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East Carolina celebrates 102 years

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Thursday, March 26, 2009

East Carolina University celebrated 102 years Thursday with Founders Day events all over campus, including dedicating a new Trustee's Fountain at Wright Circle.

The fountain on the site had been out of commission since 2006.

"As a member of the Board of Trustees, I am proud to be one of the 202 current and former trustees whose names are on the new wall behind me," said Bob Greczyn, chairman of the Board of Trustees.

"The first trustees for the institution were appointed in 1907, and I am confident that all of us since have felt a special sense of responsibility to East Carolina and a special pride in its achievements."

The celebration continued with the Centennial Convocation in Wright Auditorium where Janice Hardison Faulkner was presented with the Jarvis Medal, the university's highest honor.

The medal is presented only "to the most deserving recipients and only when the board is prepared to recognize a person of distinction," Greczyn said.

Faulkner was born in Martin County and earned a bachelor's degree from ECU in 1953 and a master's degree in English in 1956. She later joined ECU as an English professor.

From there she served the university and the state of North Carolina in many capacities including stints as the North Carolina secretary of revenue, secretary of state and commissioner of the Department of Motor Vehicles.

"Faulkner's loyalty to her birthplace in eastern North Carolina has led her to be a strong and effective advocate for regional economic development in the area," Greczyn said.

Faulkner said she was excited to receive the award.

"Leaders do not choose their times but the times choose their leaders," she said.

"I believe, literally, that a lot of the inspiration I have received has been divine intervention or dumb luck. God has been good to me and I thank you very, very much for this honor."

Faulkner joins a distinguished list of Jarvis Medal winners including, Gov. Thomas Jordan Jarvis; Robert Wright, the university's first president; former Chancellor Leo Jenkins; former U.S. Sen. Robert Morgan, and Dr. Andrew Best, a Greenville pediatrician who also served on the university's faculty.

Officials also recognized students and staff who were inducted into the Servire Society, the university's new organization for members of the ECU community who serve their local community.

The audience heard about four ways that ECU is making a difference in education by utilizing the Internet to offer classes to high school students, battling global climate change, fighting childhood obesity and producing leading-edge computer animation.

The first Founders Day was held on March 5, 1932, to recognize the bill passed in the state legislature on March 8, 1907, that established East Carolina.

The university will continue to celebrate its centennial until October.
Career coaches trying to give students a leg-up

By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector

Thursday, March 26, 2009

East Carolina University alumnus Joe Hester and senior David Daw hovered near the entrance of the Greenville Convention Center's exhibit hall, arms full of company brochures and applications.

They'd spent the lunch hour wandering around talking to representatives from about 75 employers brought in by the university's Career Center. Military recruiters, small banks and insurance companies, and big names like Coca-Cola and Target were all available for questioning.

The hardest part of finding a job?

"There aren't any," Hester quickly replies. He lost his job with a roofing company in February.

Still, Thursday afternoon's all-majors career fair hosted a strong and diverse employer turnout considering the economy, said Jim McAtee, interim director for East Carolina University's Career Center. His staff's job is to "make sure that Pirates are getting hired" as they leave the hallowed halls of higher education and enter the real world.

"It's hard to find jobs," said Daw, whose degree will be in marketing and supply chain management. "Most companies want you to have four to five years experience. Starting out ... how do you get in that position? When you're graduating and you don't have that experience[s], where's that entry-level position?"

"I've had summer jobs at different companies and stuff but nothing consistent that they'll take as the experiences needed."

Now he's looking at other options — an Air Force Officer Training program that could make him a pilot, in particular.

McAtee said thinking outside of the box is a good thing, that students need to isolate "transferable skills" they take away from their major and could apply to a number of fields.

"Technology, government services, health care — they're hiring," he said. "And they're hiring people from different majors. They also need employees in accounting, PR, marketing or sales."

One sign of the times is that job-seeking students are asking for help more often, McAtee said, and their questions have changed. People used to come to the Career Center to ask about resume tips and how to negotiate a salary.

"Now they're asking, 'How do I find a job when my dad just got laid off?,'" McAtee said. They're concerned about competing with their peers, students from other schools, international candidates and laid-off experienced workers.

Pitt Community College will hold a career fair of its own in the coming weeks. Career Services Coordinator Tami Kernen said her students are taking the process "a little bit more seriously" now than in healthier economies.

She's been requested to provide focused workshops on interview skills rather than the overall job hunt and to host more one-on-one mock interview sessions. Kernen said she focuses on small factors that could make a big difference: Appropriate attire, a firm handshake, remember to smile in a stressful situation, making eye contact.
“What I tell students, in good economies and bad, is to have a couple of whales on your radar,” McAtee said. “Target those. But have some small fish options. To continue with the fishing metaphor, students have to cast a wider net.”

Senior Kathryn Glenn is following that mantra. She envisioned herself working overseas as a corporate international buyer based on experiences working trade shows, but is now considering smaller companies closer to home.

“People keep forgetting to go local,” Glenn said, noting some regions don’t have the unemployment numbers big cities do.

Another piece of advice career advisors are dishing out? Keep your chin up, kid.

“You can always find a reason to feel badly about a situation,” McAtee said. “You need to find the positive. As much doom and gloom as there is, there are still great places to work and great jobs to be had.”

“We’re still trying to be optimistic with students,” said Kernen. “The competition is greater, but I think our PCC students are academically prepared.”

Some students are taking the advice to heart, and even finding a silver lining.

“I know the economy will turn around eventually and grad school’s what I really wanted to do anyway,” Hester said.

“And I wouldn’t have done it if I kept my job.”

Contact Kathryn Kennedy at kkennedy@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9566.

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Pitt County nonprofits fret about funding, futures

By Brock Letchworth
The Daily Reflector

Thursday, March 26, 2009

An announcement by the United Way of Pitt County on Wednesday that it is reducing funding for many programs and eliminating it all together for others has left some nonprofit leaders unsure about the future of their organizations.

Others say they will have to find creative ways to manage limited revenue and put more emphasis on locating other funding opportunities.

"If we don't find a way to make up that amount of money, it will be devastating," said Suzanne Czyz, executive director of Greenville's Creative Learning Center. "There really aren't a lot of options. You have to be realistic and realize that if the United Way didn't raise enough money, it is unrealistic to think we are going to make it up in fundraising. It is really disheartening."

The Creative Learning Center, which provides affordable care and services for low-income seniors and disabled adults in Pitt and surrounding counties, was one of 11 programs to have funding cut. In the past, the center has received about $40,000 annually, Czyz said, adding that the center's services are not covered by Medicare or Medicaid.

"We can't just say we are going to charge more because it won't work," Czyz said. "This kind of population can't afford it."

Nearly $835,000 was approved Wednesday by the United Way Board of Trustees for 17 community programs. The allocations for next year will be about $400,000 less than the current fiscal year that ends March 31.

The organization received 38 proposals requesting more than $2 million. It had less than $1 million to distribute due to fewer contributions in its annual campaign, according to Lindsey Brown, community action plan coordinator.

Approximately 40 community volunteers participated in the review process and evaluated proposals based on collaboration between agencies, the lasting community impact of a program and data-driven results.

Brown cited programs such as the Summer Significance Academy and the 10-year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness as good models of what the volunteers were seeking.

The academy, which will receive $101,000, is a collaboration between Pitt County Schools, Greenville police, the Boys & Girls Club, Intergenerational Community Center, Building Hope Community Life Center and STRIVE. It is aimed at lowering the dropout rate in the county.

The 10-year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness is a collaborative effort that includes University Health Systems, Pitt County Social Services, East Carolina University, Pitt Community College, East Carolina Behavioral Health, Pitt County government, the city of Greenville and Pitt County Veterans groups. It will receive $20,000.

Brown said both programs do a great job of bringing multiple agencies together to make an impact on a community issue.

"It is about the community rallying around an issue and figuring out how to address the root cause of that problem and finding a solution," Brown said. "Those programs are a great example of that."

Funding was awarded based on four focus areas: building a safe and healthy community; caring for
neighbors in crisis; fostering financial stability leading to independence; and preparing children and youth for life success.

Camp Sunshine, a summer day camp for special populations, is another program that had its funding cut this year.

Deirtre Crandol, special populations supervisor for Greenville Parks and Recreation, said organizers will be actively pursuing additional funding opportunities, but they may have to start charging campers for their participation.

“You hate for someone to miss out on the trips and activities because their parents can’t afford it,” Crandol said. “Maybe we could connect with another group that can help supply some of the money to offset the costs.”

Another program that had its United Way funding eliminated was Literacy Volunteers of Pitt County, a free adult tutoring service that has received funding for more than 20 years. Organizers of the program say they will be losing about $40,000.

“It is going to force us to rethink a lot of things,” said Laura Smith, executive director of Literacy Volunteers. “We are faced with the challenge of being in a down economy so it is tough to find funds. We have over the last several years, like many nonprofits, cut our budget to where we are at bare bones so there are not a lot of areas in many programs to cut other than staff. And you need the staff to deliver services. It is such a catch-22.”

Contact Brock Letchworth at bletchworth@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9574.

Following is a list of the programs that were recommended Wednesday for United Way funding:

New Directions Safe House, Family Violence Program: $64,250
The Family Center, Family Violence Program: $78,500
Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling, REAL Crisis: $10,000
Emergency Assistance, Salvation Army: $37,000
Home Delivered Meals Program, Council on Aging: $93,000
Pitt Resource Connection, REAL Crisis: $2,949
Crisis Counseling, REAL Crisis: $80,000
Disaster and Armed Forces Services, American Red Cross: $35,000
Emergency Shelter, Greenville Community Shelters: $40,000
Project Working Recover, East Carolina University: $25,000
10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, Pitt County government: $20,000
Transitional Housing, Greenville Community Shelters: $39,223
STRIVE Life of NC/STRIVE: $35,000
Summer Significance Academy: $101,000
Partnership for Progress: $42,000
Boys & Girls Clubs of Pitt County: $122,000
Building Peace in Schools, Mediation Centers of Eastern NC: $10,000

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Russian National Ballet to perform classic at ECU

The Daily Reflector

Friday, March 27, 2009

The classic romantic ballet “Giselle” was written for one dancer, a love story of its own. French poet Théophile Gautier created the ballet in honor of Carlotta Grisi. He not only admired Grisi’s talent as a dancer, but he was also in love with her.

East Carolina University’s S. Rudolph Alexander Performing Arts Series will present the Russian National Ballet Theatre performing “Giselle” at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in Wright Auditorium. The company performed “Swan Lake” in 1999 and “La Bayadere” in 2006 as part of the preforming arts series.

“Giselle” was first presented by the Ballet du Théâtre de l’Académie Royale de Musique in Paris on June 28, 1841, and tells the story of a peasant in love with a nobleman. In the first act, Count Albrecht, disguises himself as a peasant by the name of Loys and goes to stay in a small village. He flirts with a young, mentally fragile, country girl named Giselle who falls completely in love with him.

Their union is short lived when Giselle learns that the man is already engaged to a noblewoman. Giselle loses her mind and dies.

In the second act, Albrecht looks for Giselle’s grave in the forest. Her spirit rises and she forgives Albrecht’s betrayal. The two dance all night long.

The Russian National Ballet Theatre was founded in Moscow in the late 1980s as the Soviet National Ballet.

Former principal Bolshoi Ballet dancer Elena Radchenko founded the theater at a time when dancers and choreographers began exercising their new-found creative freedom.

Radchenko’s company embraced both the timeless traditions of the classical Russian ballet and the new developments in dance from around the world. The founding company incorporated graduates from prestigious Russian dance schools in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Perm, and the principal dancers came from the upper ranks of great ballet companies in Russia, Riga, Kiev and Warsaw. Radchenko became the permanent artistic director of the company in 1994 through a presidential decree.

Today, the Russian National Ballet Theatre is its own institution with more than 50 dancers, many of whom have been with the company since its inception.

Radchenko focuses on the grand national tradition of the major Russian ballet works and developing new talents throughout Russia, with a repertory of virtually all of the great full works including “Don Quixote,” “La Bayadere,” “The Sleeping Beauty” and “Swan Lake.”

If you Go!

What: “Giselle”

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursday

Where: Wright Auditorium

Cost: $10-$32

For tickets: Call 328-4788 or visit www.ecu.edu/srpas

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ECU bus, bicyclist collide

Incident leaves man in surgery

The Daily Reflector

Thursday, March 26, 2009

A bicyclist was in surgery early Thursday night at Pitt County Memorial Hospital after being struck by an East Carolina University student transit bus.

The accident happened shortly after 1 p.m. at 10th and Lawrence streets near the Baptist Student Union, Sgt. R.L. Brewington, Greenville Police Department traffic safety officer, said. A witness told officers it appeared the cyclist was hit by rear wheels of the bus.

The cyclist’s name was not released Thursday, pending notification of his family, Brewington said. He is believed to be 55-years-old.

Officers were continuing the investigation, but it appears the cyclist was traveling east along 10th Street’s westbound lane when the bus, which was on Lawrence Street, made a right on 10th Street to head west.

Mike Emory, a videographer with WNCT-TV, was traveling west on 10th Street and witnessed the accident. Emory said it appeared the cyclist wasn’t moving at the intersection, then the cyclist and the bus moved at the same time.

“It looked like it was a bad accident. They took off at the same time and neither knew where the other was going,” he said.

Emory said he saw an ambulance driving behind him and it stopped to assist the cyclist.

Kemal Atkins, ECU vice provost for student affairs, said three passengers and a driver were on the campus shuttle bus, which had just picked up students from Joyner Library and was heading to Mendenhall Student Center.

The bus driver will undergo a mandatory drug test and be debriefed by school officials, he said.

The 26-year-old driver started his training in September 2008, said Christine Neff, university spokeswoman. He completed his supervised route training in December 2008. Transit officials said the driver will be suspended pending the outcome of the accident investigation and drug test.

This is the second accident on 10th Street involving an ECU transit bus this week. A cherry picker owned by the university shattered a row of windows on a bus Monday afternoon. The machine’s driver was attempting a left turn off 10th Street when the bucket swung right, striking the bus.

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Editorial: A new look - Redevelopment efforts proceeding well

Thursday, March 26, 2009

Greenville commenced its revitalization efforts downtown at a critical time in the city's history. An exploding population called for city officials to review its plans for the heart of the community and to breathe new life into an area that needed help to realize its potential as an attractive draw to residents.

The city has made great strides since, as Monday’s meeting of the Greenville Redevelopment Commission confirms. The projects under way, and a new proposal that earned favored status, show tremendous promise for bolstering the many strengths already evident in the downtown district.

The redevelopment efforts in the Center City and west Greenville areas began in 2002, pouring millions of dollars into improving blighted areas of the community. The plan called for the city to address a 45-block region in west Greenville over an eight-year period and a 344-acre area of downtown including Evans Street and the Town Common, aiming to forever alter a huge swath of the city.

Thus far, the project has progressed in impressive fashion. But that is only a starting point for redeveloping the city, particularly in the downtown area where a number of exciting proposals are advancing.

The city hopes to construct a plaza on the previous location of the Five Points intersection, now bordered by Fifth Street and Evans. It has conducted public forums to solicit aspirations for that project and has accepted design proposals to create a multi-use gathering place there.

The Reade Circle-Cotanche Street area is slated for improvement, thanks to a cooperative effort with East Carolina University to improve its aesthetic value.

The State Theater, a prominent landmark once known as White's Theater, is targeted for an overhaul through partnerships between the city, an adjoining property owner and a local arts organization, using grant money to fund the repairs and improvement.

Those are in addition to the important work that continues in west Greenville. And on Monday, the Redevelopment Commission agreed to give a proposed science center improved status on the list of favored projects the city intends to pursue. The potential of such a facility, for education and tourism, could be tremendous.

This process has been conducted in an open and forthright manner, engaging citizens in the targeted areas and those who have concerns about how the projects should proceed. For that, the city can be proud. The end result should be a city remade, providing great benefit to residents and strengthening the heart of the community.

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UNC Greensboro warns of budget-driven layoffs

The Associated Press

GREENSBORO, N.C. - More than 100 employees at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, including dozens of faculty members, will lose their jobs because of budget-driven cost cuts, the Greensboro News & Record reported Friday.

UNC Greensboro Chancellor Linda Brady sent a letter to employees and students this week to announce the layoffs.

Brady said the university needs to cut employees now to pay accrued benefits before state-mandated budget cuts of as much as 7 percent take effect July 1. The campus expects to cut about $10 million because of revenue shortfalls at the state level.

The exact nature of the cuts still is uncertain.

"We won't know the size of the budget cuts, and the mix of one-time and permanent dollars required, until the General Assembly completes its work, the governor signs a budget and the UNC Board of Governors provides guidance for the campuses," Brady said. "However, we do know the cuts will be larger than anything we've previously experienced."

The first draft of Gov. Beverly Perdue's budget included cuts of $195 million across the University of North Carolina system, which includes the Greensboro campus and 15 others.

UNC Greensboro's losses under a 7 percent cut would include 109 positions, including 59 faculty. The cuts also would eliminate 275 class sections and 60 percent of freshman seminar classes that would be replaced by large lecture classes.

The university said some positions at the campus have been kept vacant for months because cuts were expected, but that layoffs still are necessary.

Brady said the university would begin notifying affected employees soon.


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Public records advice decried

Lawyer says rules must apply to all

BY SARAH OVASKA, Staff Writer

RALEIGH - Members of the state legislature can't exempt themselves from the state's public records law, according to a Raleigh lawyer who also heads a coalition of groups advocating open government.

Attorney Hugh Stevens, president of the N.C. Open Government Coalition, said he disagreed with the legal advice that Walker Reagan, an attorney on the legislature's payroll, gave to Senate Leader Marc Basnight and House Speaker Joe Hackney late last year.

Reagan advised both men in December that many of the e-mail messages and letters they receive - from constituents, would-be state vendors and others - don't have to be made available to the public because, he said, they fall under what Reagan said fell under a legislature exception to the state's public records law.

His advice came in response to a request by a reporter from The News & Observer to see documents about the state's troubled probation system on file in the offices of Basnight and Hackney.

"If the General Assembly were to claim exemptions for itself from obligation that it has imposed on other public officials the implicit message would be 'openness for thee but not for me,'" Stevens wrote in a letter Wednesday. "Such a message invites cynicism and noncompliance on the part of those other officials."
Stevens frequently represents The N&O on public information issues, including challenging the policy of former Gov. Mike Easley's administration of destroying e-mail.

Gov. Beverly Perdue has pledged that her administration will be more open than Easley’s.

Stevens went on in his letter to ask Basnight to establish rules at the state Senate ensuring that the records will be preserved and kept open.

Hackney, who received a copy of Stevens’ letter, said he asked Reagan to respond but was otherwise non-committal.

"We'll see who has the superior position," he said. "I'll hold my comments until this debate plays out."

Attempts to reach Reagan and Basnight on Thursday were unsuccessful.

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State to monitor insurer's expenses

State to monitor insurer's expenses

BY DAN KANE, Staff Writer

Comment on this story

The State Health Plan has never audited the company it pays about $100 million annually to process members' claims to make sure that the company's expenses are appropriate, the plan's executive administrator said Thursday.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina's contracts with the State Health Plan allow Blue Cross a profit of less than a penny on the dollar. Blue Cross bills the plan to process claims, enroll members and provide other administrative services to the 667,000 state employees, teachers and retirees that it serves.

Jack Walker, executive administrator for the health plan, said Thursday that he learned late last year that no expense audits had been done and that he is in the process of hiring a firm to do them. The plan has an auditing firm to weigh Blue Cross' performance in processing claims, but the firm's contract does not include looking at the expenses the company bills the state.

"We are trying to correct that," Walker said.

Blue Cross' contract has come under scrutiny as state legislators wrestle with how to address a major shortfall in the plan's finances. The state Senate earlier this week approved a measure to provide roughly $660 million from the state's general fund to shore up the plan for the next two years.

"I'm flabbergasted that they don't have an auditor who can go over there and validate the cost basis for this cost-plus contract," said Ed Regan, executive director for the N.C. Retired Governmental Employees' Association. "It's disturbing to say the least."

Walker and House Majority Leader Hugh Holliman said officials are looking at the Blue Cross contract to see whether they can trim some services the company provides in order to save money.

Blue Cross has two contracts to administer claims. The first began in 1996 and ends this year with the phasing out of a long-standing insurance plan. The second began in 2006, when the plan started a preferred provider organization that covers all members.

Both contracts allow Blue Cross to claim administrative expenses plus a profit of less than a penny on the dollar. But the lack of auditing prevents the plan from learning whether those expenses are necessary. The self-insured plan spends more than $2 billion a year on members' medical bills.

"That is outrageous," said Dana Cope, executive administrator for the State Employees Association of North Carolina. "Literally billions of dollars of taxpayers' money and
employees' money go to fund this plan, and to have the third-party administrator be unaudited for its business expenses is crazy."

Blue Cross has not responded to repeated requests for a breakdown of administrative expenses.

Company spokesman Lew Borman said in a statement that the expenses are not an issue. Plan officials have cited a survey of administrative costs in 11 unidentified states to show North Carolina's are not out of line.

"We have been and continue to work cooperatively with the state," Borman said. He said the problem isn't with the contract but with what he called the state's "inability" to properly forecast medical costs of their members.

The plan is in the midst of a bailout because it underestimated costs, including those incurred by Blue Cross.

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In the legislature

The fix to the State Health Plan that the N.C. legislature is considering includes higher co-payments and deductibles for members, and higher premiums for dependents.

Those changes have drawn criticism from member advocates.

Legislation to that end cleared the Senate earlier this week, but House members balked Thursday at moving it through committees without considering changes. Legislative leaders have said the bill needs to be passed by Wednesday to give the plan time to make changes by July 1. Meeting that deadline, they say, would save taxpayers $45 million.

Once it became clear the bill likely would not clear the legislature by Wednesday, House Majority Leader Hugh Holliman said the plan could still meet its deadline. He told members the legislation was a short-term fix and that a long-term fix would come later in the session.

The bill has been criticized for doing little to attract younger, healthier dependents to the health plan. The state pays the premiums for employees, teachers and retirees, but they pay the premiums for their families.

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No hard feelings between Perdue and Bowles

Gov. Beverly Perdue was miffed at comments University of North Carolina President Erskine Bowles made about her budget proposal. At a legislative meeting this week, Bowles had described as "ludicrous" some of the governor's suggestions that the UNC system could get by with eliminating just 73 jobs during this budget crisis.

"I thought his comments were harsh, and I called him and told him that," Perdue said to reporters Thursday afternoon.

Perdue said she had "a great conversation" with Bowles, and had sent her budget director to Chapel Hill to meet university budget officials.

She said the disagreement should not be blown out of proportion. "Erskine and I have been great friends for 20 years," Perdue said. "There is never an apology or a confrontation. We are both strong, bold, very verbal leaders. We are very direct. I respect that, and he respects me. We had a very good conversation. I don't believe it was his intent or his desire to talk disrespectfully or to speak out of school in that meeting. He was just giving a presentation using words that we both use.

"It's not a big deal, and no one should make it one."

Bowles, a former Charlotte investment banker who was President Bill Clinton's chief of staff, is known for his blunt speech. Bowles had said that 500 UNC jobs would be eliminated under the governor's budget proposal and that a better alternative would be unpaid furloughs.

Staving off layoffs

SEANC is taking on Bowles over layoffs. Dana Cope, executive director of the State Employees Association of North Carolina, sent a letter to the UNC system president.

In it, he says he has learned of an e-mail message at UNC-Chapel Hill that calls for reducing staff size now in order to save money in the budget starting July 1.

He cites a State Personnel Commission rule that says reductions can happen only once there is a shortage of funds. "There is no shortage of funds yet, as the next budget has yet to be passed and signed into law," Cope writes. "The General Assembly may, in fact, find a way to fund UNC for the next fiscal year in such a way that no reductions in force are required."

Copies of the March 26 letter were sent to Perdue and Linda Coleman, head of the Office of State Personnel.

Budget panel filled

Perdue has named the rest of a budget-cutting committee.

The five appointees include Dan Gerlach, a budget adviser to former Gov. Mike Easley who now runs the Golden LEAF Foundation, and Norma Houston, a former chief of staff to Senate
leader Marc Basnight, The Associated Press reports. Other new members are former Glaxo
chief executive Charlie Sanders, the first chairman of the state lottery commission; IBM
executive Curtis Clark; and Ronald Penny, chairman of N.C. Central University’s public
administration department.

This month, Perdue named former Cabinet member Norris Tolson and Hilda Pinnix-Ragland to
head the panel.

The Budget Reform and Accountability Commission will propose to the legislature ways to cut
state spending.

By staff writers Rob Christensen and Ryan Teague Beckwith.

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Much-admired N&O writer A.J. Carr will retire

CHIP ALEXANDER, Staff Writer

Growing up in Wallace, in eastern North Carolina, A.J. Carr would read The News & Observer's sports pages in the early morning hours before leaving for school.

In August 1966, he began working at The N&O, writing stories for the sports pages others wanted to get up early to read. Over the course of more than 40 years, that never changed, even if the newspaper, the industry and the sports he covered did.

And, say those who know him and have worked with him, A.J. Carr never changed.

"A.J. is a one-of-a-kind 'throwback' in the best sense of the word," East Carolina athletic director Terry Holland said. "He has been able to thrive in a very different and more competitive world without losing his sense of humor or his graciousness."

Carr, 66, will retire from the newspaper next month. N&O senior vice president and executive editor John Drescher made the announcement on Thursday.

"A.J. has been really good for a really long time," Drescher said. "I think he's just as good now as he's ever been. He understands the people who play so well. He writes about sports in very human terms. He's clearly held in high regard by his professional colleagues, the subjects of his stories and his sources."

Duke basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski once gave Carr a fist-bump on press row before a game at Cameron Indoor Stadium. If that has happened with any other writer, no one can recall it.

"I've loved my association with A.J., and I can't think of any coach from any school in any sport who would not say the same thing," Krzyzewski said. "Because A.J. was trustworthy. You knew you could tell him anything, and he would say it exactly the way you wanted. He was never trying to trick you.
"When you talk about honest, trustworthy and good, A.J.'s picture comes up."

The late Norman Sloan, who often had a tempestuous relationship with the media while N.C. State's basketball coach, once told a group of sportswriters: "If it wasn't for A.J. Carr of The News & Observer, I could say I hated every one of you sons of [guns]."

Sloan's language was more colorful than that, but the point was made. Carr was an exception -- and exceptional.

Carr deflects such praise. A quiet, gentle type who rarely raises his voice, a deeply religious man who never is profane, he said he felt "blessed and fortunate" to have worked for The N&O nearly all of his professional career.

"I always wanted to work here," he said. "Once I got here, I never wanted to leave. This is where I wanted to be."

Carr said the man who hired him, longtime N&O sports editor Dick Herbert, was a "genuine giant in the business" who was a dutiful mentor and helped nurture his career. So, too, was Joe Tiede, who succeeded Herbert as sports editor.

Carr said a conversation with legendary Duke football coach Wallace Wade many years ago left an indelible impression. Wade was talking about recruiting Ace Parker, who would be a big Blue Devils star, and how Wade told Parker to always remember that Duke would do a lot more for him than he ever did for Duke.

"It really made me think," Carr said. "And when I think of The News & Observer, it has done a lot more for me than I've ever done for the paper."

Carr has covered Final Fours and bowl games but said he has put just as much effort into writing about a small-college athlete or the Senior Games. He twice was voted North Carolina sportswriter of the year by the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Association. The awards in 1978 and 2008 were a testament to his longevity but also to the richness of his career.

In the early days, Carr would hunker down with his typewriter, twirl his wedding band for a few moments in thought, then begin banging out a story. The computer age brought on a bigger challenge -- working with a laptop, wireless, blogging.

This basketball season, after N.C. State upset Wake Forest, Carr hunkered down with his iBook, twirled the band and then banged out this:

For a moment, let your imagination run rampant.

Picture the No. 10 ranked team in the ACC beating the No. 7 ranked team in the nation. Envision N.C. State guard Farnold Degand outscoring Wake Forest's player of the year candidate Jeff Teague. Close your eyes and see Brandon Costner going on a wild scoring spree.

Imagine it. All that and more happened Wednesday night at the raucous RBC Center, where the Wolfpack emerged from the depths of the conference to conquer Wake Forest 82-76.

"A.J. is a writer that cared about the teams and the players and the coaches he met," North Carolina basketball coach Roy Williams said. "He is a writer who was not interested in being controversial; he was interested in writing his story. He didn't come along in that age where the more controversial, the better the story."

Carr always could get the story. He's competitive. He knew whom to call and his calls were almost always returned.

ECU's Holland noted Carr was rarely scooped "since he knows everyone and none of us can
lie to or mislead him, even when we know that it is in our self-interest to at least mislead him."

Carr's colleagues perhaps will miss him most -- his humor in the office or the press box, the welcoming smile, the words of encouragement and praise.

Few have shared a press box with Carr as often as N&O sports columnist Caulton Tudor.

"Like lots of their readers, sportswriters have heroes, too," Tudor said. "But contrary to some public opinion, our heroes usually aren't famous coaches, all-star quarterbacks and high-scoring basketball players.

"Our heroes are seldom seen and rarely saluted. A.J. Carr has long been and forever will be as high on my hero list as you get. The reasons for that are as numerous as A.J.'s lifetime in the business. But to sum it up in a few words, A.J. is a great newspaper person but an even better pure person.

"To those of us who have been fortunate enough to work with him, A.J., at maybe 5-foot-8, is an all-time giant."

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WHAT THEY'RE SAYING ABOUT A.J. CARR

"The words that come to mind with A.J. are courteous, honesty, diligence, fairness, great humility and great pride. All those things are interwoven in his life."

-- Former Wake Forest and East Carolina basketball coach Dave Odom

"Some people don't know that A.J. was a tremendous athlete at Wallace-Rose Hill [High School]. He was a hard worker, team player, unselfish and a true sportsman, the same attributes that he carried into his professional life in sportswriting."

-- Wendell Murphy of Rose Hill, a friend of Carr's for more than 50 years and former chairman of the N.C. State board of trustees

"A.J.'s a giant in the media industry. He's got such a caring attitude; he doesn't try to make up the story, he just writes the story. He writes it as well as anybody that I've known, and I've always enjoyed reading him, and I've always enjoyed being interviewed by him."

-- North Carolina athletics director Dick Baddour

"During my 26 years in college athletics administration, I never met a finer gentleman in the media arena than A.J. Carr. I'm glad I had the good fortune to work with him directly during my tenure at East Carolina. He is a special person."

-- Former ECU and Florida State athletics director Dave Hart

"When I sat down to talk to A.J., and this has been over 31 years, I always felt like I was not going to read something that was 180 degrees from what I said. As a coach, I had a great deal of respect that A.J. wanted to get the story, he wanted to write the story, and he had in his mind that he wasn't going to jump away from it to be more controversial."

-- UNC basketball coach Roy Williams

"A.J. and I worked a lot of games together, and he was always a pleasure to work with and be with. He's the most polite person I've ever known. He's a rare individual."
-- Former N&O sports editor Joe Tiede

"I consider him a great friend. When he had his hip replaced, I visited him in the Duke hospital. And so I have two hip replacements. We’re kind of brothers in that regard. We kind of kid each other about setting alarms off together."

-- Duke basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski

"Most of us would settle for the kind of inscription that could easily be his epitaph: "Here lies the nicest, kindest man you could hope to meet. ... and a darn good sportswriter."

-- East Carolina athletics director Terry Holland

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HEALTH CARE REFORM

Treating N.C.'s problems

By Paul R.G. Cunningham

GREENVILLE

As a physician who has practiced medicine in North Carolina for more than 30 years, I am extremely concerned about our state's health care system. My patients, and your family and friends, are being served by a system that is in danger of collapsing because of rising costs, elevated levels of chronic disease and the strains of a waning economy.

I'm encouraged by the commitment from our leaders to fix the system and their willingness to be transparent in a variety of national discussions, such as the Regional White House Forum on Health Care to be held Tuesday in Greensboro. The onus now falls on us to talk about what type of reform we want and what the priorities must be.

The crisis is daunting — millions of uninsured Americans, increasing insurance premiums burdening families and businesses, and skyrocketing rates of obesity and other chronic diseases. While these are serious problems, a related yet often overlooked issue — health inequalities — also deserves our attention.

But to truly address the health care of every American, comprehensive reform must go beyond providing better coverage. It also must address chronic disease, the No. 1 driver of health problems in our nation. More than 133 million Americans — 45 percent of the population — suffer from at least one chronic disease. In 2003, the most recent year such statistics were available, 18.6 percent of the North Carolina population suffered from pulmonary conditions, and 14.6 percent suffered from hypertension.

In minority populations, these diseases are present at even more alarming rates. According to the DHHS report "2006 Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Report Card," African-Americans in North Carolina are 1.2 times more likely to die than whites from heart disease. Also, African-Americans were 2.1 times more likely than whites to die from diabetes and 1.4 times more likely to die from stroke.

As health care leaders get together in Greensboro, I encourage them to keep the health care gap in mind when formulating policy to ensure that quality, affordable health care is no longer a luxury but a service available to all Americans. I also encourage them to consider common-sense solutions, such as disease prevention and management.

I hope I speak for us all when I say we can do better. We can create a health system that provides equal access to all North Carolinians, regardless of their racial, ethnic and socio-economic status. Our health, our children's health and the future of our state depend on us addressing this issue — right now.

Dr. Paul R.G. Cunningham is dean of the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University and co-chairman of the NC Partnership To Fight Chronic Disease.
OUR VIEWS

Hope, and courage

The historian John Hope Franklin inspired several generations with a personal example of wisdom, integrity and grit.

Such a magnificent life he lived. It was full of personal challenge, remarkable fortitude and awe-inspiring accomplishment. John Hope Franklin, who died Wednesday in his adopted home city of Durham at the age of 94, wrote the first definitive history of African-Americans more than 50 years ago. “From Slavery to Freedom” is still an important book today.

He was — as a scholar at Harvard, as a professor at Duke and other universities, as an author, as a key figure in the advance of civil rights in America — emphatically a person of breathtaking professional accomplishment. But his personal story was itself the most compelling thing about him, one of early struggle in which he faced the realities of cruel racial discrimination and yet managed to change some of those realities for those who followed in his path.

Consider that story: born in an all-black town in Oklahoma. Educated at black universities during a time of hardline segregation. Admitted as a graduate student to Harvard, where his personal brilliance was recognized. He was determined to succeed despite facing, again and again, the horrid, thoughtless “institution” of prejudice. Time after time, this distinguished man of the mind would see it applied to him, from not being able to get a cab to pick him up to having trouble buying a house in a “white” neighborhood.

One night in Washington in 1995, Franklin was approached by a woman in a club where he was attending a party and happened to be a member. She handed him her coat check and told him to bring her the coat. The next day, Franklin was awarded the nation’s highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Franklin was associated with the Triangle before he and his wife, Aurelia, moved to Durham in 1980 after he had retired from the University of Chicago. He had taught long before that at St. Augustine's College and at N.C. Central University in Durham. After they moved back, he worked on a book, and then Duke University named him to its most prestigious professorship, the James B. Duke, and he kept working. He had much on which to reflect, including his research for the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund in making its case in the landmark Brown v. Board of Education case.

But Franklin did not just reflect. He remained active into old age, continuing to accept honors and to speak out on race issues that remain a part of the quest for social justice in this country. And his always-active mind was ever-sharp, ever-insightful.

Certainly it was significant to Franklin, given all that he and other African-Americans of his generation and those that followed had endured, when Barack Obama was elected president. Franklin lived to be asked for comment, which was: “I knew it would come sooner or later.”

John Hope Franklin did not just observe history. He lived history. He made history.