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Armed gunmen rob ECU students

Two male students were briefly kidnapped during the early morning incident.

The Daily Reflector

Two East Carolina University students were kidnapped and robbed at gunpoint as they were leaving the downtown area early Thursday, a Greenville Police Department spokesman said.

The two male students, one 23 and the other 21 years old, were approached at 11th and Forbes streets at 2:25 a.m. by two black males, each holding a handgun, said Lt. E.D. Carson.

The handguns were held to the victims' heads as the robbers took a wallet with assorted credit cards and identification as well as two cell phones, the police report said.

Then, they were forced to walk with the suspects to the nearby Harris-Teeter. One suspect kept watch on the victims, while the other went into the store to use a stolen bank card at the store's ATM, Carson said.

The suspects released the victims shortly thereafter, then went to a nearby Sheetz and tried, unsuccessfully, to use the card again, Carson said.

The victims reportedly had minor injuries.

The police report said alcohol or drug use was involved in the incident, but did not say how.

One of the suspects was described as 6 feet tall, wearing dark jeans, Timberland boots and a long-sleeved black shirt. The other suspect was not described.
Study finds

Vitamin D may help curb cancer

By Marilynn Marchione
The Associated Press

Breast cancer patients with low levels of vitamin D were much more likely to die of the disease or have it spread than patients getting enough of the nutrient, a study found — adding to evidence the "sunshine vitamin" has anti-cancer benefits.

The results are sure to renew arguments about whether a little more sunshine is a good thing.

The skin makes vitamin D from ultraviolet light. Too much sunlight can raise the risk of skin cancer, but small amounts — 15 minutes or so a few times a week without sunscreen — may be beneficial, many doctors believe.

While the vitamin is found in certain foods and supplements, most don't contain the best form, D-3, and have only a modest effect on blood levels of the nutrient. That's what matters, the Canadian study found.

Only 24 percent of women in the study had sufficient blood levels of D at the time they were first diagnosed with breast cancer. Those who were deficient were nearly twice as likely to have their cancer recur or spread over the next 10 years, and 73 percent more likely to die of the disease.

"These are pretty big differences," said study leader Dr. Pamela Goodwin of Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto. "It's the first time that vitamin D has been linked to breast cancer progression."

But people shouldn't start downing supplements, she warned. Experts don't agree on how much vitamin D people need or the best way to get it, and too much can be harmful. They also don't know whether getting more vitamin D can help when someone already has cancer.

"We have no idea whether correcting a vitamin D deficiency will in any way alter these outcomes," said Dr. Julie Gralow, a cancer specialist at the University of Washington in Seattle.

The study was released Thursday by the American Society of Clinical Oncology and will be presented at the group's annual meeting later this month.

Lots of earlier research suggests vitamin D may help prevent prostate, breast and especially colon cancer. In lab and animal tests, vitamin D stifles abnormal cell growth, curbs formation of blood vessels that feed tumors and has many other anti-cancer effects.

Other evidence: People who live in northern regions of the world have higher cancer rates than those living closer to the equator, possibly because of less sunshine and vitamin D.

The Canadian researchers wanted to see whether it made a difference in survival. They took blood from 512 women at three University of Toronto hospitals between 1989 and 1995, when the women were first diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer.

A decade later, 83 percent of those who had had adequate vitamin D blood levels were alive without extensive spread of their cancer, versus 79 percent of those whose vitamin D levels were insufficient and 69 percent of those who were deficient, as defined by widely used medical standards for measuring intake.

One red flag: The few women with the very highest levels of vitamin D seemed to have worse survival.

Though the study was too small and those results were not conclusive, "there may be an optimal level of vitamin D in women with breast cancer and it may be possible to take too much," Goodwin said.

The federal government says up to 2,000 international units of vitamin D a day seems OK. Taking 800 units per day will, on average, raise blood levels to the middle of the range that seems best for bone and general health, Goodwin said.

Vitamin D is in salmon and other oily fish, and milk is routinely fortified with it, but dietary sources account for little of the amount of D circulating in the blood, experts say.

"It's very hard to make a recommendation" because how much difference a supplement makes depends on someone's baseline level, which also can be affected by sunlight, skin type and time of year, she explained.
Death renews fears about street

A jogger is killed by a bus in an area where pedestrians have been concerned for safety.

By Jesse James DeConto

CHAPEL HILL - The death of a young jogger in the shadow of the UNC-Chapel Hill medical school Thursday morning has amplified some students' call for a safer street.

The 20-year-old woman was hit by a Chapel Hill Transit bus in the far right eastbound lane of Manning Drive at Columbia Street. Police have not released the jogger's name pending notification of her family.

A construction project that would include a pedestrian bridge across Manning Drive near that location previously was scheduled to begin this week.

The bridge would not be an obvious option for a jogger as it will be accessible from the sidewalk only by a long, tiered staircase or an exterior elevator.

But medical student Evan Corey says the jogger's death illustrates that Manning Drive is not safe for pedestrians. He and some colleagues had been asking the university administration for temporary safety measures, such as a pedestrian-activated traffic signal, until the bridge is open in 2011.

"We've all had incidents where we've been almost struck by cars because they just don't yield," Corey said. "It's something like this, sadly, that brings attention to an issue that's been neglected for far too long."

Bruce Runberg, the university's vice chancellor for facilities planning, did not know whether the bridge could be ready earlier than planned.

"Given what has happened, we'll certainly consider that," he said. Runberg referred questions about interim safety measures to UNC-CH Police Chief Jeff McCracken, who was unavailable for comment.

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Witnesses said they saw the young woman jogging on a sidewalk just before the accident. Police were continuing to investigate and had not determined who was at fault.

Previous accidents

It was the 12th pedestrian accident on Manning Drive in a little more than three years. Three people in those accidents required hospital treatment.

In 2006, retired UNC psychology professor David Galinsky died while crossing U.S. 15-501 toward Manning Drive on his way to the Dean Smith Center for a Tar Heel basketball game.

The town is planning over the next several years to install new street lights, marked crosswalks and pedestrian signals, flashing signs, sidewalks and a pedestrian tunnel or bridge across U.S. 15-501 at Manning Drive.

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Want students to succeed?

Pay 'em

American culture is built on rewards, one lesson our kids have learned far too well

BY GERDA PRESSON

As a dedicated high school math teacher, now retired, I cannot believe what I am about to suggest.

Having recently read a summary of the current presidential candidates' proposals on how to improve education, I yawned. Talk about "same ol', same ol.'" Look, if it hasn't worked for the last several decades, wouldn't you think someone would finally say, "It doesn't work!" And move on.

Why doesn't the "same ol'" work? Let's just look at who we are as a culture. Face it: We are a materialistic culture.

So, very simply, if you want students in a materialistic culture to perform, reward them. Never mind Abraham Maslow's notion of self-actualization: performing well simply for its own sake. Even the overvalued "A" on your report card isn't going to do it. Just like their moms and dads, students want real rewards, and they want them now.

So pay them: real, hard cash.

Over the years I've had the opportunity to teach overseas, the last time on a Fulbright teaching fellowship in Berlin. It was a very different atmosphere.

The most significant difference was that, in Germany, it was the student's responsibility to learn. Here in the USA, it is the teacher's responsibility that the students learn. This is huge.

When I first arrived in Berlin, bright-eyed and excited with lots of innovative teaching techniques filling my briefcase, I was looking forward to a year of professional exchange. I'll show you my ideas, and you show me yours.

What a letdown. "Who needs new techniques?" they queried as they dusted off the same old lesson plans they had been using for 25 years. Instead, they suggested I head for the local stationery store to buy some of those plastic sleeves that would better protect my own plan sheets and prevent them from getting dog-eared.

Well, I thought, they must be terrible teachers. But they weren't, not if you measure their effectiveness by student performance.

I cannot point to any single strategy that we could borrow from their system to improve ours. It was the entire system. The primary responsibility for student performance and discipline lay with the parent. Because the values of the culture were so different, peer pressure had the effect of encouraging good behavior rather than the opposite.

Education was not merely academic in nature, it was social as well. Every class went on a two-week holiday for the purpose of working together, planning and preparing meals, sharing in activities, dealing with interpersonal relationships.

It is not my intent to laud someone else's system. We have little to gain by this. Instead, my intent is to point out that the method for improving anything in our culture, including education, must be based on the culture we already have. Our culture is based on reward and on who has the most stuff.

During a career day program, I had a guest speaker tell about his job. When one student asked what he was paid, I intervened and said that was a personal question. The student quickly rephrased: "What kind of car do you drive?"

A late model Lexus was the reply: "So what kind of car do you drive, Mr. P?"

An old Honda Civic. "Well, that's easy," she analyzed, "you make more money than Mr. P."

These are the students we are teaching. If you want them to perform, then reward them. Give them gift cards to their favorite stores, movie theaters, celebrity performances, sports events, iPods. If you want to get parents involved, offer coupons for health insurance premiums, car discounts, gasoline gift cards.

We have a masterfully skilled advertising industry in this country. It knows how to persuade us to buy things, to need things. Let's use its expertise and research to woo students into doing exactly what we want them to do as well.

If National Public Radio stations have to lure adults into making tax-deductible, charitable contributions by offering trips to London and Paris, then it doesn't seem right to ask students to be more altruistic and self-actualized than their parents. A's might be nice, but "show me the money" is better. Let's face it, we've bred them that way.

Does this horrify you? It does me. But if the shoe fits —

Gerda Presson lives in Raleigh.
Duke to weigh safety concerns

BY STANLEY B. CHAMBERS JR.
STAFF WRITER

DURHAM – Safety concerns for maintenance workers will be among the subjects Duke University officials will review as part of an investigation into the death of an employee.

Rayford Cofer, 53, was killed Wednesday after a steam pipe ruptured while he was working in the mechanical room of the Levine Science Research Center.

It was not known Thursday whether Cofer, a master steamfitter, was working on the pipe when it broke.

Kemel Dawkins, Duke vice president for campus services, said at a news conference Thursday afternoon that a group of employees was in or near the mechanical room when the pipe ruptured and that what each person was doing at the time is still being determined. He said he didn’t know when the steam-only metal pipe was last inspected or how old it is but said there were no concerns about a similar incident elsewhere on campus.

Many of Duke’s buildings are heated and cooled by steam, which runs out of a central steam plant and is transferred through underground pipes.

OSHA on hand

An investigator from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration is at Duke looking into the accident. OSHA investigates all workplace deaths.

WRAL reported that Cofer’s stepson, identified as William Coble, had raised unspecified concerns about workplace safety. “We are looking into it,” Dawkins said.

The most recent serious safety violation found at Duke by OSHA was in 1992, involving a construction trench, according to the state Department of Labor.

Fire alarms and a sprinkler system were activated after the rupture, and the research center’s basement was flooded. Most of that water was cleared by Thursday morning, allowing the building to reopen. None of the water is contaminated, Dawkins said.

Construction of a water line in front of the building appears to be unrelated to the incident Wednesday, Dawkins said.

“We’re confident the building is safe,” he said.

In front of the school’s main administration building, the university’s flag was at half-staff in memory of Cofer.

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