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Editorial: ECU, PCC growth fuel region's economic engine
Tuesday, March 30, 2010

Pitt County may be the economic engine of eastern North Carolina, but higher education serves as its fuel. East Carolina University and Pitt Community College are among the county’s most critical resources, and their growth helps provide the basis for economic expansion even in the leanest of times.

It is therefore reassuring to hear of record enrollment at PCC and the exploration of future housing options at East Carolina. The projects needed to house these students and to facilitate their education should stand to benefit residents here and throughout the region for years to come. At East Carolina last week, continued student growth and projections for the future prompted the Board of Trustees to examine options for student housing. To maintain the school’s designation by the Carnegie Foundation as a primarily residential university, East Carolina must have 25 percent of its student population live on campus. That is becoming increasingly more challenging as the school sees enrollment grow each year while the number of available rooms remains static.

At last week’s meeting of the board’s facilities and resources committee, members explored the possibility of taking on some level of debt to fund construction and the renovation of existing buildings to accommodate more students. Given the value of having students live in the campus core, the progress of this effort should be both monitored and encouraged.

In Winterville, a different problem faces Pitt Community College. While students there do not need a place to stay the night, they do need space for classes during the day. The school remains last in the state for its available space-to-student ratio, though it is working toward enacting the vision set forth in its master plan for growth, that will see the number of buildings dramatically increase in the coming years.

The continued evolution of these institutions serves a crucial interest for this community and for eastern North Carolina. It provides the education infrastructure to develop a valuable and attractive workforce, providing graduates to fill positions of need. As well, further construction helps out the local building industry, a field suffering amid the economic slowdown. On both counts, the region is improved as a result.

There is pain to growth, of course, and the further expansion of the student populations at East Carolina and PCC will not come without problems that will require resolution. But residents should never take for granted the benefits of having higher education at the heart of the community.
‘Shovel tests’ reveal long-buried artifacts in Southport

By Amy Hotz
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Before Southport was Southport – even before it was Smithville – Fort Johnston brought life and a little bit of action to this small piece of land near the mouth of the Cape Fear River.

And recently, graduate students with East Carolina University uncovered another part of its colorful history with a tiny treasure trove of historical artifacts.

In May, the town approved a plan to move its branch of the N.C. Maritime Museum to the Fort’s property. This meant improvements would have to be made to the old building and a couple of new buildings, connected by a covered cement walkway would need to be built. Any time construction is ordered on a site of historical significance, a survey must be done to ensure nothing of great historic value is disturbed.

For curious locals, this is more than just a precaution. It’s an opportunity to see what has been hidden all along.

With the guidance of ECU professor of archaeology Charles Ewen, students Dawn Luker, Greg Pierce and Joey Roberts dug “shovel tests” in the area where the cement walkway is to be built. Ewen said they kind of knew all along that they might encounter some artifacts. According to old maps, a seamstress’s quarters were located nearby in the 1800s. Various shops could have been in that area, too, during the fort’s more than 260-year history.

Luker and the other students began digging test holes about 10 feet apart in a 30 x 30 foot area. Although the team had to fight with about 3 feet of clay fill that had been brought in during recent history, the work soon paid off.

"We definitely found some brick and mortar. We also found a couple of buttons, what looks like a lady’s pin or broach, the thimble, a Civil War bullet, which was really cool ... bottle fragments and a lot of ceramics," she said. "It was amazing ... It’s neat to see all the years come out."

The earliest artifacts date from the early 19th century.

Now that the information is collected, Ewen said it’s up to state archaeologists and N.C. Maritime Museum officials to decide what they want to do next.

Mary Strickland, manager of the Southport museum said no decision has been made yet as to the construction or whether the artifacts will be on display in the museum’s new location.

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McNeill boots Jackson, suspends Ruffin

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector
Monday, March 29, 2010
East Carolina football coach Ruffin McNeill dealt with his first dose of dereliction about as quickly as he learned about it.
The first-year coach announced the dismissal of junior running back Brandon Jackson and the indefinite suspension of senior back Giavanni Ruffin on Monday after the two players were arrested early Sunday morning.
It was the first incident requiring McNeill’s disciplinary judgement, and the coach said he simply put the university and the team above the individual.
“Nobody is above the football team. Nobody is above the program,” McNeill said. “I set the standard when I took over the job. There are certain things I believe in, and professionalism is one of them. And being an adult, being in class, having class about them and conducting themselves in championship style.”
The coach confirmed that Ruffin could return to the team pending his future conduct and a re-evaluation from McNeill.
According to a Greenville Police report, Jackson and Ruffin were arrested downtown after being repeatedly warned by officers about causing a disturbance.
“These individuals were encountered on three separate occasions for which one was issued a citation. Their repeated misconduct led to their arrests,” the statement read.
Jackson, 20, who has two previous arrests in Greenville on alcohol- and traffic-related violations, was charged with being intoxicated and disruptive, along with simple affray and consumption under the age of 21. Ruffin, 21, was charged with resisting a public officer. Both posted bond.

Spring practice notes
McNeill has stayed on his players through all five of the team’s spring sessions to keep the up-tempo offense moving at the pace he and offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley grew accustomed to as coaches at Texas Tech.
“They’re catching up. It’s new for them, I think, and we really expect tempo on all three sides of the ball,” McNeill said following Monday’s drills. “Everybody knows our offense is an up-tempo group, but defensively we’re an up-tempo group too, and that’s why substitutions and back-up player development is important on defense as well.”
There must be some visible progress already, as McNeill said this ECU team appears to be further along than the Red Raiders were at this point in their first year in the same offensive and defensive systems.

One major change in tempo is spending little or no time huddling before plays.

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@reflector.com or (252)329-9595.
Raj Jagad, left, and Wayne Bowers participate in the ice-breaker exercise at the community impact forum at C.M. Eppes Recreation Center on Monday night.

Jackie Drake/the Daily Reflector

**Area learns value of collaboration**

By Jackie Drake

The Daily Reflector

Monday, March 29, 2010

Residents in the area surrounding the C.M. Eppes Recreation Center learned the value of collaboration while choosing which community issues to focus on improving during the second “Conversation on Community” engagement forum hosted by the Pitt County Impact Alliance on Monday night.

Convened by United Way of Pitt County, the alliance is holding a series of 15 forums countywide to obtain feedback on the most pressing community needs and issues to guide the focus of United Way funding. The first forum was held Saturday in Bethel.

To experience the effect of collaboration first-hand, attendees at the Eppes forum participated in an ice-breaker exercise, using pretend money to give out as they saw fit to various hypothetical projects like “playground for elementary school” or “street lights for an unsafe neighborhood.”

The exercise was done first silently with individuals placing money in containers separately. Then, the group collaborated and talked about which ones to focus on. The second time yielded more projects with enough money to be completed.

“We need to focus on prioritizing,” Steve Kiess, co-chairman of the community impact cabinet of United Way, said. “When you collaborate and pool resources, it can be much more effective.”

Attendees also were given three stickers to place on posters that represented 18 community issues, including abuse, gangs, crime, illiteracy, substandard housing, unemployment and homelessness. Those 18 issues were the result a needs assessment through the “Pitt County Voices” survey conducted by East Carolina University in 2005.

“We used the results of that survey just as a starting point,” Kiess said.

The high school drop-out rate was rated as the most pressing issue, followed closely by gangs. Unemployment, job preparation, teen pregnancy, underage drinking and after school programs also were among top concerns.

“Not to say the others aren’t important, but it’s amazing how drop-outs and gangs stand out,” Kiess said. “You’ve really shown here tonight that you can direct focus through collaboration. Your role here is so significant. This is how we identify these issues.”

“So many of the issues have to do with children,” Stephanie Grey, a public health nurse, said. “A lot of children join gangs or drop out because of mental issues like insecurity. We need to be addressing the mental health of our youth.”

About a dozen people attended the forum for a small but lively conversation.

The opportunity to give feedback will not end with the forums, Kiess said.
“It’s not over once we complete our list of focus issues; that’s when the real work begins,” he said.
A final community summit is scheduled for April 29.
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**Top forum issues**
High school drop-out rate
Gangs
Unemployment
Job preparation
Teen pregnancy
Underage drinking
After-school programs
The next two forums will be held tonight at 7 at Jaycee Park Auditorium and the Belvoir Fire Department.