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Lewis earns highest honor from dental society

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Wednesday, May 20, 2009

Dr. Jasper L. Lewis, a Greenville pediatric dentist, has been awarded the Distinguished Service Scroll from the North Carolina Dental Society, the group’s most prestigious award.

"It was a huge surprise, and it is obviously a great honor to be there with the people who have gotten it before," Lewis said. "I was surprised and very honored to receive it."

The award, which is not conferred every year, is given to a dentist or lay person who is nearing the end of a career of outstanding service, leadership and dedication to the profession of dentistry or to the improvement of the health of the people of North Carolina.

"There is perhaps no other dentist in the state who has done more for the dental profession and for our children than Dr. Lewis," Dr. Gavin Harrell, president of the N.C. Dental Society, said.

Lewis also is a clinical professor of surgery, chief of the division of dentistry, and clinical associate professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the East Carolina University Brody School of Medicine in Greenville.

Dr. Billy Williams, also a Greenville dentist, serves as the chairman of the NCDS awards committee. He said Lewis is one of the most generous people with his time.

"He is constantly giving back to the profession," Williams said. "Not only has he done as much as anyone for our community, he has done things at the state level and he has done a lot for organized dentistry."

The Give Kids a Smile program is held annually at Lewis’ office, Eastern Orthodontics & Pediatric Dentistry on Johns Hopkins Drive, where he donates his and his staff's time for a day to give free dental care to children in eastern North Carolina.

"He is always helpful and always willing to offer advice. Any question that you might have about dentistry, he is always there," Williams said.

Lewis’ son, Dr. Lee Lewis, also is a dentist. He said his father has spent his life practicing dentistry and trying to help the people of eastern North Carolina. Lewis played a large role in helping to bring a dental school to ECU to increase the number of dentists in the east, where access to care has historically been low.

"He has been very active in dental politics his entire career," Lee Lewis said of his father. "He has been more than willing to stand up for what he believed was right for the people of eastern North Carolina."

A winner of the Governor’s Award for outstanding volunteer service, Lewis is a member of the American College of Dentists, the International College of Dentists and the Pierre Fouchard Academy.

Lewis, a specialist in pediatric dentistry, is a native of eastern North Carolina. He received a bachelor's degree in biology from Wake Forest University and earned his dental degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He then served two years as a dental officer in the U.S. Air Force.

Lewis received a postdoctoral degree from UNC in 1973, moved to Greenville and opened his practice that same year.

Lewis has held offices in numerous regional and national dental organizations including a term as president of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. He lectures across the nation and internationally on
pediatric dentistry and practice management.

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Editorial: Reflect goals - Reconsider equal state wage reduction

Thursday, May 21, 2009

It stands to reason that pay cuts should be a component of Gov. Beverly Perdue’s effort to close a $3.3 billion shortfall in the state’s 2008-09 budget. The decision to impose wage cuts equally across the board asks all employees to shoulder the burden of this shortfall, an approach grounded in fairness and shared responsibility.

Better, however, would be a more nuanced policy that reflects the state’s priorities to improve education and other areas despite the economic crisis. In this case, the governor should protect the state’s long-term interests by eschewing a dedication to equality.

Perdue issued a directive in April to reduce state workers’ pay by 0.5 percent between now and the end of the 2008-09 fiscal year on June 30. She pledged to offset the loss of income with flex hours after July 1 as employers allow, repaying workers for this sacrifice. All state employees, including those in public schools, community colleges and the University of North Carolina system, will be affected.

Pitt County Schools will follow Raleigh’s edict and impose those cuts as well. That leaves classroom teachers, already tasked with a difficult burden, taking home smaller paychecks. Those on a 10-month pay schedule will be most harmed, since the end of the fiscal year next month provides little time to make appropriate financial arrangements for a reduced income.

Considering the relatively paltry size of the wage reduction — a mere 0.5 percent — criticism of this policy might be viewed as unwarranted. These difficult economic times challenge the entire nation, so all should be willing to sacrifice for the fiscal solvency of North Carolina.

And yet, though Raleigh’s approach may be fair, it fails to recognize that not all areas of state government hold so critical importance as does education. With a public school system that continues to lag behind its peers, North Carolina can ill afford to cut the pay of those at the front of the classrooms. At community colleges and state universities, worker training and valuable research complement the higher education pursuits of the next generation of state leaders. As such, instructors at every level deserve special consideration in any budget decision.

Such an approach should not be construed as a slight to other state workers. They deserve the respect of a grateful public for their commitment to public service and the challenging tasks they undertake each day.

Yet, North Carolina’s emphasis on education should be reflected in its budgeting, particularly in dire economic times. Pitt County must impose these wage cuts on teachers, but only because Raleigh left no choice.

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Attorney for Mary Easley will speak this morning

BY MIKE BAKER, The Associated Press

RALEIGH - An attorney who says he is representing North Carolina's former first lady is holding a news conference to talk about her job at North Carolina State University.

Raleigh attorney Marvin Schiller said the news conference is scheduled for Thursday at 11 a.m. at his office on the city's west side.

Schiller would not comment on what information might come from the news conference. Neither would he say when he was hired to represent the wife of former Gov. Mike Easley, who left office after consecutive four-year terms.

According to subpoenas, U.S. Attorney George Holding is investigating the Easleys.

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NCSU trustees name a fill-in chairman

BY JAY PRICE, Staff Writer

RALEIGH - The N.C. State University Board of Trustees has picked one of its elder statesmen -- former Lt. Gov. Bob Jordan -- as chairman to briefly replace businessman McQueen Campbell of Raleigh, who resigned in controversy last week.

Board members voted to give Jordan the job in a special telephone meeting Wednesday afternoon.

The board's bylaws dictate that it must have a chairman, but it's unclear whether Jordan will have to take any action as its leader. The board has no meetings scheduled before it votes July 14 on a new slate of officers, including a new chairman, for a full term.

Campbell was appointed to the board twice by his friend, Gov. Mike Easley. He stepped down after telling University of North Carolina system President Erskine Bowles that he had suggested to Chancellor James Oblinger that the university hire the governor's wife, Mary.

Mary Easley was given a job, and later her salary was raised to $170,000. Provost Larry Nielsen, who hired her, resigned last week, and Bowles said this week that Mary Easley should resign, too.

Jordan, who was serving as the board's first vice chair, is president of Jordan Lumber and Supply Inc. in Mount Gilead. He was lieutenant governor of North Carolina from 1984 to 1988 and also has served in the state Senate and on the UNC Board of Governors.

Jordan said in a telephone interview that he was happy to help by stepping into the role temporarily but that he had no interest in seeking a full term as chairman after this one ends.
Andrew Giuliani flubs Duke golf suit

Judge doubtful about its merits

BY ANNE BLYTHE, Staff Writer

The son of former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani tried to make a federal case against Duke University for kicking him off the golf team. But a federal magistrate says Andrew Giuliani's case belongs in the drink.

Wallace Dixon, of North Carolina's Middle District, offered his opinion on the case this week, in a document peppered with references to golf and the movie "Caddyshack."

Dixon said Robert Ekstrand, the Durham lawyer representing Andrew Giuliani, spoiled his case when he argued that Duke reneged on a contract with the aspiring pro golfer when he was a high school recruit.

"His analysis slices far from the fairway," Dixon said in the memorandum.

Duke, in previous court filings, claims no such contract existed. Giuliani, Duke's lawyers said, was neither guaranteed a spot on the golf team nor promised lifetime access to the university's facilities.

Duke contends that Giuliani squandered his opportunity to be on the team after flipping a putter, breaking a driver, gunning his car engine in a golf course parking lot and throwing an apple in the face of a teammate. The misconduct got Giuliani bumped off the team last year.

Dixon, a magistrate judge, was assigned to the case last week. James A. Beaty, chief Middle District judge, said an increase in criminal cases in recent years is requiring more attention of
district judges. If Duke and Giuliani consent, the magistrate judge can have trial jurisdiction.

"We are pleased with the decision and appreciate that the court understood the potential implications of this lawsuit for sports teams everywhere," said Michael Schoenfeld, Duke vice president for public affairs and government relations.

Efforts to reach Ekstrand on Wednesday were unsuccessful.

Throughout his document, Dixon describes Ekstrand's various legal arguments as "a swing and a miss," needing "a sand wedge" and "attempting to take a mulligan."

Dixon even references the golf film "Caddyshack," and Bill Murray's crazed groundskeeper character, Carl Spackler.

Dixon said Ekstrand's claim "brings to mind Carl Spackler's analysis from the movie 'Caddyshack' ... 'He's on the final hole. He's about 455 yards away, he's gonna hit about a 2 iron, I think.' "

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SAT Coaching Found to Boost Scores -- Barely

Study Results Run Counter to Test-Prep Course Claims; How Colleges Fuel Industry

By JOHN HECHINGER

Families can spend thousands of dollars on coaching to help college-bound students boost their SAT scores. But a new report finds that these test-preparation courses aren't as beneficial as consumers are led to believe.

The report, to be released Wednesday by the National Association for College Admission Counseling, criticizes common test-prep-industry marketing practices, including promises of big score gains with no hard data to back up such claims. The report also finds fault with the frequent use of mock SAT tests because they can be devised to inflate score gains when students take the actual SAT. The association represents 11,000 college admissions officers, high-school guidance counselors and private advisors.

"It breaks my heart to see families who can't afford it spending money they desperately need on test prep when no evidence would indicate that this is money well-spent," says William Fitzsimmons, Harvard University's dean of undergraduate admissions, who led a group at the college admissions association that prompted the report.

Jonah Varon, a straight-A student at Lowell High School in San Francisco, took a mock SAT from a test-prep company last year and scored 2060 out of a possible 2400. A few weeks later, with no tutoring, he took the real test. His score: a perfect 2400, or 340 points higher.

Mr. Varon, who is headed to Harvard in the fall, was suspicious. The coaching company, Revolution Prep, of Santa Monica, Calif., says its mock tests are calibrated to be at the same difficulty level as the real SAT. So why had it seemed to the student so much harder?

After gathering test scores from 15 classmates who had had similar experiences, Mr. Varon wrote an article for his school newspaper claiming that the mock test was far more difficult -- or was scored more harshly -- than the actual exam to make Revolution Prep appear to be raising test scores more than it actually does.

"It seems like dishonest advertising," Mr. Varon says.

Revolution Prep says that the experiences of Mr. Varon and several of his classmates were "outliers," and that surveys of students at Lowell High School generally show high satisfaction with the test-coaching company's results.

Scores of coaching companies, including Washington Post Co.'s Kaplan unit and Princeton Review Inc., the two largest players, help prepare students each year to take the SAT, used by many colleges to help make admission decisions. Companies typically charge $1,100 for a class and $100 to $200 an hour for individual tutoring, the college admissions counselors' report says. In total, about two million students spend $2.5 billion a year on test preparation and tutoring, including the SAT, according to Eduventures Inc., a Boston research and consulting firm.

The college counselors' report concludes that, on average, prep courses yield only a modest benefit, "contrary to the claims made by many test-preparation providers." It found that SAT coaching resulted in about 30 points in score improvement on the SAT, out of a possible 1600, and less than one point out of a possible 36 on the ACT, the other main college-entrance exam, says Derek
Briggs, chairman of the research and methodology department at the University of Colorado in Boulder and author of the admissions counselors' report.

The report was prepared by reviewing numerous academic studies from past years that examined the impact of test preparation on SAT scores. The studies predated the addition of the writing section of the SAT in 2005, which increased the possible score total to 2400 from 1600.

The report also noted that some college-admissions officers indirectly encourage applicants to sign up for SAT-prep courses by setting score cutoffs. A survey included in the report found that more than a third of schools with tight selection criteria said that an increase of just 20 points in the math section of the SAT, and of 10 points in the critical reading section, would "significantly improve students' likelihood of admission."

The nonprofit College Board, which oversees the SAT, is critical of colleges that select applicants based on small score differences that aren't statistically significant. Laurence Bunin, a College Board senior vice president, says the board's own research shows limited benefit from test-prep courses. He says familiarity with the SAT tends to provide the biggest short-term gains for students. He recommends free and low-cost College Board materials, including a $20 study guide.

Test-prep companies say that some students see substantial gains in their SAT scores as a result of coaching, even if studies show that average test-score improvements are limited. For example, Kaplan cites two of its former students, Lily and Emma Shepard, twin sisters who are seniors at Montclair Kimberley Academy in New Jersey. Kaplan says Emma increased her SAT score, compared with an initial diagnostic test, by 450 points to 2210, while Lily's score rose 330 points, to 2190. The family paid $4,000 to Kaplan for a tutor to come to their home. "I learned new material as well as test-taking tricks," says Lily, who will be attending Duke University next year. Emma is going to Georgetown University.

The sisters' gains were smaller when compared with their scores on the Preliminary SAT, or PSAT, which the College Board says is a good predictor of SAT scores. In that comparison, Lily's score improved 110 points, and Emma's rose 300 points.

Kaplan officials say they take pains to make their diagnostic test similar to the real SAT. Seppy Basili, senior vice president at Kaplan, says that the PSAT doesn't include higher-level algebra, while the SAT does, so some students score lower on the real test. In addition, he said, Lily and Emma skipped many questions on the diagnostic test, which could explain the different scores.

Some test-prep companies acknowledge there is nothing to hold them accountable for score-gain promises. "The industry is not regulated," says Paul Kanarek, a senior vice president with Princeton Review. "It is sort of the wild, wild West."

Kaplan and Princeton Review say they make no claims about any specific average point increases, calling that practice inherently misleading because it is difficult to collect accurate data.

Revolution Prep offers a "score improvement guarantee" of 200 points for students taking its coaching courses. But co-founders Ramit Varma and Jake Neuberg say the guarantee doesn't mean that all students will increase their scores by that much. If students don't achieve a 200-point gain, they are entitled to a free repeat of the course, they say.

Revolution and other test-prep companies say they use their own diagnostic tests for baseline comparisons because the College Board publishes only eight practice tests -- also simulations -- in its official SAT guide, and many students have already taken them. In the past, the board published actual SATs from previous administrations of the exam, but discontinued that practice in 2005 when the writing section was added. The College Board says it will begin including three actual tests this summer in the new edition of its SAT guide, along with seven simulated tests.

In Newton, Mass., Summit Educational Group Inc. says its "proven score increases on the SAT are 180 to 400 points." Chief Executive Charles O'Hearn says those figures are based on improvement only from real PSATs or SATs, not diagnostic tests. Still, he says the figures are based on surveys to which fewer than half of students respond. "I wouldn't say there isn't an element of marketing in this," he says.

On its Web site, Elite Educational Institute Inc., of Irvine, Calif., advertises a 240-point average increase in SAT scores, calculating it in comparison with its own diagnostic exam. After an inquiry from a reporter, the company says it plans to take the claim, which it says was based on the SAT before the addition of the writing section, off its Web site. "Any test-prep company that gives you their own test with their own score scale could be accused of fudging the numbers to make students think they improved more than they really had," Kevin Sung, Elite's chief operating officer, said through a spokeswoman.