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Dreams come true at theater workshop
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Kings, queens, snakes, castles and dreams came to life Saturday onstage at the Turnage Theater in Washington.

Guided by students from East Carolina University, around 13 children from Pitt County’s Belvoir Elementary School took part in the Young Playwrights Project. In a single morning, the students dreamed up, wrote, directed and acted out their own original plays onstage for parents and other spectators.

“They’ve done some wonderful things,” said Patch Clark, an ECU instructor who presided over the workshop.
“They’ve really embraced this opportunity to write and see it come alive on the stage,” Clark added.

Funded by a BB&T Leadership Grant, the Young Playwrights Project was taken up by ECU’s College of Fine Arts & Communication, she related. The goal of the program is to promote young people’s interest in writing and the arts, especially the art of writing plays.

Participating children had chances to work with authors of children’s books and a performance artist to explore that art, she shared.

Locally, in May, students at John Cotten Tayloe Elementary School in Washington will stage plays they’ll write at their school, according to Clark.
Scotty Henley, executive director of the Turnage Theaters Foundation, praised Clark and her ECU students for getting young people interested in the theater.

“I think it’s a wonderful program and it’s a blessing to have Patch involved with it,” Henley said.

Clark, a member of the Turnage foundation’s board, is committed to bringing children’s programming to the theater, he pointed out.

“She sees the value of the size of this theater,” Henley continued, adding that the Turnage’s relatively small stage lets students experience plays in close-up fashion. Among Clark’s helpers was student director Bethany Bondurant, a rising ECU senior pursuing a double major in theater education and theater for youth. Bondurant said she hopes to tour with a children’s theater company after graduation, and expects to find herself in the classroom eventually.

“This experience has been absolutely wonderful for me,” she said of Saturday’s workshop. “It’s shown me the whole other world that theater can expose children to.” Theater education helps children develop life skills, Bondurant asserted. Asked whether she fears live theater is a dying art, given that so many electronic distractions are competing with it, she suggested acting is life, and essentially permanent.

“We act every day,” Bondurant said, a couple of her younger student-helpers nodding their approval.
Police seek help in cold case

The Greenville Police Department pleaded for information Tuesday on the 11th anniversary of an ECU student's shooting death near campus.

Two men allegedly gunned down Reginald Neal Harris, 27, in a yard near 113 N. Jarvis St. in the early morning hours of April 5, 2000. Harris was shot several times at close range and died from wounds to the head and midsection, The Daily Reflector reported in 2000.

Tuesday's news release said the men approached several people in the yard, attempted to rob them, and shot and killed Harris.

They were described as black males, one about 6 feet tall with a slender build and the other about 5 feet 7 inches tall, with a heavy build and a round face.

Witnesses reported the men were dressed in black, wore hooded shirts and had something covering their faces. They fled in a dark sport utility vehicle. Witnesses told investigators in 2000 the assailants grabbed Harris' girlfriend about 1 a.m. Wednesday and shot Harris when he intervened.

Harris, of 109-B Stancil St., was putting himself through school at East Carolina University, family said at the time. He enrolled in January 1997 and expected to graduate in December 2000 with a degree in management. He worked part time as a bouncer at Pantana Bob's downtown.

He served in the U.S. Army as a military police officer and was an avid golfer and fisherman. He had three dogs he took with him just about everywhere he went, his father said.

Pitt-Greenville CrimeStoppers will pay up to $5,000 for information leading to an arrest in the case. Police asked anyone with knowledge to contact Sgt. Joe Friday at 329-4372 or Pitt/Greenville CrimeStoppers at 758-7777 or by texting “PITTGV” and their information to 274637.
The judge in James Richardson's capital murder trial denied a request late Tuesday to remove a juror who was “unable to make a decision.”

The request came about 5 p.m. to Judge W. Russell Duke via a note from the jury forewoman. It said the 10-woman, 2-man panel had taken another vote on whether to convict Richardson of first-degree murder in the June 30, 2009, shooting deaths of Andrew Kirby and Landon Blackley outside The Other Place nightclub in downtown Greenville.

It also said one of the members was asking to be excused. Duke asked the forewoman whether the jury had reached any verdict. “No sir,” she replied.

Richardson, 33, a former J.H. Rose High School athlete and professional basketball player, could face the death penalty if convicted of the killings.

Duke denied the request and told the panel it was its duty to make every effort to achieve a unanimous verdict. He told members they should not hesitate to re-examine their views and change their opinion.

“On the other hand, you should not hesitate to hold to your own views if you remain convinced they are correct,” he said.

“Please be mindful that I am not, in any way, trying to force or coerce you to reach a verdict,” Duke said. “I recognize the fact that there are sometimes reasons why jurors
cannot agree. ... I merely want to emphasize that it is your duty to do whatever you can to reason the matter over together as reasonable people and to reconcile your differences, if such is possible, without the surrender of conscientious convictions, and to reach a verdict as to each charge.”

Tuesday morning, jurors received court records they requested Monday transcribing the testimony of Corio Arrington, who said he was with Richardson just before the shootings. The jury had listened on Monday to a recording of Arrington being interviewed by Greenville Det. Connie Elks on July 1, 2009, after Arrington was arrested on unrelated drug charges.

In his account to Elks, he said he was “a thousand percent sure” Richardson was alone in the car that drove by him at the corner of Reade and Fifth streets, headed toward the Other Place.

In his March 21 court appearance, however, Arrington told Assistant District Attorney Kimberly Robb that he got just a glance of the passing car.

“I couldn't see who was in the car; it zoomed by,” Arrington told Robb “I don't think I saw more than one person.”

Each member was handed a copy of the transcripts and was required to read them silently in the courtroom.

The panel returned to the deliberation room about 9:35 a.m. Deliberations continued through the day except for short breaks in the morning and afternoon and for lunch.

Proceedings continue at 9 a.m. today.

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UNC-CH receives $3 million for athlete study center
BY ERIC FERRERI - Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL The foundation run by Wake County businessman Art Pope has given $3 million to UNC-Chapel Hill for a new academic counseling center for athletes.

The John William Pope Foundation's gift will fund the John W. Pope Student-Athlete Academic Support Center, part of the ongoing renovation of Kenan Stadium.

The foundation, which also paid for the original academic support center built in 1986, is named for John W. Pope Sr., a 1947 UNC-CH graduate and founder of Henderson-based Variety Wholesalers, which operates hundreds of low-cost retailers such as Roses, Value Mart and Super Dollar.

"My father loved Carolina and believed strongly in excellence in both academics and athletics, that each reinforced the other," Art Pope, president of the Pope Foundation, said in a news release Tuesday.

At 29,000 square feet, the new academic center at Kenan Stadium will be more than three times larger than the former space. It will serve nearly 800 athletes from 28 sports and include classrooms, computers, a writing lab, reading rooms and office space.

Athletics Director Dick Baddour calls it "a showcase facility." It is slated to open this fall when stadium renovation is complete. The $70 million project is being funded through private donations and the sale of new, premium seating.

The gift announced Tuesday is the latest in a long string of gifts Pope and his foundation have given to athletics and academics at UNC-CH. Pope also has given to arts and sciences and the business and journalism schools and has funded initiatives at N.C. State University and other universities.

Still, Pope and his foundation have long been an irritant to many on the UNC-CH faculty.
In 2005, a Pope proposal to give millions to promote the study of Western cultures was met with disdain by many faculty members who feared it would allow Pope to influence curriculum and academic decisions.

Pope subsequently scrapped plans for that donation, opting instead to give $2.3 million largely to the university's football program for assistant coach pay raises and other uses.

The Pope family and foundation have long supported conservative causes and fund the John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy, a frequent critic of UNC-CH and its curriculum.

Last week, members of the N.C. Association of Educators, which represents teachers, voted to boycott stores operated by Variety Wholesalers, claiming Pope profits from poor communities to fund organizations that work against the interests of poor people and public education.

Pope has helped fund conservative groups such as the Civitas Institute and the John Locke Foundation, which have taken positions contrary to those espoused by the education group.

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N.C. State turns to former Alabama coach
BY J.P. GIGLIO - staff writer
RALEIGH After describing new basketball coach Mark Gottfried as fearless and as a winner, N.C. State athletic director Debbie Yow leaned forward with excitement and proclaimed the Wolfpack back.

"We're in the game," Yow said near the end of Tuesday night's news conference to introduce Gottfried. "So I'm pretty excited."

Gottfried motioned to Yow as if to calm down his new boss.

"Slow down a little, Debbie, slow down," Gottfried said. "We're not back yet, we're almost back."

Yow ended a three-week search for Sidney Lowe's replacement Tuesday with a five-year deal for $1.2 million per year for Gottfried, an ESPN analyst who led programs at the major (Alabama) and mid-major (Murray State) levels to the NCAA tournament seven times in his 14-year coaching career.

Looking tan and wearing a gray suit and red tie with a block "S" logo, Gottfried, 47, delivered a polished performance at the news conference. He quickly acclimated himself to a fan base that was cool to the news of his hire - at least judging by comments on online message boards and calls to afternoon talk radio shows - with promises to stand up to neighbors North Carolina and Duke.
"I'm not backing down from anybody here. Period," said Gottfried, who has won 278 games in 14 seasons.

Of those wins, 210 came during his tenure at Alabama.

Gottfried's hiring came less than 12 hours after he lost the University of Utah job to Larry Krystkowiak and after Yow sent out an email to anxious Wolfpack fans about the search. It was also a search that Yow claimed had been "sabotaged" by Maryland coach Gary Williams. Yow and Williams worked together for 16 years before Yow left the AD position at Maryland last June for N.C. State.

Sam Pardue, the faculty representative for athletics and one of four people on the search committee, said the search was a success and the fan base will be impressed with Gottfried once they get to know him. "There are always people who want to second-guess but we need to win on the court," Pardue said. "Not win the press conference."

On March 24, Arizona coach Sean Miller, a former N.C. State assistant, declined an opportunity to interview for the job. (That same day, Miller's team upset Duke in the NCAA tournament.) N.C. State turned its attention to Shaka Smart, the coach of Virginia Commonwealth University, which went on an unlikely run to the NCAA tournament's Final Four. Monday afternoon, however, Smart turned down N.C. State's offer and set off a series of dominoes which left Cincinnati's Mick Cronin and Wichita State's Gregg Marshall also out of the equation in N.C. State's search.

That's when Yow turned again to Gottfried. She said she first contacted him during the first week of the search. Yow and Gottfried's relationship goes back almost 30 years, when both were at Oral Roberts -- Yow as the women's basketball coach and Gottfried a star freshman on the men's basketball team.

Yow described the courtship with Gottfried as quick. He said he came close to landing the Utah job but was "much more excited about this opportunity, to be quite frank."

Yow spoke with Gottfried about becoming N.C. State's head coach on Monday night and she flew him in from Houston, via Pensacola, Fla., on Tuesday afternoon. By 5 p.m., he was in front of Raleigh television cameras for the announcement. Two hours later, he walked out of the Vaughn Towers at Carter-Finley Stadium with his carry-on luggage in tow.

"This is a great place," Gottfried said.
Just where the program stands after five seasons under Lowe depends on who you ask. In her email to Wolfpack Club members on Monday night, Yow described the program in "poor shape" and wrote that it would take a "special effort to rebuild" since N.C. State has not been in the tournament for five years.

Sophomore Wolfpack guard Scott Wood thought the team was in better shape, with four starters back from a 15-16 team, than Yow's assessment in the email.

"With this team, I don't think there's any reason to rebuild," Wood said. "You have all the talent there. I was kind of confused by what she meant by it."

Wood said the only thing he knew about Gottfried was that he won at his two previous stops.

Gottfried's coaching career started at UCLA. He was an assistant to Jim Harrick on the Bruins' 1995 national title team. He left UCLA for Murray State after the championship season and took the Racers to the NCAA tournament two times in three seasons.

He jumped from the Ohio Valley Conference to the SEC for the Alabama job before the 1998-99 season. His first three Alabama teams did not make the NCAA tournament but then went five straight years, including a run to the regional finals in 2004 as a No. 8 seed with wins over top-seeded Stanford and defending national champion Syracuse before losing to the University of Connecticut.

The program began to sour in the 2006-07 season, though, with an NIT trip. Gottfried's tenure culminated with his abrupt resignation after a 12-7 start to the 2008-09 season.

Gottfried said Tuesday he loved his time at Alabama, where he played his final three college seasons, but said "mistakes were made" in his exit, without providing further details.

Yow said she had no trepidation about Gottfried's hasty, midseason departure. Yow said she talked in person with four candidates.

Gottfried wasn't her first choice, and he went through the interview process with Utah before talking seriously with Yow, but the process is not what matters, Yow said.

"I love where we ended up," Yow said.

Staff researcher Peggy Neal contributed to this report. jp.giglio@newsobserver.com or 919-829-8938
Pell cuts would come late in the admissions game
By Daniel de Vise

Last year at this time, Congress was pushing through the biggest boost to the federal Pell Grant program in a generation. Pell, the largest source of grant aid for low-income students to attend college, once covered two-thirds of the cost of a public college. It had dwindled to covering about one-third of those costs by the time the Obama administration stepped in with a massive infusion of cash.

Pell is now bigger than ever — and targeted for a new round of cuts. Congressional Republicans have proposed cutting $6 billion from the $40 billion program. Those cuts would reduce the largest Pell award by $845. The Obama administration favors preserving the maximum grant of $5,550.

But the program faces a shortfall of more than $10 billion. The largest Pell grant has grown, and the number of students receiving the grants has ballooned — from 6.2 million in 2008 to more than 9 million this year.

Quite apart from the merits of cutting Pell or not cutting Pell, there is an important question of timing. The vast majority of large state institutions have already told admitted students how much aid they are likely to expect, including Pell grants. Many students have already chosen colleges based partly on available aid.

Changing the Pell program now could trip up millions of families well after aid and attendance decisions have been made, according to student advocates. Students generally must decide where to attend by May 1.

“This is literally the worst possible time to be talking about a cut to federal student aid,” said Rick Shipman, director of financial aid at Michigan State University, in a conference call today organized by the nonprofit U.S. PIRG.

If Congress enacts Pell cuts now, Shipman said, colleges will have to send out another round of letters with new, lower aid figures at the very end of the admission cycle.
“I can’t imagine having to send a letter to over 9,000 families saying, “I’m sorry, but the aid offer we sent to you previously is now null and void,” he said.

The students most affected by any cuts would be those in the greatest need, whose college plans are most easily disrupted, said Rich Williams, higher education advocate at U.S. PIRG.

“We’re talking about the students who are on the tipping point already,” he said.

More employers hiring college-educated workers
By Paul Davidson, USA TODAY
2011-04-01

College-educated workers are clearly reaping the benefits of a strengthening job market, but economists worry that Americans with lesser skills could be left behind.

Employers added 216,000 jobs last month, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Friday, the most since the U.S. Census-inflated growth last May. Yet the gains aren’t spread evenly. Professional and business services grew by 78,000 jobs, the most since 2005, and many require college degrees.

Jobs are also sprouting for the less-educated. McDonald’s plans to announce today that it’s hiring 50,000 mostly part-timers in the U.S. on April 19 to prepare for the summer sales spike.

But since January, employment has grown by 521,000 jobs for Americans with bachelor’s degrees or higher and fallen 318,000 jobs for those with only a high school diploma, underscoring a divide that could widen as job growth picks up.

“We have a lot of people who have the wrong skills,” says Wells Fargo economist John Silvia.

Tig Gilliam, CEO of staffing giant Adecco, says his firm is handling surging placements for engineers, computer professionals and accountants. Many employers, spoiled by a big pool of jobless workers, now seek college degrees even for customer service jobs.

“Clients still (can) pick and choose,” says Roy Krause, CEO of staffing firm SFN Group.

Meanwhile, the battle for skilled workers is becoming fiercer.
Many job candidates are getting multiple offers for the first time in the recovery, says Evan Davis, chief operating officer of MRINetwork, an executive search firm.

That’s forcing companies to beef up recruiting staffs slashed in the recession, says Harry Griendling, CEO of DoubleStar, a staffing consultant.

Philadelphia-based chemical maker Arkema increased its recruiters from one to three this year, Vice President Chris Giangrasso says. It plans to add 200 engineers and managers to its 2,500 employees after making big cuts in the downturn.

“People who managed 20 people now manage 40,” he says. “We’ve begun to see how that’s not efficient. Some people don’t get trained.”

Russell Construction of Davenport, Iowa, is adding accounting, sales and business development executives to snare market share in a recovering market for health care and federal government building, President Jim Russell says.

John Daly, 56, newly hired as vice president of business development, lost a similar job at a construction firm in January but quickly got three offers. “I felt blessed,” he says.