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Garden offers veggies, lessons

“Gardens are very visual, and there’s lots that can happen around them.”

Margie Gallagher
professor

By Michael Abramowitz
The Daily Reflector
Monday, May 21, 2012

There is more growing around the garden at west Greenville’s Lucille Gorham Intergenerational Community Center than meets the eye.

It becomes apparent by listening to the giggling, squeaky voices of a dozen young children moving enthusiastically among the garden beds in the yard behind the center, pulling weeds and tending the newly sprouted vegetable patches.

The community garden, initially funded in 2008 by a $50,000 grant from the Kellogg Foundation, was one of the first things the program directors developed when they established the center.

“Gardens are very visual, and there’s lots that can happen around them,” said Margie Gallagher, professor and associate dean of the East Carolina University College of Human Ecology, which operates the center, following the vision of its founder, the late Lessie Bass.

The garden is tended by people from all of the neighborhood’s generations. It provides some important basic nutritional needs to its tenders, but feeds more than their stomachs. It satisfies their appetite for social interaction, nurturing and a sense of place, say those who provide a structured environment that represents their neighborhood in one community center.
For the staff and educators, it also provides an opportunity to teach the center’s elementary school children in less traditional ways.

“Nutrition, science, math, growing things and harvesting them — lots of learning opportunities that can kind of sneak up on those anti-book kids,” Gallagher said. “They aren’t thrilled about adding four plus nine to get 13 until they’re counting how many carrots they’ve grown.”

Megan Gatlin, 10, boasted that she learned how to spell “photosynthesis” from her gardening experience.

“That’s when plants use sunlight to produce their own food. It’s amazing,” she said.

Dwight Cannon, 10, said he likes to learn about how deep to plant seeds, but he’s mostly in it for the fun.

“You get to work in the soil and get your hands messy,” he said. “I didn’t know gardening was so much fun. I learned that from Miss Joni.”

Miss Joni is Joni Young Torres, botanist and master gardener from the Pitt County Cooperative Extension office. She takes time from her work at the community garden on County Home Road to teach gardening science at the center. Her work is made possible by a grant from Communities Putting Prevention to Work, through the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. The goal is to encourage people to eat healthy foods and add more physical activity to their lifestyles.

“We’re trying to introduce children to fresh fruits and vegetables and replace a lot of the processed foods they eat,” Torres said.

Torres turned to the children around her and asked, “When you grow it, you will eat it, right?”

“Yeah,” the children shouted in unison.

The garden is a hands-on project-oriented approach to horticultural education but it does much more than simply teach.

Gallagher pointed out the several elevated beds bounded by rail ties allows access to people in wheelchairs who roll along concrete walkways to reach them. That feature illustrates one of the important basic principles of the center: It is intergenerational, bringing disabled and older people into close interactive contact with youngsters.
“The kids learn from their interactions with older people who tell them that, yes, this is actually a vegetable and you can pick it and eat it,” she said. “It sparks lots of intergenerational communication and parental engagement.”

Torres said that nurturing the plants, particularly outdoors, is an important activity for young people.

“It’s a healthy and useful life skill, and they get very excited,” she said. “They make lots of observations and ask lots of questions that require immediate answers. They learn patience, teamwork and cooperation out there.”

Gallagher said not all the benefits of the program are easily measurable because many show up in the home and family, but many are observable in the classroom.

“We can’t be certain the garden is totally responsible (for the children’s improved performance in school and at home), but we know, for example, that children who participate in our summer program, including here in the garden, where they do a lot of harvesting, measuring and counting, don’t lose ground in their retention of school work over the summer, as most children everywhere do,” Gallagher said.

The combination of healthy activity, education and interaction is just the thing that motivates Torres to share the coming summer program with the children at the center.

“Who knows what we’ll find out there that we can learn from?” she asked.

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GRAND CAYMAN, Cayman Islands — Greenville’s Steve Benson held his breath for seven minutes, 43 seconds, setting a men’s U.S. record in the freediving discipline of static apnea on May 8 at an international freediving competition.

Static apnea challenges breath-hold divers to float facedown in the water for as long as possible under the supervision of safety divers and official judges.


“My focus was relaxation and meditation,” said Benson, who spent the first four minutes of his breath-hold imagining himself in a “happy place.”

Soon after the four-minute mark, his diaphragm began to contract involuntarily in a desperate urge to breathe. Benson tried to suppress the contractions through mental focus.

“Staying in the moment and telling myself, ‘I can do this all day’ was key,” Benson said. “If I start thinking about how much time I have to go, I am sunk.”

After seven minutes underwater, Benson’s coach began to call out the time signals every 15 seconds. After surpassing the record by four seconds, Benson surfaced with some heavy breathing and quickly demonstrated that he had full control of his mind and body by completing a protocol that included telling the judges he was OK.
To train for the competition, Benson practiced “tables”, a series of timed breath holds that teach the body to withstand increasing levels of oxygen deprivation.

The East Carolina University alum made three national record attempts while at Deja Blue III, an annual competition that attracts top freedivers from around the world. He aborted the first attempt after 5:30 due to painful contractions.

Benson lost consciousness on his second attempt and was swiftly rescued by his coach and Performance Freediving International’s staff of safety divers. Benson’s blackout demonstrates why freediving should never be practiced alone.

“Our sport is growing in America, but these extreme attempts should only ever occur under the watchful supervision of professional trainers and staff,” cautioned Francesca Koe, vice president of the US Freediving Association.

As a medical professional, Benson agreed.

“It is possible to pass out from holding your breath,” he said. “I know this because it’s happened to me. Because of this simple but deadly issue with freediving, I can’t stress strongly enough that anyone who is interested in freediving take a class, so they can be safe and enjoy it as much as I do.”

Benson received his training through weekend classes with world-class freedivers Ren and Ashley Chapman of Evolve Freediving in Wilmington.

“The instruction that I got from Ren and Ashley made the real difference,” Benson said. “They helped me achieve things that I didn’t even think were possible.”

Steve credits his girlfriend and fellow freediving enthusiast, Dr. Kerry Hollowell, as the secret to his success.

“Kerry encouraged me to sign up for the freediving course with Evolve,” Benson said. “I would not be doing this if it were not for her. Sure I would be diving, but certainly not to this level.”

“I could tell from his body position and his relaxation that he was going to get it,” Hollowell said. “I knew how much he wanted the record, and I couldn’t be happier for him.”

Benson’s performance also impressed Kirk Krack, the organizer of the competition and star of the Oscar-winning documentary “The Cove.”
“He made it look like a walk in the park,” Krack said. “Now I want him to start thinking of what else he can accomplish. With a breath-hold like that, Steve has a really bright future in this sport.”

Benson was just one of several U.S. athletes who broke records at the event. Ashley Chapman of Wilmington also set two world records in no-fins depth diving, demonstrating that North Carolina is quickly becoming a popular training ground for top U.S. freedivers.

DIVING
Letters

**Worthy of study**

A May 19 letter-writer claimed that “black studies” are a “politically correct sop” in colleges and universities. To make this claim, the writer would need significantly more evidence than he demonstrates. In fact, even to make such a claim demonstrates serious ignorance of world history and especially of American history.

I have no personal or even professional stake in the issue: I’m a professor of Classics – about as far from “black studies” as one can get without actually going to Mars. But I know that the field of African and African-American studies is a crucial part of any institution of higher learning. And we at Carolina are fortunate to have a very distinguished department in that field, filled with highly educated, hard-working faculty and students.

To suggest that higher education should simply omit serious and dedicated degree study of the entire continent of Africa and the integral role of African-Americans in the history of the entire continent of the Americas is to imagine this planet as filled only with white people – who are, of course, a racial minority on Earth. The letter-writer should consider taking some courses in African and African-American Studies. An amazing education awaits him.

Sharon L. James
Chapel Hill
Andrew Kenney - From left, Dylan Simel, 18, of New Bern, Sasha Seymore, 19, of New Bern, and Ahmad Saad, 20, of Cary, kick soccer balls along the American Tobacco Trail near Cary. The University of North Carolina students are raising money for religious tolerance by dribbling across the state.

UNC students aid charities through soccer trip

By Andrew Kenney - akenney@newsobserver.com

CARY - Their feet were weary and their soccer balls scuffed from the mountain roads when they heard the voice: “Hey, hey,” cried a woman, chasing after the college students as they dribbled through the tiny town of Nebo.

“Do you want a drink?” she asked. After 20 miles of kicks and footwork, they certainly did.

Minutes later, the Muslim, Jewish and Christian trio was laying its cause before the black congregation of St. John AME Church, hundreds of miles from the students’
homes in Cary and New Bern. They were kicking soccer balls across North Carolina, they explained, to defuse religious conflict here and half a world away.

“On the spot, (congregation members) were donating money left and right, asking us details about our lives,” recalled Ahmad Saad, the Cary resident of the trio. “It was a really great experience when we still weren’t sure what to expect.”

Saad and two friends, Sasha Seymore and Dylan Simel, plan to dribble from Asheville to Morehead City, supported by family members in vehicles. By the time they reached Cary, the UNC-Chapel Hill students had traversed 270 miles and raised $4,500 for Middle East peace charities.

Saad, Seymore and Simel are members of a generation that is less religious than any in modern history – a quarter of Millennials are unaffiliated – but their message is resonant, drawing the attention of hundreds of individuals, a half-dozen media outlets, and a sponsorship from Eurosport.

The germ of the pilgrimage came to the three friends at the dining hall this year. They’d talked a few times about how soccer was the basis of their pan-Abrahamic friendship, and thought it could bridge religious divides for others. They concluded brunch and began months of research and preparation.

Their idea of the soccer field as common ground, they found, was not unique. All three of their nonprofit beneficiaries – The Maccabim Association, The Peres Center for Peace and Soccer for Peace – bring religions and ethnicities together on the pitch.

“People always talk about how soccer is the world’s game,” Saad said Wednesday as cars blew by him. And the sight of young men on a journey is an easy hook for conversations, he agreed. “It really gives people something concrete, something they can actually hold on to,” he said.

They bring others in with videos, blog posts and a Twitter account that has quickly found 250 followers. The message is simple and pragmatic: While all three feel spiritual bonds to a different religious text, they believe their tenets can co-exist.

“You see those values again and again,” said Simel, 18, a New Bern native who is working toward his Bar Mitzvah.

Seymore, 19, also of New Bern, returned to Christianity after his mother’s passing. He knows parts of his faith clashes with Saad’s Islam, but they find it’s nothing to argue about.

“A lot of hatred is done in the name of religion. We hope we can show religion isn’t that way,” said Seymore. “As I have loved you, love one another,” he quoted before the boys dribbled down the American Tobacco Trail in Cary.
While many believe “Islam is spread by the sword,” Saad finds no trace of the idea in the Quran, he said.

Instead he turns to a line of the 109th Sura of the Quran: “For you is your faith, and for me, my faith.”

More information

Donate or track the trio’s progress at kickingacrosscarolina.com
Friday’s team

The comments on The News & Observer’s website were frequent and followed the same theme. “He’s the greatest North Carolinian…”

“Proud to have his name on my diploma…”

“A great man...we’re pulling for you…”

And that, to be certain, was a small sampling of the public dialogue that ensued after William C. Friday, 91-year-old president emeritus of the University of North Carolina system, fell ill about a week ago. Now his condition at UNC Hospitals had been upgraded from “critical” all the way to “fair.” His family was understandably guarded about releasing information, though it is known he did have a pacemaker implanted.

For over 40 years, Friday’s been a regular living room presence on his “North Carolina People” public television program. Some of those viewers may be too young to remember his 30-year tenure as president of what is now the UNC system. Friday was the first president, and, during his term from 1956 to 1986, shaped system policies that still are in effect.

The outpouring of genuine concern over his illness demonstrated the vast popularity and affection he enjoys across the state, from people of all backgrounds. Some remember him for singular acts of kindness, or perhaps he invited their children to his house when they were students. (He did that fairly often.)

Not many public people would draw the kind of response Bill Friday did with his hospitalization. But then, not many public figures have remained in such close contact with the people they served.

It is said that in a crisis that a person often finds out who his friends are. Bill Friday, as he recovers with the best wishes of all North Carolinians, knows: they are legion.
Painter promoted at N.C. State

May 21, 2012

RALEIGH, N.C. — Jason Painter of Staunton, Va., has been named director of The Science House at North Carolina State University. He brings to the position more than 15 years of experience as a leader in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education.

He began his career in Pitt County as a high school science teacher. He then went on to serve as interim director of the Center for Science, Mathematics and Technology Education at East Carolina University and then as assistant director of the Center for Mathematics and Science Education at UNC-Chapel Hill.

For the past six years, he has directed the North Carolina Science Olympiad, the largest K-12 science competition in the state. Since assuming the role of executive director of NCSO in 2006, the program has grown by more than 80 percent, reaching more than 12,000 students and 600 schools annually.

He has received the National Outstanding Leadership in Science Education Award and the Herman Gatling Award for Outstanding Science Leadership in North Carolina. He holds a bachelor's degree in biology and a master's degree in science education from East Carolina University and a doctoral degree in educational psychology from UNC-Chapel Hill.

Painter also will lead The Science House into a new relationship with the Nature Research Center, the new wing of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences.

He is a 1992 graduate of Robert E. Lee High School. He is the son of Cy and Vickie Painter of Staunton. He and his wife, Sarah, have five children.
Local ECU student receives scholarship

From staff reports

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An East Carolina University student from Spartanburg has been chosen to receive a $2,500 scholarship from the East Carolina Alumni Association.

Twenty-two scholarships were awarded on April 21 to full-time students who excel in the classroom and have distinguished themselves as leaders. Spartanburg’s recipient for the second year is Jatin Rajnibhai Patel.

Patel is a senior biology and chemistry major with minors in economics and business administration. Patel has received a Pirate Tutoring Center Scholarship and a Summer Biomedical Research Achievement Award.

Patel is president of AMSA, the American Medical Student Association, a member of the ECU Conduct Board and the Pirate Tutoring Center Advisory Board. Patel has been recognized on the chancellor’s and dean’s lists.

Patel volunteers as a chemistry tutor for the Pirate Tutoring Center and is the Southeast lead for BAPS Youth Group, a Hindu organization for college students that helps them maintain their culture.

“At ECU many students excel in the classroom, many lead organizations and many serve their communities,” said Paul J. Clifford, East Carolina Alumni Association president and CEO.

“This group of scholars excels at all three. They learn, they lead and they serve, and that is why they have been awarded this prestigious scholarship. We are proud to once again include Jatin in the group.”

-- Town Square, Herald-Journal, P.O. Box 1657, Spartanburg, SC 29304
Is college too easy? As study time falls, debate rises.

By Daniel de Vise

May 21, 2012

Over the past half-century, the amount of time college students actually study — read, write and otherwise prepare for class — has dwindled from 24 hours a week to about 15, survey data show.

And that invites a question: Has college become too easy?

Ashley Dixon, a sophomore at George Mason University, anticipated more work in college than in high school. Instead, she has less. In a typical week, Dixon spends 18 hours in classes and another 12 in study. All told, college course work occupies 30 hours of her week. Dixon is a full-time student, but college, for her, is a part-time job.

“I was expecting it to be a lot harder,” said Dixon, 20, of Haymarket. “I thought I was going to be miserable, trying to get good grades. And I do get good grades, and I’m not working very hard.”

Declining study time is a discomfiting truth about the vaunted U.S. higher-education system. The trend is generating debate over how much students really learn, even as colleges raise tuition every year.

Some critics say colleges and their students have grown lazy. Today’s collegiate culture, they say, rewards students with high grades for minimal effort and
distracts them with athletics, clubs and climbing walls on campuses that increasingly resemble resorts.

Academic leaders counter that students are as busy as ever but that their attention is consumed in part by jobs they take to help make ends meet.

Consider George Mason, Virginia’s largest public university and a microcosm of modern academia. Some students care for dependents. Many commute to class. Seventy percent of seniors hold off-campus jobs. George Mason students spend 14 hours, on average, in weekly study, close to the national average.

“It’s not enough,” said Peter Stearns, the George Mason provost. “And it’s a figure that troubles us, not only at Mason but in higher education generally.”

The university has responded by launching an honors college and an undergraduate research initiative in recent years — driven, Stearns said, by “the need to create a more challenging undergraduate environment.”

Tradition suggests that college students should invest two hours in study for every hour of classes. The reality — that students miss that goal by half — emerged from the National Survey of Student Engagement, a research tool for colleges that examines the modern student in unprecedented detail.

The survey, first published in 2000, queries freshmen and seniors. It reveals that study time can vary widely by college and by major. Architecture majors, for example, study 24 hours a week, while marketing majors put in only 12.

Colleges are not required to publish survey results. The Washington Post asked prominent colleges in Maryland, Virginia and the District to disclose their survey data on study time. Only at Washington and Lee University, in Virginia, did students report as many as 20 hours of weekly study.

At Sweet Briar College, a private women’s school in Virginia, students reported 19 hours of study in an average week. Weekly study among seniors averaged 18 hours at St. Mary’s College of Maryland, 17 hours at the College of William and Mary, 16 at the universities of Maryland and Virginia and Catholic University, 15 at American University and 13 at Howard University.

The University of the District of Columbia declined to release data on study time. Georgetown and George Washington universities have not given the survey recently.

Evidence of declining study was mostly ignored until 2010, when two economists at the University of California at Santa Barbara brought the issue to the fore in a paper titled “Leisure College, USA.”
Philip Babcock and Mindy Marks unearthed previous research, part of a longitudinal study called Project Talent, that showed students of 1961 spent about 24 hours a week studying.

They calculated that those students spent another 16 hours in class time, or 40 hours in total weekly scholarship, giving college, for them, the feel of a full-time endeavor.

By contrast, the typical student today spends 27 hours a week in study and class time, roughly the same time commitment expected of students in a modern full-day kindergarten.

“This is an absolutely enormous change in postsecondary education, possibly as big as anything we’ve seen in the last 50 years,” Babcock said.

The finding has led some critics to question whether college is delivering on its core mission: student learning. Sociologists Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa identified lax study as a key failing of academia in their 2011 report “Academically Adrift,” which found that 36 percent of students made no significant gains in critical-thinking skills in college. Arum’s own research found that students study only 12 hours a week.

“What students are getting is four or five years of country club living,” said Richard Vedder, an Ohio University researcher who studies the economics of higher education.

Some academicians dispute the evidence of a downward trend in study time. They note that the findings are based on different surveys and on the fallible accounts of students. Babcock and Marks say their analysis accounts for those subtleties. The director of the student engagement survey, Alexander McCormick, concurs that the findings are sound.

By many accounts, students are far from lazy — it’s just that things besides schoolwork are consuming more of their time.

“They’re working full time and going to school full time, which I think is absurd,” said Joe Scimecca, a sociology professor at George Mason. “I asked a class recently how many were working, and there were only two who weren’t.”

Dixon, the sophomore from Haymarket, is majoring in tourism, works 23 hours a week at a campus information desk, commutes up to two hours a day and volunteers at church.

“My planner is a wreck,” she said.

Students at several other colleges report the same stressful pace. Karli Wood, a senior at Northern Kentucky University, maintains an A-minus average, even
though she works nearly 40 hours a week and commutes up to an hour a day across the Ohio River from her Cincinnati home. She counts her study time in minutes, not hours.

“I don’t mean to sound cocky,” she said, “but if I had more time, I could have had a 4.0.”

Modern technology helps and hinders collegiate study. Students are more efficient in researching and writing term papers now than 50 years ago. They also spend several hours a week using computers for fun, a pastime that did not exist in 1960.

Nationally, few colleges even approach the historical standard of 24 hours of weekly study. Private schools do not report much more study than public ones, and elite schools report only marginally more study time than the less elite. Even among colleges rated “most competitive” in the Barron’s college guide, the survey shows, weekly study averages less than 18 hours.

Colleges that rate high in study time are typically small liberal-arts schools, often set in remote locales. Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind., and Centre College in Danville, Ky., all report more than 20 hours of average weekly study for freshmen, seniors or both.

Sweet Briar, on a rural campus outside Lexington, is a regional leader in study time. Yet, the school is only modestly selective. Four-fifths of applicants are admitted, and SAT scores average about 1,100 out of a maximum 1,600 points in reading and math.

What sets such schools apart? Pedar Foss, dean of academic life at DePauw, found clues sprinkled across the student survey. DePauw students almost never work off campus, care for relatives or commute long distances. DePauw seniors are twice as likely as students at other schools to read at least 11 assigned books in an academic year. They write more than their peers.

“They’re held accountable for how well they can speak, and how well they can draw upon evidence, and whether they know what they’re talking about,” Foss said.

Another key to study time is one’s choice of major. McCormick, director of the student engagement survey, analyzed 85 majors and found a 13-hour spread in average weekly study. Architecture students studied the most, at 24 hours a week. Further down the list, in descending order: physics (20 hours), music and biology (17), history (15), psychology (14), communications (13) and, at 11 hours, parks, recreation and leisure studies.

“Every one of these colleges has some students who are studying quite a bit,” McCormick said, “and, to balance things out, some students who are studying very, very little.”
Public university presidents nearly crack the $2 million mark

By Daniel de Vise

Ohio State University President Gordon Gee came within a few thousand dollars of earning $2 million in total compensation in fiscal year 2011, according to the latest analysis by the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Former Penn State President Graham Spanier, one of the highest-paid presidents in public higher education last year, chats with one of his athletic coaches. (Gene Puskar — Associated Press)

Texas A&M Chancellor Michael McKinney earned nearly as much, $1.97 million to Gee’s $1.99 million. Ousted Penn State President Graham Spanier earned $1.07 million.

Locally, the top-paid public chiefs were Charles Steger of Virginia Tech, at $738,603, and Alan Merten, the departing George Mason president, at $717,363. University of Virginia President Teresa Sullivan earned $665,000, but that pay is listed as “partial-year”.

The annual Chronicle survey shows a rapid rise in top executive compensation in the public universities; last year’s survey had just one president, Gee, earning
seven figures, and his total package was just $1.3 million. Governing boards are probably mindful of such milestones, just as they are mindful of being the first (or second, or third) institution to charge, say, $40,000 in private tuition.

No other local public university presidents rank high on the national list; in fact, the top-paid Maryland university chiefs appear rather modestly paid. University System of Maryland Chancellor earned $490,000 in total compensation; Freeman Hrabowski of UMBC earned $420,400 — after 20 years of service, mind you — and University of Maryland President Wallace Loh earned $300,000.

Clearly, high pay corresponds to long service. Gee has told me he’s among the longest-serving presidents in academia, having led various institutions since 1981. Spanier started at Penn State in 1995.

Average presidential pay, however, is not rising at a particularly swift rate. The survey of 190 institutions and university systems found median total compensation rose 3 percent to $421,395.

The Chronicle said the California State University system was the epicenter of unrest over presidential pay last year:

“The outcry over presidential pay at Cal State reached a crescendo last July, when Elliot Hirshman, former provost of the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, was named president of San Diego State University and given a $400,000 salary, which was 33 percent higher than that of his predecessor.”

Under pressure, the Cal State board adopted a presidential pay cap in January.

I should hasten to add that the top private university presidents earn significantly more than their public counterparts. The last Chronicle survey of those schools found three private presidents around Washington earning more than $1 million in 2009: $3.8 million went to William Brody at Johns Hopkins University and $1.5 million to Kevin Manning at Stevenson University, both in Baltimore. George Washington University President Steven Knapp earned $1.05 million in 2009.
Networking requires strategy, research and social grace. But as competition for jobs remains high, it's easy to fumble.

"Remember that you have two ears and one mouth, and use them in proportion," says Bobbi Moss, general manager at Govig & Associates, a Scottsdale, Ariz., recruiter.

Networking is about building relationships—not simply selling yourself.

"People have talked to me for only a few minutes, and then asked if they would be the right fit for a position. That's too aggressive," says Suki Shah, chief executive of GetHired.com, a jobs site based in Palo Alto, Calif.

Here are five networking "don'ts."

1. Don't misuse the Internet.

Some workers rely too much on email and networking websites such as LinkedIn.com. But nothing beats meeting face to face, whether it's over lunch or a cup of coffee, experts say.

"People forget that it's very easy to delete an email, not return a phone call. It's very difficult to leave a meeting," says Scot Melland, chief executive of Dice Holdings, a New York-based provider of specialized career sites.

"People remember faces and conversations more than the written word."

Don't send sloppy or mass emails. Take the time to check spelling, especially each name, and tailor each letter to specific recipients based on your shared interests.
"It's very easy to determine when I am on the receiving end of an email blast. Those messages get an automatic delete," says Peter Crist of Crist|Kolder Associates, a Hinsdale, Ill.-based recruiter of executives and board directors. "They write me: 'Dear Mr. Christ.'"

2. **Don't be vague.**

Tell network contacts about specific ambitions for your career or professional growth so they know how to support you. Customize your message based on a contact's experience.

"A very experienced product executive told me during a single lunch that he wanted to start a company, go back to school and serve on a board. How on earth could I ever help that person? My take-away was that he didn't know what he wanted to do," says Mr. Melland.

3. **Don't stop.**

Keep networking, even when you're not looking for a job. That way, your network is in place when you do need it. Keep in touch by sending occasional updates about your career interests and accomplishments.

Let people in your network "know about your long-term career aspirations, additional training or next steps there might be for you," says Lucy Leske, partner at Witt/Kieffer, an Oak Brook, Ill.-based executive search firm. "People will see you as having goals."

4. **Don't be selfish.**

Networking solely for your own goals is a mistake. Also help your contacts. For example, before a meeting, research a contact's business and its challenges, and offer solutions based on your experience.

"It shows that you have initiative, that you have an interest in that person, and you are not just trying to extract value from them," Mr. Melland says. "And it demonstrates that you have skills."

Helping your contacts connect with each other, and sharing useful information are other ways to provide value. "Somebody just sent me a report on the NYC tech start-up scene," Mr. Shah says. "I appreciated it. That's a great way to stay connected."

5. **Don't misuse your network.**

Distributing your references' contact information too frequently can lead to burnout. And don't abuse your network with too much contact.
"There is a polite way to check in," Mr. Crist says, "but don't send me an email every week badgering me."

Also, be wary of name-dropping. Just because someone is key in an industry, an interviewer may not be impressed. Furthermore, be confident about your references' reputation before distributing their contact information.

"A reference from someone who is not a stellar worker will make you look bad," says Carol Middlebrough, employment advocate at Our Place DC, a Washington nonprofit. "If you know they are flighty, they are probably not the best worker."

Finally, while including your parents in your network can be helpful, bringing them to an interview is not.

According to a recent survey from staffing firm Adecco, 30% of recent graduates said their parents were involved in their job search, and 3% said their parents have joined interviews.

"This is a parent trying to go too far in helping," says Janette Marx, an Adecco senior vice president. "When it comes time for an interview, parents need to let children stand on their own."

Write to Ruth Mantell at ruth.mantell@dowjones.com