THE DAILY CLIPS

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E-mail to durhamj@ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481 FAX: 252-328-6300
Roller shoes popular, despite safety worries

Two area doctors say protective gear should be worn, but shoes are a good way to encourage exercise.

By Jimmy Ryals
The Daily Reflector

When a group of kids from the Pitt County Boys & Girls Club started lobbying their parents for a pair of wheeled shoes, they faced two obstacles: expense and injuries.

For the eight or 10 kids who showed off their wheels outside the club Wednesday afternoon, the desire for Heelys and other roller shoes came down to one thing: speed.

"I never go to the skating rink much," said Ashante Bracy, 10. "I wanna roll."

Through birthdays, good grades and plain nagging, they won their parents over, despite concerns they may hurt themselves wheeling around on the increasingly popular shoes.

Those safety concerns drew new attention with the release last week of a Consumer Product Safety Commission study. According to the commission, roller shoe injuries led to 1,600 emergency-room visits last year.

That figure "in the scheme of things is not a huge number of emergency visits," said Dr. Gail Hash, chief of pediatrics at East Carolina University Health System.

But Dr. John Stovall, chief of orthopedics at that hospital, said kids who wheel frequently should wear protective gear. A baseball helmet and shoulder pads can be purchased for about $50.

"At the very least, get a helmet," he said. "Who knows what is going to happen?"

Stovall is concerned with the lack of department store safety guidance regarding roller shoes, which are placed in the "toy" section.

On the website heelys.com, the only mention of safety is a note that says "Be sure to practice. Be sure to watch your balance."

"When I was a kid, you knew how to fall," Stovall said. "No one taught that in the stores."

"Parents should do their own research," Hash said.

Study suggest Heelys pose injury risks. Would you let your kids wear them? Give your opinion on the popular roller shoes online in our poll.
HEELYS
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department visits for injuries," said Dr. Herb Garrison, director of the Eastern Carolina Injury Prevention Program, which is sponsored by University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina.

Garrison didn't recall seeing any wheeled-shoe injuries in the Pitt County Memorial Hospital emergency room. A PCMH spokesman said the hospital's tracking system doesn't allow for tracing an emergency room visit back to a specific product.

"I have not seen them personally, but I suspect we've probably had a handful" locally, said Garrison, who also is a professor of emergency medicine at the Brody School of Medicine.

While the frequency of roller-shoe injuries may not be significant, the types of injuries the shoes could cause are, Garrison said. As with roller skates, Heelys wearers are at risk for breaking arms, wrists and hands as they reach out to stop their falls. Unlike roller skates, which have wheels at the toes and heels, roller shoes require riders to lean back to engage a single wheel on the heel. In rare cases, the backward falls this encourages could cause head injuries, Garrison said.

Parents should treat wheeled shoes as they do roller skates or inline skates, said Dr. Chris Hasty, an orthopedic surgeon at Orthopedics East. Children shouldn't wear Heelys as street shoes, he said. Some Pitt County schools have made it hard for children to wear the shoes every day. While the Pitt County Schools has no policy banning roller shoes, system spokeswoman Heather Mayo said individual schools have passed rules against wheeling around on campus.

Hasty also suggested that Heelys wearers also use helmets, elbow pads and knee pads. The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons made similar recommendations.

"Obviously, the risk of somebody falling is up with wearing wheels on their shoes, and that would be one of my concerns," said Hasty, whose daughter has a pair of Heelys.

"I guess, in my opinion, it's like any other sports-related activity ... there's risks of being injured."

At one local sports apparel store, a pair of Heelys cost $60.

The risks weren't lost on the kids at the Boys & Girls Club. Marya McCoy, 9, had two fresh bandages on her hands, the products of a fall on the playground earlier in the day. All eight reported falling at some point. It takes a day or two to master the heel-heavy posture a good roll requires.

"That's why you've gotta put some helmets on," said Caleb Silver, 8.

Despite the risks, Garrison said the shoes are probably a good thing. As childhood obesity spreads, they offer a way to get kids up and moving around, he said.

"You have to keep propelling yourself, and in that way it's a form of good exercise ... we want people to be able to go about their other activities, so that's why you want to be safe when you're doing these things," he said.

Jimmy Ryals can be contacted at jryals@coxnc.com and 329-9568.
Budget negotiations reach obstacle over Medicaid, taxes

By Gary D. Robertson
The Associated Press

RALEIGH — Negotiators have progressed in the past two weeks toward fashioning a final state spending plan before the new budget year begins July 1, but legislative leaders won't get much further until they determine how much money they can spend.

"I hope we can still make it by June 30," said Rep. Jim Crawford, D-Granville, one of the House's chief budget-writers. "There are a lot of issues, not the least of which is the Medicaid issue."

House and Senate Democrats have been weighed down with tax questions and how to help counties with Medicaid expenses in the two weeks since the Senate approved its budget for the next two years May 31.

"We've been meeting every day on that issue," said Sen. Kay Hagan, D-Guilford and Crawford's counterpart in the Senate.

The Senate has assured North Carolina's 100 counties that it wants the state to take over their share of expenses for Medicaid, which is expected to surpass $500 million this coming year. House leaders sound more willing to give $100 million earmarked in their budget to reduce the counties' expenses for one year if legislators don't agree on a permanent fix.

Under one proposal, the state would take away from counties a half penny that they now receive from the sales tax in exchange for taking over the counties' Medicaid expenses.

At the same time, counties would be allowed to implement a half-cent increase in the sales tax to make up for lost revenue but counties would have to use that money for education and infrastructure needs, said Senate Majority Leader Tony Rand, D-Cumberland.

House members don't like the idea because the Senate simultaneously wants to eliminate what's left of a pair of "temporary" taxes first approved in 2001 — a quarter-cent increase on the sales tax and a higher income tax rate for the state's highest wage earners.

If both were allowed to expire, most consumers would pay a 6.5 percent sales tax and the highest income tax rate would drop to 7.75 percent.

The House budget approved in early May keeps the sales tax at 6.75 percent and an 8 percent income tax bracket in place until 2009, generating about $300 million more to spend or place in a rainy-day reserve.

So if the taxes expired but the Senate's Medicaid plan took effect, the sales tax — considered a regressive tax — likely would go back up to 7 percent as counties approve a higher sales tax.

"Under the Senate plan, the top 1 percent get a $90 million tax break and the rest of us pay more sales tax," said Rep. Paul Luebke, D-Durham, senior chairman of the House.

"We're asking the people to pay the bill; the people should have a say in whether we incur the obligation."

House Republican leader
Finance Committee. "That's not a fair solution to the fiscal problems of our state."

Rand said the Senate is open to ways negate the impact of the sales tax increase, such as Gov. Mike Easley's plan to eliminate or reduce income taxes for low-income filers, or create an earned income tax credit. Easley, who would be asked to sign the final budget into law, has urged the Senate to keep the temporary taxes in place to provide more fiscal stability for the next two years.

Crawford said the two sides also have yet to determine whether to cap permanently the state gasoline tax at 29.9 cents per gallon or to phase out the $170 million annual transfer from the Highway Trust Fund to the state's general operating fund.

Also Thursday, Republican leaders recommended using proceeds from the transfer phase-out to borrow $1.25 billion for road construction needs.

The road bonds are part of a $2 billion plan that would issue other debt for University of North Carolina construction projects and water and sewer projects.

All the bonds would require approval in a statewide referendum. The House and Senate budget plans issue debt that doesn't need the OK of voters, although a separate bill for infrastructure needs that would include bonds or new taxes is being considered by Democrats.

"We're asking the people to pay the bill; the people should have a say in whether we incur the obligation," said House Republican Leader Paul Stam, R-Wake.

Read more news online at reflector.com
Industry targets Duke downloads

DURHAM (AP) — The recording industry has filed federal lawsuits contending 28 Duke University computer users illegally downloaded music on the school's computer system.

The "John Doe" lawsuits, filed Wednesday by the Recording Industry Association of America on behalf of major record companies, ask a judge to subpoena from Duke the names of the students or employees who were using the computer addresses linked to the downloading.

The industry previously warned Duke that it suspected 35 people were illegally downloading music files using the computer system. It asked Duke officials to provide the alleged violators with letters offering out-of-court settlements. Duke complied in all but about 12 cases, indicating some settlements were made.

The university doesn't plan to fight the lawsuits, said Larry Moneta, vice president for student affairs.

"At this point, this is between the recording industry and the students," he said. "Duke is not a party to the legal matter."

Settlement amounts can vary based on the frequency of violations but generally are about $3,000.

The recording industry has increased its anti-piracy efforts in recent months.
Education as business

Regarding your June 8 piece "It's a 'real university' online, Bowies says": Once again you write advertisement posed as article. First, the singular point of view expressed in the article was that of Erskine Bowles and UNC officials. Bowles is a businessman, not an educator. Just look at his quote, "If you were a customer, if you were a student..." An educator would know the difference between a customer and a student. It is unfortunate that education has evolved into a big business where business interests drive curricula and assessment.

Secondly, accreditations are cited to provide the public, the customers, with a false sense of quality. In my experience, most accreditation processes are flawed and involve significant conflicts of interest that verge on the unethical.

Thirdly, there is no evidence that online courses are equal to the in-class experience in quality. Course quality is an ill-defined concept and widespread agreement on proper assessment of it is nonexistent. Reams of scholarly literature are devoted to this topic. Do a little homework, and you'd find that universities don't assess quality of education. Universities assess customer satisfaction.

Please, keep your advertisements clearly marked.

Maria Falbo
Morrisville
UNC docs say airport aids service

BY JESSE JAMES DECONTO
STAFF WRITER

Doctors lined up Thursday to oppose moving their air terminal from Chapel Hill to Raleigh-Durham International Airport.

The House Appropriations Committee held a joint subcommittee meeting to hear testimony on a plan to close Horace Williams Airport and build a $2 million to $3 million hangar at RDU.

Horace Williams serves university-affiliated doctors who travel to remote parts of the state to provide specialized care for patients and training for other physicians. The Area Health Education Centers program served 17,500 patients in 2005-06.

The move would make way for Carolina North, a satellite campus being planned by UNC-Chapel Hill. Carolina North executive director Jack Evans said UNC-CH needs the new campus both to expand current programs and to promote innovation.

UNC-CH doctors and pilots complained that adding an hour to their travel time, or the day of each flight would take away time they could spend treating patients and might prevent them from going altogether.

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AIRPORT
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Dr. Bill Henry, chairman of pediatric cardiology at UNC-CH, said poor children in places such as his hometown of Dunn would suffer if specialists lose the convenience of taking off and landing in Chapel Hill.

"I represent people who don't have a voice here today," he said. "There will be a reduction in service."

Legislators likewise were cool toward the move.

"These doctors also have a lot of other duties," said state Sen. William Purcell, a retired pediatrician from Laurinburg. "I think it's going to really undermine what they've worked so hard to make happen."

State Rep. Bob England, another doctor, said UNC-CH's Medical Air Operations lift a burden off families in his distant Rutherford County. Instead of missing school and work to drive four hours each way to see a specialist in Chapel Hill, a family can drive to a local clinic and see an expert within 15 minutes of his or her landing.

"He hasn't even had time for his stethoscope to get cold," England said.

Another airport?

University administrators also affirmed the value of the Area Health Education Centers but repeated the board of trustees' position that the program can work well out of RDU.

In a 2005 interview, Chancellor James Moeser said the university had looked at building an airport on nearly 30 tracts in Orange, Chatham and Alamance counties that ranged in price from nearly $35 million to $60 million. Although some might have worked, Moeser said, the political and bureaucratic reality was that putting up a new facility could take 15 to 20 years.

On Thursday, Kevin Fitzgerald, executive associate dean for finance and administration, said UNC-CH would again support a search for a new airport closer to Chapel Hill if another agency took the lead.

"If there's an interest locally for there to be an airport, the university would be pleased to participate in that," he said.

Rep. Louis Pate, a retired airman from Wayne County, said AHEC's Medical Air Operations need to remain close to UNC Hospitals, and it might be best to keep them at Horace Williams.

"It is much more expensive to move an airport than it is to move a campus or a cluster of buildings," Pate said. "I think we need to be very, very careful."

Rep. Rick Glazier, chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Education, asked Dr. Thomas Bacon, AHEC director, how many physicians would drop
out of the program and how many services would be cut if the air terminal moved to RDU.

"We don't have any way to know exactly how many faculty we will lose as a result of this process until it happens," Bacon answered. He said he was there only to provide facts, not to oppose the move.

**Horace Williams 'jewel'**

But the physicians were clear on that point.

"This is not a trivial matter for us," said Dr. Alan Stiles, chairman of the UNC-Chapel Hill Department of Pediatrics.

Said Dr. James Loehr, associate professor of pediatrics: "The jewel that makes this work is Horace Williams Airport."

Dr. Ali Calikoglu, associate professor of pediatrics, travels twice a month to Wilmington, serving as many as 25 patients in one day. He leaves Chapel Hill at 7 a.m. and returns at 8 p.m. His schedule in Wilmington is booked through late October.

"The close proximity of Horace Williams is a big advantage," he said. "I may have to close one of those clinics because of this additional inconvenience."

Dr. Marianne Muhlebach, a pediatric lung specialist at UNC-Chapel Hill, said she would have to leave RDU at 5:30 a.m. to offer the same hours she currently does.

"Given my research responsibilities, I may not be able to keep up with the schedule," she said.

Muhlebach often treats asthma, a disease that disproportionately affects poor children.

"They can't travel to Chapel Hill because they don't have the money," she said. "Those would be the ones that are left behind if we don't come there as frequently."

Rep. Verla Insko, a Chapel Hill Democrat who led the session, said the meeting was a start at fulfilling the General Assembly's promise to study the issue. She said legislators will continue to examine the issue.

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Staff writer Jesse James DeConto can be reached at 932-8760 or jesse.deconto@newsobserver.com.
State college campuses could soon go smoke-free.

Under a bill that passed in the House on Thursday, the University of North Carolina Board of Governors would be allowed to write smoking policies for dorms, buildings and grounds.

House Majority Leader Hugh Holliman, who lost a fight earlier in the session for a smoking ban in restaurants, stressed that the bill would not force all campuses to go smoke-free.

"This bill is permissive, it is not mandatory," said Holliman, a Lexington Democrat.

The House approved the bill 104-3. It now heads to the Senate for concurrence.