions.

But, really, it's the Habitat experience that they bring home, she said. "You learn a lot of stuff about yourself," she said of her Habitat spring breaks. "For very little money, you get a life-changing experience."

— Amy C. Rippel

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Authorities on Wednesday continued to search for a man wanted in connection with an early-morning fire investigators are calling arson.

“Greenville Fire-Rescue has determined the fire at 403 South Summit Street to be an arson,” Greenville police Sgt. Carlton Williams said late Wednesday.

“We do have a person of interest, but we are not releasing his name,” he said. “We're trying to communicate with that person.”

No one was hurt in the fire, reported at 7:42 a.m. at Summit near Fourth Street, a block from East Carolina University.

About 20 firefighters, including fire administration and crews on three engines, two EMS units and a rescue unit, arrived to the converted wood house to find fire pouring out of a window on the southwest corner and at the midsection on the south side, fire officials said.

Firefighters received several reports from neighbors of a person trapped and worked quickly to search the burning building, but the home was empty.

The fire was out in about 10 minutes. The home sustained heavy smoke and fire damage.

“There's significant damage,” Greenville Fire-Rescue Battalion Chief Tony Smart said. “It's extensive.”

Fire and police forensic investigators sifted through the charred remains of the home, which was condemned by the city after the fire and set to be boarded up Wednesday afternoon.
Officials declined to say specifically how arson was concluded, but said it was information gathered through interviews and evidence at the scene that helped investigators determine a crime had been committed.

“There were some statements made by a witness and one of the occupants of the residence that makes us think it's a possible arson,” Williams said Wednesday morning.

Hanna Gilham slept right through the fire that burned next door to her home of 26 years. “I smelled something burning and I looked if I left something on,” said Gilham, a native of Austria. “When I came out, the guy from the fire department said it was right next door.”

She said she sympathized with the victims, and was glad no one was hurt. “I can feel for them,” she said of losing all they owned, adding it was a blessing “there aren't any lives lost.”

Contact Jennifer Swartz at jswartz@reflector.com or (252) 329-9565.
James Richardson, left, talks with his attorney during jury selection for his first-degree murder trial at the Pitt County Courthouse on Monday morning. (Rhett Butler/The Daily Reflector)

12 jurors seated in capital trial
By Michael Abramowitz
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, March 17, 2011

Attorneys on Wednesday completed their selection of the 12-member jury that will hear the capital murder trial of James Richardson. Three alternate jurors still must be chosen.

Richardson is accused in the June 30, 2009, drive-by shooting of East Carolina University student Edgar Landon Blackley and restaurant manager Andrew Kirby outside The Other Place nightclub in downtown Greenville.

The jury will be comprised of 10 women and two men. Two of the jurors, one man and one woman, are black. One of the jurors is a woman of Pacific islander race.

The jury will hear evidence and testimony surrounding charges that Richardson killed Blackley and Kirby after being ejected from the club. The victims are white, Richardson is black, and the case is being watched closely by civil rights advocates.

Following selection of the 12th juror Wednesday afternoon, interviews continued to select three alternate jurors.

None were selected before 5 p.m., when Superior Court Judge W. Russell Duke adjourned the proceedings for the day. Previous reports in The Daily Reflector that two alternates would be selected were incorrect.

When the process resumes today, the defense will be able to use three peremptory challenges to reject potential alternates without explanation. The state retains 10 peremptory opportunities.
During the three-day selection process, nearly 50 jurors sat in the box to be questioned, first by Assistant District Attorney Kimberly Robb, then by defense attorneys Thomas Moore of Rocky Mount and Jeff Cutler of Wendell.

Before the 12th juror was seated, 37 were excused by Duke, seven at Robb's peremptory request, 14 by the defense team's peremptory request, and 15 directly by Duke for just cause.

Nearly all the prospects excused for cause had strong personal, moral or religious objections to the death penalty.

The trial will be conducted in two phases, Duke told the prospective jurors before the questioning began.

The first phase will be to establish whether Richardson is guilty or not guilty of the charge of first-degree murder.

The second phase of the trial would proceed only if Richardson is found guilty of the first-degree charge. The jury must decide then if he is put to death or sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole based on aggravating and mitigating factors presented during the sentencing phase, Duke said.

When jury alternate selection is complete, Duke will explain the trial process to the jury and instruct them in their responsibilities.

He ordered the 12 seated jurors to return at 2 p.m. today. Opening statements by the prosecution and defense will begin after the jury is charged, today or later.

Contact Michael Abramowitz at mabramowitz@reflector.com and (252) 329-9570.
Letter: Doctors, medical staff appreciated
Thursday, March 17, 2011

Congratulations to Dr. Jason Foltz for joining the Brody School of Medicine. The school will have one fine doctor working there, a man who cares about his patients. Because of him, Dr. Blanco, Dr. Greg Knapp and all the nurses who took care of my 93-year-old dad, William Ross, he is here today. In February, we almost lost him, but because of them he is doing well at a nursing home they also helped to get him into. I will always be thankful to God and to them for what has been done to help him. God bless you all.

LOIS LITTLETON
Winterville
Kinston native publishes novel of life in late 1800s
March 17, 2011 12:00 AM
By David Anderson, staff writer
Kinston native Bob Grady has published his first novel, a story of a young man making his way across Eastern North Carolina in the 1870s, on the run from those seeking revenge against him.

“I had been retired and I have been writing various stories for years just because I could do it,” said Grady, 82, who lives in Warner Robins, Ga.

Grady spent his professional career in the probation and parole departments of Georgia and Florida. He retired from Florida’s Department of Corrections.

Grady has also written a number of children’s stories that he has not published, but given to his daughter.

He is the son of Eddie and Maude Grady of Kinston, and grew up on East Vernon Avenue. His father ran a grocery store and a piano store in the same block.

Known to his friends as “Bowlegs,” Grady was a football standout at Grainger High School, where he graduated in 1949. He went on to study physical education at East Carolina University, and also played running back for the Pirates football team.
After graduating from ECU in 1954, his educational pursuits took him to Georgia, where he studied psychology at the University of Georgia and Macon College.

Grady’s mother was a writer herself, penning a series of poems when she was in her 80s.

“I suppose it just came about naturally for me, to be able to come up with these thoughts and ideas of writing something,” he said.

“Steely” is the story of Robert James Walker, who is given the nickname Steely because he must steal to survive.

He makes his way though Mt. Olive and Kinston, on the run from the brothers of two men he shot in self-defense.

Grady said the process of writing a novel requires a good deal of advance planning of each plot point, and the writer must have a strong idea of where he or she wants the story to go.

“I wanted to keep it suspenseful, so I did a lot of thinking of what I wanted to be the next story line,” he said.

“Steely,” which was released in January, is being published through AuthorHouse of Bloomington, Ind.

Grady’s daughter Karla Rucker, who also lives in Georgia, is working with the publisher and coordinating book signings, marketing and other aspects of selling the book. She said “Steely” has not yet hit bookstores, but copies of the book can be obtained by contacting her.

“It’s been received very well,” Grady said of the book. “We’ve shipped out an awful lot of copies of it.”

Grady and his wife Irene have four daughters — Rucker, Janie Krohne of Ocala Fla., Marcia Cooley of Orlando, Fla., and Esther Carr, who passed away about a year and a half ago — and a stepson, Ralph Williams Bland of Chapel Hill.
His brother, Ed L. Grady, is a retired film actor who has appeared in more than 60 movies and television shows, including “Dawson’s Creek,” “Wild Hearts Can’t Be Broken” and “The Notebook.”

Grady’s first cousin, Julia Catherine Turnage Toot Cole, 74, grew up in Lenoir County and still lives in the Falling Creek area.

“I’m proud of him,” she said. “I not only have an author in the family, but a movie star; it makes life interesting.”

Her husband, Grover Cole, read and enjoyed “Steely.”

“It’s interesting, and I don’t usually like fiction,” he said. “I like biographies, but it was right interesting.”

David Anderson can be reached at 252-559-1077 or danderson@freedomenc.com.

BREAKOUT BOX:
To obtain a copy of “Steely,” by Bob Grady, call Karla Rucker at 478-812-0553
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Editorial: Targeting better health
Thursday, March 17, 2011

The 2010 State of the County's Health Report, recently released by the Pitt County Health Department, provides a compelling snapshot of general wellness and a feasible road map to improve the lives of local residents. It highlights the leading causes of death in Pitt County and identifies those preventable behaviors that provide obvious targets for action.

Many of the decisions that promise to improve health — quitting smoking, for instance, or adopting a fitness routine — must be embraced by the individual or they will prove ineffective. However, the community should complement and supplement those choices by emphasizing the importance of good health and wellness through its public policy decisions.

Every four years, the health department and Pitt Partners for Health assemble a community health assessment in an effort to determine the county's health status. The last, conducted in 2007, provides a comprehensive snapshot of the population's general health and the forces that create the greatest benefit and risk. It allows officials to identify trends and areas of concern so that initiatives for improvement can be developed.

Five years ago, heart disease and stroke ranked No. 1 and No. 3 as the leading killers in Pitt County, both caused by a population struggling with high blood pressure and cholesterol. Cancer accounted for 21 percent of Pitt County deaths in 2006, though smoking was on the decline. Obesity and physical inactivity were cited as two factors contributing to ill health and shortened life span.

There are few dramatic changes in the most recent study, looking at figures from 2010.

Cancer has supplanted heart disease as the leading cause of death in Pitt County, though cardiovascular disease, manifesting itself in heart issues and stroke, remain an enormous problem. Diabetes was given increased emphasis in the latest report, reflecting the unhealthy, high-calorie diets and physical inactivity highlighted by the 2007 health assessment. The number of Pitt County adults who smoke surprisingly increased from 17.8 percent in 2006 to 21.4 percent in 2010.

Rather, the significant changes can be seen beyond the report's margins. Consider the addition of the East Carolina Heart Institute, targeting the cardiovascular disease that claims too many lives each year. The imposition of smoking restrictions in public buildings discourage that behavior. Investment in infrastructure development — for sidewalks, bicycle trails and jogging paths — help designate easily accessible space that encourages fitness.
These are the types of decisions Pitt County has made and must continue to support. In concert with individual decision making, they can make this the healthy community it should be.
Visiting imam says U.S., Muslims are linked
BY ERIC FERRERI - Staff Writer
CHAPEL HILL—In imam Feisal Abdul Rauf's view, the United States and the Muslim world are intertwined, whether they like it or not, and could use some marriage counseling.

Abdul Rauf, the high-profile leader of the controversial proposal to build an Islamic center near the ground zero site in New York City, sees himself as the mediator as discourse grows more heated and hyperbolic.

"A lot of what's happening between Americans and the Muslim world is like a bad marriage," Abdul Rauf said Wednesday night during a lecture at UNC-Chapel Hill. "We don't really hear each other with the same voice."

A prominent figure in the nation's public head-scratching over the role of Islam in America, Abdul Rauf spoke to more than 500 people jammed into the music department's campus auditorium, while 100 more watched a live video stream in a nearby building.
His appearance was hotly anticipated. It prompted a protest by a Christian group that believes his project, derided as the "Ground Zero Mosque," is an attempt by radical Muslims to place a trophy on the Sept. 11, 2001, site.

The small group of about three dozen protesters met at the Carolina Inn to view a documentary on Sept. 11 victims and their families. The gathering also featured Timothy Brown, a retired New York City firefighter who has emerged as a key critic and opponent of the proposed Islamic cultural center.

A day before he came to Chapel Hill, he argued at the New York Supreme Court that the site where the Islamic center would be build should be designated a historic landmark.

In Chapel Hill, Brown spoke at length of what he sees as a sinister plot by Abdul Rauf and his followers to build a "victory tower" so close to the ground zero attack.

"We have to remember 1,100 families never got any body parts back," he said. "So we consider this sacred ground."

The group later marched quietly to where Abdul Rauf was to speak on campus; there, they encountered about 10 student activists holding signs declaring slogans such as: "Islam is not the enemy."

UNC Greensboro graduate student Trish Kahle, who organized the counterprotest on behalf of the International Socialist Organization, said the victims' families are being manipulated.

"It's the exact same rhetoric that was used against communists in the McCarthy era," she said. "It's about constantly scapegoating this one group of people."

The two groups confronted each other briefly, but without incident, and then anti-Abdul Rauf marchers returned to the Carolina Inn.

Abdul Rauf, however, touched only briefly on the Manhattan Islamic project until questioned near the end of the 90-minute talk.

Once prompted, Abdul Rauf defended the project and his role in it and condemned those who, he said, politicized the issue for their own gain.
"The fact that our community center became not only a national topic of discussion but an international topic of conversation, it has been fascinating to see how something potentially so small ... had a profound impact on how people overseas were reacting," he said.

He blistered the repeated branding of the center as the "Ground Zero Mosque," calling that label misleading. His vision is for a faith-based YMCA of sorts, he said, a place where young people can play sports, learn, engage the arts, and learn about religion.

The plans include a mosque but would also feature a fitness center, auditorium, restaurant, culinary school, library, art studio and Sept. 11 memorial. It would be located in a former Burlington Coat Factory two blocks from the ground zero site.

The project's critics see it as a thumb in the eye by Muslim zealots to a still-grieving nation.

Mary Triola, who recently moved to Chapel Hill from New Jersey, fears Muslim extremism and is frustrated by what she sees as a nation coddling it. She believes Abdul Rauf is a leader of that movement.

"I don't want this man preaching his hateful speech everywhere," Triola said. "I don't think this man should be allowed to say how wonderful these people are when they're not. I'm talking about the extremists, the Islamic extremists. And I find this man to be an extremist."

While his critics view Abdul Rauf as extreme, his many supporters say he's a moderate voice of reason who rose to public prominence after the Sept. 11 attacks and works to bridge cultural and religious divides.

In 2003, Abdul Rauf led cultural awareness training for FBI employees in the bureau's New York field office. In 2007 and twice in 2010, he traveled to the Middle East to talk about religious tolerance and Islam in America as part of a speaker program organized by the State Department's Bureau of International Information Programs.

His speech Wednesday at UNC-CH was part of an endowed lecture series created in 1915. He was paid $20,000 plus travel expenses, all from private
funds. Born in Kuwait, Abdul Rauf moved to the United States in the 1960s and is a naturalized citizen.

Staff writer Jesse James DeConto contributed to this report. eric.ferreri@newsobserver.com or 919-932-2008
SAT’s Reality TV Essay Stumps Some

By JACQUES STEINBERG

Every year, the SAT reduces more than a few teenage test-takers to tears. But few questions on the so-called Big Test appear to have provoked more anxious chatter — at least in this era of texting and online comment streams and discussion threads — than an essay prompt in some versions of the SAT administered last Saturday in which students were asked to opine on reality television.

“This is one of those moments when I wish I actually watched TV,” one test-taker wrote on Saturday on the Web site College Confidential, under the user name “littlepenguin.”

“I ended up talking about Jacob Riis and how any form of media cannot capture reality objectively,” he wrote, invoking the 19th-century social reformer. “I kinda want to cry right now.”

Less than a minute later, a fellow test-taker identified as “krndandaman” responded: “I don’t watch tv at all so it was hard for me. I have no interest in reality tv shows...”

The commenter ended the post with the symbol for a frowning face.

By Wednesday, comments on the now-infamous prompt — which included the question, “How authentic can these shows be when producers design
challenges for the participants and then editors alter filmed scenes?" — had stretched across nearly 40 pages on College Confidential. Media coverage added to the scrutiny.

Angela Garcia, executive director of the SAT program, said she did not think it was unfair to ask that question of students who had neither the time nor inclination to watch Mike Sorrentino on “Jersey Shore,” or Kim Kardashian on “Kourtney & Kim Take New York.”

“The primary goal of the essay prompt is to give students an opportunity to demonstrate their writing skills,” she said.

This particular prompt, Ms. Garcia said, was intended to be relevant and to engage students, and had gone through extensive pre-testing with students and teachers. “It’s really about pop culture as a reference point that they would certainly have an opinion on,” she added.

Peter Kauffmann, vice president of communications for the College Board, said that “everything you need to write the essay is in the essay prompt.”

For example, the questions are preceded by an explanatory statement — “These shows depict ordinary people competing in everything from singing and dancing to losing weight, or just living their everyday lives” — as well as an assertion: “Most people believe that the reality these shows portray is authentic, but they are being misled.”

For some test-takers, including those who shared their thoughts on College Confidential and other forums, the prompt provided a welcome respite.

“I talked about American Idol (how it can push people to strive towards better singing skills) and The Biggest Loser (how it influences people to become healthier,)” one commenter, “bandgeek156,” wrote on College Confidential. “Wasn’t that hard from what I thought.”
U.S. Is Urged to Raise Teachers’ Status
By SAM DILLON
To improve its public schools, the United States should raise the status of the teaching profession by recruiting more qualified candidates, training them better and paying them more, according to a new report on comparative educational systems.

Andreas Schleicher, who oversees the international achievement test known by its acronym Pisa, says in his report that top-scoring countries like Korea, Singapore and Finland recruit only high-performing college graduates for teaching positions, support them with mentoring and other help in the classroom, and take steps to raise respect for the profession.

“Teaching in the U.S. is unfortunately no longer a high-status occupation,” Mr. Schleicher says in the report, prepared in advance of an educational conference that opens in New York on Wednesday. “Despite the characterization of some that teaching is an easy job, with short hours and summers off, the fact is that successful, dedicated teachers in the U.S. work long hours for little pay and, in many cases, insufficient support from their leadership.”

The conference, convened by the federal Department of Education, was expected to bring together education ministers and leaders of teachers’ unions from 16 countries as well as state superintendents from nine American states. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said that he hoped educational leaders would use the conference to share strategies for raising student achievement.

“We’re all facing similar challenges,” Mr. Duncan said in an interview. The meeting occurs at a time when teachers’ rights, roles and responsibilities are being widely debated in the United States.

Republicans in Wisconsin and several other states have been pushing legislation to limit teachers’ collective bargaining rights and reduce taxpayer contributions to their pensions.
President Obama has been trying to promote a different view.

“In South Korea, teachers are known as ‘nation builders,’ and I think it’s time we treated our teachers with the same level of respect,” Mr. Obama said in a speech on education on Monday.

Mr. Schleicher is a senior official at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, or O.E.C.D., a Paris group that includes the world’s major industrial powers. He wrote the new report, “What the U.S. Can Learn from the World’s Most Successful Education Reform Efforts,” with Steven L. Paine, a CTB/McGraw-Hill vice president who is a former West Virginia schools superintendent, for the McGraw-Hill Research Foundation.

It draws on data from the Program for International Student Assessment, which periodically tests 15-year-old students in more than 50 countries in math, reading or science.

On the most recent Pisa, the top-scoring countries were Finland and Singapore in science, Korea and Finland in reading and Singapore and Korea in math. On average, American teenagers came in 15th in reading and 19th in science. American students placed 27th in math. Only 2 percent of American students scored at the highest proficiency level, compared with 8 percent in Korea and 5 percent in Finland.

The “five things U.S. education reformers could learn” from the high-performing countries, the report says, include adopting common academic standards — an effort well under way here, led by state governors — developing better tests for use by teachers in diagnosing students’ day-to-day learning needs and training more effective school leaders.

“Make a concerted effort to raise the status of the teaching profession” was the top recommendation.

University teaching programs in the high-scoring countries admit only the best students, and “teaching education programs in the U.S. must become more selective and more rigorous,” the report says.

Raising teachers’ status is not mainly about raising salaries, the report says, but pay is a factor.
According to O.E.C.D. data, the average salary of a veteran elementary teacher here was $44,172 in 2008, higher than the average of $39,426 across all O.E.C.D countries (the figures were converted to compare the purchasing power of each currency).

But that salary level was 40 percent below the average salary of other American college graduates. In Finland, by comparison, the veteran teacher’s salary was 13 percent less than that of the average college graduate’s.

In an interview, Mr. Schleicher said the point was not that the United States spends too little on public education — only Luxembourg among the O.E.C.D. countries spends more per elementary student — but rather that American schools spend disproportionately on other areas, like bus transportation and sports facilities.

“You can spend a lot of money on education, but if you don’t spend it wisely, on improving the quality of instruction, you won’t get higher student outcomes,” Mr. Schleicher said.