THE DAILY CLIPS

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Former ECU star lends a helping hand

By Kim Grizzard
The Daily Reflector
Friday, June 17, 2011

When Jacksonville Jaguars quarterback David Garrard decided to team up with an eastern North Carolina charity, he chose one that was close to home.

Not only was the annual Beau's Buddies golf tournament played near Garrard's alma mater, East Carolina University, the nonprofit group also championed one of his favorite causes: helping patients and families who are fighting cancer.

Garrard, whose mother died from breast cancer when her son was in his teens, has made fighting the disease one of the primary goals of his foundation.

“Being a son of a mother who was working at the same time and having to go in for chemo and radiation, that's where my heart is,” Garrard, 33, said. “That's kind of the focus that I have .. I want to help those families.”

Single with four children, his mother, Shirley, often had to take Garrard and his siblings with her to her treatments. There was simply nowhere for them to go.

“We used to sit in the car, we used to go inside, play in the lobby,” Garrard said. “We didn't really have very many places to go.”

That is one reason the David Garrard Foundation chose to fund a kids' play area at the Hill Breast Center in Jacksonville, Fla., where Garrard lives with his wife, Mary, and
their son, Justin. At the Kids Zone, children whose mothers are being treated will have someone to watch them while they read books or play video games.

“I just try to think of things that I had to deal with in my life that I know a lot of families are having to deal with,” Garrard said. “(Cancer is) a group disease. It's a family disease. It doesn't just affect one person. It affects the whole family.”

Beau's Buddies has been offering support to cancer patients and their families since 2008. The all-volunteer organization, which will host the first David Garrard Golf Classic on June 27, has donated more than $120,000 toward the needs of patients and families, including camp scholarships, video gaming systems, coupons for meals at local restaurants and gas and phone cards. The charity also donates a significant portion of its proceeds to the children's hospital at Pitt County Memorial Hospital.

“You've got big organizations that raise money for cancer,” said Dr. Heather White, a medical oncologist with Physicians East. “With Beau's Buddies, what gets contributed you actually see it in this area, and the people that live here get to benefit from it.”

White, who will be among speakers at the charity's June 26 fundraising banquet, has seen the charity help some of her patients who had financial needs.

“Even though they have insurance, co-pays add up,” White said. “Typically, these people aren't working anymore. They're on fixed incomes; they're trying to buy medicine. “I've had a couple of patients who actually just said, ‘I know my cancer's not curable and I'm just not going to leave my family with a big debt. I'm just not going to get treatment.’”

Cost studies presented at the recent American Society of Clinical Oncology annual meeting suggested that cancer treatment is unaffordable to a growing number of Americans.

White said a lack of finances can cause even patients whose prognosis is good to forgo their treatments. She recalls one patient, a woman in her 40s diagnosed with breast cancer, who began missing treatments because she could not afford the gas to make the trip from Ahoskie to Greenville.

“Her cancer was quite serious. It was curable but, if she neglected it, it would definitely be life-threatening,” White said. “We were able to get some donated gas cards for her ... (and) she went all the way through all of her chemotherapy.”

Today, the woman is cancer free, which White credits, in part, to charitable contributions. “She would not have come otherwise,” White said. “Who would have thought a gas card would make a difference like that? “(Patients) have absolutely had their lives changed by just a small gesture from someone's gift.”

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Pirate homecoming set to aid nonprofit
By Kim Grizzard
The Daily Reflector
Friday, June 17, 2011

East Carolina won't celebrate homecoming until October, but about a dozen former Pirate athletes are coming to Greenville this month for the first David Garrard Golf Classic.

Besides Garrard, Jeff Blake, Tony Collins, Rod Coleman, Dwayne Harris, Chris Johnson, Vonta Leach, Patrick Pinkney, Jay Ross, Jody Schulz and C.J. Wilson all are on the celebrity guest list for the June 27 event, a fundraiser for Garrard's foundation and Beau's Buddies Cancer Fund.

“A lot of old ECU players are coming back,” said Beau's Buddies advisory board member Melissa Gibbs, whose husband, John, helped to found the charity in 2008. “It's turned into this mini former ECU player reunion.

“They see it as a chance to come back and see each other just as much as it is a chance to help a good cause,” she said. “They want to come back to the town where they played football.”

ECU alumni are not the only ones with Greenville ties who are participating. Greenville natives including PGA golfer Will MacKenzie, Derek Cox of the Jacksonville Jaguars and BMX biker Josh Harrington are all supporting the hometown cause, which is named in honor of “Beau” Stanley, a local boy who lost his battle with cancer at age 2.

Some celebrity guests are backing the effort because of a personal connection with cancer, including Garrard, whose mother died from breast cancer, and Garrard's Jaguars teammate Adam Podlesh, who is a cancer survivor.

“We're really excited about having celebrities coming in to share,” Beau's Buddies board member David Vaughn said. “But we do not want to lose sight of what it's really all about. It's about helping people with cancer, families with cancer. That's the most important thing that we can do.”

Among those lending support are Garrard's teammates, including not only Cox and Podlesh but Akin Ayodele and Zach Miller as well. The guest list also includes professional golfers James Driscoll, Steve Marino and Marc Turnesa; BMXers Dan Foley, Will Love and Dan Seig, and a number of additional celebrity participants, including Rasheed Wallace, Bonecrusher Smith, Dennis Tripp, Paul Stewart, Mick Mixon and ECU basketball coach Jeff Lebo.
Some of them don't even play golf. For those, Beau's Buddies is launching a “Playing with the Pros” football event during the June 27 golf tournament. NFL players will help participants test their passing accuracy with the quarterback practice net, practice footwork on the ropes course and hit the blocking dummies.

The two-day David Garrard Golf Classic fundraising event will begin on June 26 with a dinner and live auction at the Hilton Greenville. Dinner guests may bid on a chance to play with Garrard at the following day's golf classic; two tickets to the Super Bowl; tickets to the U.S. Open, including airfare and a tour of a Napa winery; and several ECU sports packages.

Tickets for the auction are $100. Seating is limited. Registration deadline is Wednesday. Gallery tickets for the June 27 tournament, to be held at Greenville Country Club, are $20, free for ages 12 and younger. First teams tee off at 8 a.m.; second teams tee off at 1:30 p.m. Autograph sessions are scheduled from 11 a.m.-noon and 1:30-2:30 p.m. Those with gallery tickets may participate in Play with the Pros (football) be held from 2-5 p.m. June 27 at Greenville Country Club. Registration is $25.

In recent months, East Carolina soccer coach Rob Donnenwirth and ECU track and field coach Curt Kraft have found different ways to marvel at the progress and soon-to-be completion of their respective programs' new facilities.

Both projects are expected to be completed in July and will be ready when athletes report to campus in August. T.A. Loving Construction is putting the finishing touches on the facilities while erecting the Olympic Sports Support Building, which should be completed next February and will feature coaching offices and meeting and locker rooms.

Donnenwirth said he has only been on the soccer field once or twice because of the construction but has found that the softball stadium bleachers provide a great view of the field.

“If you drive by the softball complex, you might see me up there,” he said. “I've just really enjoyed watching the progress of it.”

Charles Boulevard provides a perfect view of the new track, which Kraft utilizes on a daily basis.

“I drive by it maybe a dozen times a day just by using Charles Boulevard,” Kraft said. “This is like Christmas Eve to me and we're really excited.”

When the project is completed, East Carolina will have two brand-new stadiums and two relatively new ones in very close proximity of each other. The ECU Softball Stadium opened last season and top-notch Clark-LeClair Stadium, where the Pirate baseball team plays, opened in 2005.

Kraft said the four programs will be able to feed off each other and the entire complex is a testament to the university's commitment to athletics.
“It's just one example of the direction this university is going and how progressive this university is,” Kraft said. “It's a win-win situation and a credit to Chancellor (Steve) Ballard and the athletic administration. This is what makes the university grow and athletic programs grow.”

ECU soccer will open its new stadium Aug. 19 with a 7 p.m. game against South Carolina, a night-game luxury the program didn't have with its previous on-campus facility because Bunting Field didn't have lights. It's unclear whether ECU track will host any events this season because of the construction of the support building, but the Pirates will be able to practice on it.

The new facilities are almost guaranteed to boost recruiting. Kraft described the track surface as state of the art and Donnenwirth said he thinks the new soccer stadium will be in the top 10 percent in the country.

“Now when a recruit comes on campus, you see a little different look in their eyes when you show them around,” Donnenwirth said. “When you're looking at trying to get the top players, everything has to fit.”

Last season, ECU soccer played at the North Campus Crossing facility that is about five miles from the university's main campus. The track team practiced at J.H. Rose High School, which Kraft said he appreciated but was not ideal. This year, neither program will have to worry about such issues.

“The whole complex is unlike any other in the nation,” Kraft said. “You walk up and see four beautiful venues.”

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GREENVILLE DAILY REFLECTOR  Jaquan Waller, then a junior at Greenville's Rose High, died after a head injury during the 2009 season.

**Concussion bill signed into law**

Published Fri, Jun 17, 2011 05:13 AM
Tim Stevens- StaffWriter

RALEIGH Markiest Waller, whose younger brother died of a football-related concussion in 2009, rejoiced Thursday at the signing of a bill designed to protect young athletes from head injuries.

The Gfeller-Waller Concussion Act was signed into law by Gov. Bev Perdue in the old House of Representatives chamber of the State Capitol as North Carolina became the 21st state to have a concussion law.

"It has been a long road," Waller said. "But the bill passed. People working together can accomplish great things."

The act previously had been endorsed by every member of the North Carolina House and Senate.

Kevin Guskiewicz, a UNC professor and the director of the Matthew Gfeller Sport-Related Traumatic Brain Injury Research Center, said the law is the best in the country.

"It has such a strong educational component," he said. "I suspect we will hear from other states wanting to copy it."
The N.C. High School Athletic Association, which administers public school high school athletics in the state, adopted a concussion policy soon after Jaquan Waller, a junior at Greenville Rose, and Matthew Gfeller, a sophomore playing his first varsity football game at Winston-Salem Reynolds, died in August 2009 while playing in football games.

The Gfeller-Waller Act extends protections into middle school athletics and adds education and emergency planning requirements.

**The law has three thrusts.**

The law requires athletes at North Carolina public high schools and middle schools to be removed from participation if there is a suspicion that the athlete has had a concussion. The athlete cannot return to participation until being cleared by a medical professional.

Public high school and middle school coaches, trainers, athletes and parents will receive information about concussions each year.

Schools will be required to formulate emergency action plans.

"These are things that we should have already been going," Perdue said.

**Preventable death**

The law might have prevented Waller's death.

The junior running back suffered a concussion in practice on a Wednesday but played two days later against Wilmington Hoggard. A hit during the game induced a lethal case of second-impact syndrome, which occurs when there is a second concussion before a first one has healed.

Markiest Waller said he can understand why his younger brother wanted to play.

"It was Friday night lights. That's what he lived for," he said. "He had been the offensive player of the game the year before against Hoggard. Rose had won back-to-back-to-back state titles. He thought he was the man to get it going again."

Working for passage of the bill has forced Markiest Waller to relive the events of that night over and over.

"The only way I could get through it was with faith," he said. "You don't get over it, you get through it. Two teenagers died because they were playing sports. That's tough to handle. But with this law, maybe some other families won't have this type of tragedy. I have to look back and see how much good has come."

Unlike Waller, Gfeller's injury came from a single blow, and the new law would not have helped deal with that type of injury.
Law's reach

Guskiewicz said the law will help thousands of youngsters and not just those involved in middle school and interscholastic athletics.

"Hopefully, what starts at the high school and middle school level filters down to little league, Pop Warner and youth soccer," he said.

"We absolutely have to eliminate the idea of someone having their bell rung or getting a little dinged. We have to raise the awareness of the severity of concussions, and this law does that."

Concussions, which are traumatic brain injuries, can be difficult to assess. They are caused when the brain is shaken inside the skull. The trauma causes a change in the way the brain works. Electrical and chemical processes are altered.

Ashlee Pentony, an Apex High graduate whose college soccer career at Wingate was ended by a series of concussions, said the law will help people understand concussions better.

She was knocked unconscious during a high school soccer game in April 2008. She sat out two weeks to heal but suffered another concussion when she returned to play. She suffered another concussion while playing at Wingate and eventually had to give up soccer and temporarily drop classes because of the effects of the repeated concussions.

"I like that the bill will help people understand concussions more," said Pentony, who still has some concussion effects such as headaches. "My grades fell, and it was pretty bad. We really have to educate people."

Markiest Waller said he misses his younger brother every day. Markiest still goes to the gravesite regularly.

"I just sit there and talk just like I am to you," he said.

Thursday, he had some good news to share.

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The University of North Carolina system has raised tuition steadily over the last 15 years (most recently, by 6.8 percent for 2011-12), and though most campuses in the system remain a relative bargain compared with public institutions in other states, the total cost of education has soared and created a hardship for some families. In North Carolina, after all, there are still many students who are the first in their families to attend college. And the recession has knocked many people for a financial loop.

This year, with a budget cut of 14.6 percent, it must have been tempting for new UNC system President Tom Ross to seek a supplemental tuition hike. To his credit, he resisted, and says he will not support such a request.

Ross rightly noted that student financial aid packages for next year have been settled. Obviously, to hit all students with a tuition boost now would cause them trouble and create confusion over financial aid, which is limited anyway. While it may be true that many students at the flagship institutions in Chapel Hill and Raleigh could afford to pay more, many others there and throughout the system struggle to meet the expenses of staying in school.

Ross has done well in one of his early tests as UNC president. While he has told state lawmakers that the cuts they have ordered will be painful and will have consequences, he has not tried to unduly alarm the university system's supporters and alumni.

"We are going to survive this," he says - no matter how unfortunate that the campuses on which the state depends so heavily will have to perform their crucial missions while surviving on very short rations.
While thousands of state employees have had their wages frozen at 2008 levels (after years of small or no increases), state House Speaker Thom Tillis thinks that it's acceptable to hand out raises of up to 27 percent to his own staff. Perhaps Tillis needs to remember that many state employees were among those who put him and his colleagues into office. They are people who work hard for the state and who struggle like others in this economy to buy food, put gas in their cars and pay their mortgages with no cost-of-living raises for three years and counting. They are also taxpayers who contributed to those raises.

It is a slap in the face of each one of them for Tillis to pass a budget that will lay off state workers, add a fourth year of no raises and increase health care costs while handing out raises to a privileged few. It's even more insulting that some who got raises are new state employees while workers who have dedicated a portion of their lives go unrewarded year after year. I hope that those workers make sure that Tillis and those of his ilk don't go unrewarded come election time.

Connie Schafer

Apex
Blake, players talked

BY J.P. GIGLIO - Staff Writer
Published Fri, Jun 17, 2011 05:04 AM

Former University of North Carolina assistant coach John Blake was in communication with UNC football players Marvin Austin and Cam Thomas during their trip to a training facility in California before the 2009 season.

Cellphone records obtained following a court ruling in a lawsuit filed against the university by The News & Observer, The Charlotte Observer and other news organizations, also show that Blake, head coach Butch Davis' top recruiter for three and a half years, used a university-paid number to contact (phone calls or texts) numbers associated with NFL agent Gary Wichard and Davis during the players' visit.

In addition, the phone records show that Blake contacted numbers linked to Austin and Wichard during the NCAA investigators' initial visit to campus last July.

Although it is unclear whether Blake knew the players were training in California with former UNC teammate Kentwan Balmer, the phone records indicate that Blake and Austin were in contact while Austin was there. Had Blake or anyone else at UNC learned the players were with Balmer in California, it would have been necessary to have North Carolina's compliance office investigate whether the trip was permissible before the 2009 season.

The records indicate Blake, who resigned one game into the 2010 season amid the NCAA investigation into whether players accepted improper benefits, visited the same California city where Wichard's agency, Pro Tect Management, was located, as well as the site of the training facility, before the players made the trip.

A busy caller

According to the phone records, Blake made calls or texts from Westlake Village, Calif.; Thousand Oaks, Calif.; Los Angeles and more than 20 other California cities between June 28 and July 11 in 2009.

Thomas and Austin have said they went to the Proactive Sports Performance in Westlake Village, Calif. - where dozens of Wichard's clients have trained - before the start of UNC's training camp in August 2009.

A hotel receipt obtained by Yahoo! Sports, which financially links Austin to Wichard's agency, shows the dates of the players' stay in California as July 23 to Aug. 1.
Between July 20 and Aug. 3, Blake's phone records show that there were 20 calls or texts to Wichard's cellphone, 10 to Austin's and eight to Thomas'.

Blake was also in contact with Davis twice on July 28.

Austin said in a March 2011 interview that no one at UNC knew about the trip to California. The trip came under scrutiny during the NCAA investigation into whether players received preferential treatment, benefits or services.

"They had no reason to know," Austin said of the trip at UNC's pro day before the NFL draft on March 31. "I didn't think I had to call the university and say, 'Well, I'm going to California to go train.'"

Blake, Thomas, Austin, Davis and UNC athletic director Dick Baddour did not return phone calls seeking comment.

Both Thomas and Austin played in all 13 games in 2009. Thomas, a fifth-round pick of the San Diego Chargers, completed his rookie season in the NFL in 2010.

Austin was dismissed from the team for the 2010 season for receiving benefits that Baddour estimated at between $10,000 and $13,000. Seven UNC players missed the entire season, and 14 missed at least one game as a result of the NCAA investigation into improper benefits and academic misconduct.

When the NCAA first sent investigators to campus on July 12 for interviews with players, Blake's phone communication with Wichard and Austin increased.

There was an 8-minute call to Wichard's cell on July 10 and a 31-minute call with Austin's number on July 12. The call to Austin was followed by four calls with Wichard's cell, the last of which ended at 12:02 a.m.

Twelve hours later, Blake received a call from Davis' cell, which was proceeded by a 13-minute call to Austin's phone.

Blake and Wichard had four more calls in July and one on Aug. 12, which was the last call from Blake's cell to Wichard's on the records.

Wichard, who was eventually suspended by the NFL, died in March. Austin was drafted by the New York Giants in April.

UNC received a notice of inquiry from the NCAA on June 7 but is still awaiting a ruling from the NCAA for possible punishments in connection with the investigation.

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UNC Chancellor Holden Thorp, center, listens to head football coach Butch Davis, left, respond to a question during a press conference with UNC athletic director Dick Baddour, far right, to discuss possible academic violations by the Tar Heel football team on Thursday August 26, 2010 at the Kenan Field House in Chapel Hill, N.C

UNC football players racked up 395 parking tickets

BY J. ANDREW CURLISS AND ROBBI PICKERAL - Staff Writers
Published Fri, Jun 17, 2011 04:00 AM

In the wake of a court ruling that required UNC-Chapel Hill to release public records involving the school's football program, university officials faced questions Thursday not about sports agents or academic misconduct but about hundreds of parking tickets racked up by a handful of Tar Heels football players over 3 1/2 years.

A review of the records released Thursday shows that fewer than 12 football players tallied 395 parking violations from March 2007 through August 2010, when The News & Observer and Charlotte Observer first sought the documents as it began reporting on the high-profile NCAA probe then under way.

The university refused that and other requests, and it led to a lawsuit by a consortium of media outlets.

The main thrust of the lawsuit contends that the university should release documents about the NCAA investigation; but a part of it was a request for the parking tickets incurred by some of the players who were part of the agent probe.
The university has said that it has determined nothing improper related to ownership of the vehicles that players were driving - a problem that has cropped up at some schools nationwide.

The documents released Thursday state that the tickets led to fines totaling $13,125; the university said only 30 of those remain unpaid, but it did not specify the dollar amount still owed for those outstanding tickets.

Separately, a university Department of Public Safety database indicates that unpaid fines total $2,035 for citations issued to a range of vehicles that the university linked to the football players. That amount includes violations that occurred since last August.

Chancellor Holden Thorp was not available for comment; UNC athletics director Dick Baddour was traveling and not available for comment.

The university has not released what it calls an "internal investigation" conducted about the parking tickets.

In the court fight, the university had argued that even releasing a vehicle tag or make of a car would allow the media to identify the player who received a ticket. The university argued that a citation was part of each student's "educational" record.

The judge ruled otherwise and was upheld by the Court of Appeals.

UNC leaders did not match names of any players who received the tickets, saying the citations were issued to a vehicle - not a person.

Still, according to records and interviews, the parking scofflaws included:

Greg Little, a former wide receiver who was one of two players ruled permanently ineligible last season for violations of NCAA agent benefits, preferential treatment and ethical conduct rules, appears to have been responsible for 93 tickets and still owes $125.

Ryan Houston, a tailback who redshirted last season, has 74 tickets. He apparently owes $740.

Marvin Austin, a defensive tackle who was dismissed from the team last season, has 68 tickets.

Linebacker Bruce Carter had 10 tickets. He has since received more and owes $700.

Students must pay their tickets, or arrange a payment plan, in order to register for classes; UNC said tickets were not forgiven for football players.

"They were treated like every other student," the school said in a prepared document.
Because of the nature of the media's request, it is not known how many tickets the full football team received. UNC officials said that parking officials issued 47,092 tickets in the most recent fiscal year.

The 11 players whose records were requested in August 2010 were Little, Carter, Charles Brown, Kendric Burney, Houston, Dwight Jones, Donte Paige-Moss, Robert Quinn, Kevin Reddick, Johnny White and Deunta Williams. Austin's records were subsequently sought. Not all 11 were ticketed, the school said.

Williams said the numbers and fines were not surprising. He said parking permits were difficult to come by and that some players were indifferent to the parking rules.

"You have to understand, for some players, they thought they're going to the NFL and they didn't care about the parking tickets," said Williams.

Records indicate he had 17 tickets. He says he's paid them.

**No valid permit**

The documents indicate a range of violations. By far, the most common was issued for not having a valid parking permit. Team members also were cited for parking in spaces across campus that are reserved for others. They blocked fire lanes, travel lanes and trash bins.

Many of the violations took place near the stadium.

But records show Little and Austin also were cited a combined four times for parking in handicapped spaces.

Both also had their cars towed or booted.

Neither could be reached for comment. Both were drafted into the NFL this spring.

It appears that Houston once was ticketed for parking a black Land Rover in the wrong place on Aug. 30, 2008, near the football stadium in a temporary athletics spot. The team was playing McNeese State at the time.

The ticket-writer's comment on the citation says only, "UNC FOOTBALL GAME."

Staff researcher David Raynor and staff writer J.P. Giglio contributed to this report.

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WakeMed to UNC: Let's deal

BY ALAN M. WOLF - Staff Writer
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WakeMed leaders are urging UNC officials to begin negotiations on WakeMed's hostile $750 million bid to buy rival Raleigh hospital Rex Healthcare.

In a letter delivered Wednesday to Tom Ross, the UNC system president, Wake Med CEO Bill Atkinson and chairman Tom Oxholm wrote that they want to close the acquisition "on or before" Dec. 31.

"We think it could be done by the close of the year, assuming everyone wants it to happen and we put teams in place on both sides to make it happen," Atkinson said in a phone interview Thursday.

"We hope the state of North Carolina and UNC will look at this in a timely and fair and serious manner," he added. "We have a very viable proposal and it could be a big plus to the state of North Carolina economically."

Still, a sale is far from certain.

UNC officials have made clear that they will review WakeMed's offer, but they're not interested in selling Rex, which is a key piece of the UNC Health Care System's expansion strategy in Wake County. Ross had recently requested more information by this week from WakeMed, which made the unsolicited offer to buy Rex last month.

The executive committee of UNC Health's board is expected to review the latest information from WakeMed during a regularly scheduled meeting Monday.

"While the letter received today is far less comprehensive than anticipated, I am forwarding it to Chairman Richard Krasno for careful review by the UNC Health Care Board, in keeping with its fiduciary responsibilities," Ross wrote in a note to UNC's board. "We continue to believe that Rex is an integral part of UNC Health Care that is vital to our teaching, research and clinical care missions."

As part of its offer to buy Rex, WakeMed is willing to expand its relationship with UNC by collaborating on research, teaching and innovation, Atkinson said. Wake Med and UNC have worked together for more than 40 years, with UNC sending its medical students and physicians to work at WakeMed's facilities, for example.
"There is potential for UNC to lock themselves with us in this market for generations to come," Atkinson said. "But we can't compete with Rex and be friends with UNC."

The offer to buy Rex followed months of increasing hostility between WakeMed and UNC Health. WakeMed officials contend that UNC and Rex are using their status as a state-supported hospital system to compete unfairly in Wake County's medical market.

WakeMed officials also are lobbying North Carolina's lawmakers to support - or even force - a sale of Rex, as a way of raising money for the cash-strapped state. Several lawmakers have said they may consider action, but didn't want to address it during the recent session focused on the state budget, or use the sale of any state asset to provide a one-time budget fix.

Atkinson said that the Dec. 31 deadline for a Rex sale isn't firm. In his letter to Ross, he wrote that if it's later, WakeMed could close an acquisition within about 150 days after UNC agrees to a sale.

'Anywhere, anytime'

"We don't want to let it drag on forever," Atkinson said.

"We look forward to meeting with President Ross or whoever he appoints to look at this," Atkinson added. "We'll do that anywhere, anytime."

The WakeMed letter also addressed some other questions Ross raised:

WakeMed expects to pay for the deal, worth up to $875 million with the assumption of Rex's debt, with cash reserves and the proceeds from one or more bond offerings.

WakeMed is getting financial advice from the investment banking arm of Citigroup. That investment bank also would serve as senior manager for the tax-free bonds, which would be issued through the N.C. Medical Care Commission.

WakeMed expects its takeover of Rex would pass the scrutiny of antitrust regulators because of the "robust competition" in the Triangle's health-care market.

The Duke University Health System, UNC Health, WakeMed and "multiple other providers" compete for patients and doctors. "The same competitors and robust competition will remain in the market after the completion of the proposed transaction," Atkinson and Oxholm wrote.

If the sale is completed, WakeMed would offer jobs to "substantially all employees of Rex Healthcare, subject of course to WakeMed's customary screening and hiring policies." WakeMed employs more than 7,000 people and Rex employs more than 5,000, making the hospital systems two of Wake County's largest private employers.
Rex employees who are hired would be eligible to participate in a profit-sharing program at WakeMed, and salaries and benefits would be comparable to what they now receive.

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Cancer death rate gap widens based on education

By MIKE STOBBE - AP Medical Writer
Published in: Health/Science
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ATLANTA The gap in cancer death rates between college graduates and those who only went to high school is widening, the American Cancer Society reported Friday.

Among men, the least educated died of cancer at rates more than 2 1/2 times that of men with college degrees, the latest data show. In the early 1990s, they died at two times the rate of most-educated men.

For women, the numbers aren't as complete but suggest a widening gap also. The data, from 2007, compared people between the ages of 25 and 64.

People with college degrees are seeing a significant drop in cancer death rates, while people who have spent less time in school are seeing more modest improvements or sometimes none at all, explained Elizabeth Ward, who oversees research done by the cancer society.

The cancer society estimates there will be nearly 1.6 million new cancer cases in the United States this year, and 571,950 deaths. It also notes that overall cancer death rates have been dropping since the early 1990s, but the decline has been greater for some groups more than others.

Experts believe that the differences have to do with education, how much people earn and where they live, among other factors. Researchers like to use education as a measuring stick because death certificates include that information.

"Just because we're measuring education doesn't mean we think education is the direct reason" for the differences among population groups, Ward said.

That said, the cancer death rate connection to education is striking.

For all types of cancer among men, there were about 56 deaths per 100,000 for those with at least 16 years of education compared to 148 deaths per 100,000 for those with no more than 12 years of school.

For women, the rate was 59 per 100,000 for the most educated, and 119 per 100,000 for the least educated.
The gap was most striking when it comes to lung cancer.

People with a high school education or less died at a rate four to five times higher than those with at least four years of college education, the new report said.

More than a third of premature cancer deaths could have been avoided if everyone had a college degree, cancer society officials estimated.

Studies have suggested that less educated people are more likely to do risky things with their health.

They are more likely to smoke, drink and overeat, leading to obesity. All those things raise the risk for various cancers.

As for survival after diagnosis, the least-educated are often poor people without good health insurance. Studies have found that people with no health insurance are more likely to be diagnosed when their cancer is advanced stage, and they are also less likely to receive standard treatment.
Brain implant serves as an aid to memory in laboratory rats

BY BENEDICT CAREY - New York Times
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Scientists have designed a brain implant that restored lost memory function and strengthened recall of new information in laboratory rats - a crucial first step in the development of neuroprosthetics to repair deficits from dementia, stroke and other brain injuries in humans.

Though still a long way from being tested in humans, in recent years neuroscientists have developed implants that allow paralyzed people to move prosthetic limbs or a computer cursor, using their thoughts to activate the machines.

In the new work, being published today in The Journal of Neuroengineering and Rehabilitation, researchers at Wake Forest University and the University of Southern California used some of the same techniques to read neural activity. But they translated those signals internally, to improve brain function rather than to activate outside appendages.

In a series of experiments, scientists at Wake Forest led by Sam Deadwyler trained rats to remember which of two identical levers to press to receive water; the animals first saw one of the two levers appear and then (after being distracted) had to remember to press the other lever to be rewarded.

Repeated training on this task teaches rats the general rule, but in each trial the animal has to remember which lever appeared first, to inform the later choice.

The rats were implanted with a tiny array of electrodes, which threaded from the top of the head down into two neighboring pieces of the hippocampus, a structure that is crucial for forming these new memories, in rats as in humans. The two slivers of tissue, called CA1 and CA3, communicate with each another as the brain learns and stores new information. The device transmits these exchanges to a computer. To test the effect of the implant, the researchers used a drug to shut down the activity of CA1. Without CA1 online, the rats could not remember which lever to push to get water.

The researchers, having recorded the appropriate signal from CA1, simply replayed it, like a melody on a player piano - and the animals remembered. The implant acted as if it were CA1, at least for this one task.
In rats that did not receive the drug, new memories faded by about 40 percent after a long distraction period. But if the researchers amplified the corresponding CA1 signals using the implant, the memories eroded only about 10 percent in that time.

The authors said that with wireless technology and computer chips, the system could be easily fitted for human use. But there are a number of obstacles.