THE DAILY CLIPS

July 22, 2009

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by the East Carolina University News Bureau from:

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Bicyclist contributed to collision with ECU transit bus

By Michael Abramowitcz
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, July 21, 2009

A bicyclist found to be riding in violation of state and city bike laws contributed to the collision with an East Carolina University Transit bus earlier this year that took his life, Greenville Traffic Unit police said Friday.

Joseph Leon Smallwood died March 26 at the intersection of East 10th and Lawrence streets. Officers released their findings after several weeks of investigation and observations of traffic patterns at the location, traffic commander Sgt. R.J. Brewington said.

Traffic officers who reconstructed the collision determined that Smallwood was riding his bike on the sidewalk, headed east against the flow of traffic on 10th Street toward College Hill Drive from Wendy's restaurant, Brewington said.

State regulations require bicyclists to ride with the flow of traffic, and Greenville ordinances prohibit riding bicycles on city sidewalks.

The ECU bus was stopped behind another vehicle on Lawrence at the intersection with 10th Street. It then pulled forward in preparation to make a right turn onto 10th Street, Brewington said.

As the bus pulled forward, it blocked the sidewalk entry into the crosswalk and Smallwood left the sidewalk on his bike and went into the road as the bus was making the turn, Brewington said.

Smallwood was knocked off the bicycle and was reportedly pulled under the bus.

A witness at the scene had initially reported that Smallwood was run over by a rear bus tire. However, a report from the Pitt County Medical Examiner's Office supported the finding that Smallwood was pulled under the bus with the bicycle, but not run over by the bus' tires.

Smallwood died at Pitt County Memorial Hospital.

The officers also concluded that Smallwood's blood alcohol level of .07 found by the medical examiner contributed to the collision, Brewington said.

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Safety Tips

In North Carolina, the bicycle has the legal status of a vehicle. This means that bicyclists have full rights and responsibilities on the roadway and are subject to the regulations governing the operation of a motor vehicle.

Some basic bicycle traffic laws and safety tips from the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety.

HELMETS
Bicyclists and bicycle passengers younger than 16 must wear protective safety helmets securely fastened while riding on public roads. Bicyclists are strongly advised to wear a properly fitted helmet.

RIDING IN TRAFFIC

A bicyclist must ride in the same direction as other traffic, must travel in the right lanes as close as practical to the right edge of the highway. Greenville city ordinance prohibits riding bicycles on city sidewalks.

SIGNS AND SIGNALS

Bicyclists must obey all traffic signs and signals. They must come to a complete stop at stop signs and yield the right-of-way before proceeding.

TURNS

Before turning, make sure the movement can be made safely and yield to traffic coming in the opposite direction. When turning right, be as close to the right edge of the roadway as possible. Turn left from the left-most position in the dedicated left-turn lane.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

A bicyclist is not considered a vehicle for purposes of impaired driving. However, bicyclists should be aware that alcohol involvement was reported in more than one-third of U.S. bicycle fatalities in 2000, according to U.S. Dept. of Transportation statistics.

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Report finds bloat at UNC

Layers of leaders stifle efficiency

BY ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL - UNC-Chapel Hill has too many supervisors, bloated administrative costs and a bureaucracy that hamstring everything from assigning courses to classrooms to purchasing supplies, a consultant has concluded.

Bain & Company, an efficiency expert hired to examine the university's financial processes, will present a 107-page report Thursday suggesting an institution with too many layers. UNC-CH officials hope the analysis leads to millions in savings. A campus task force will soon begin discussing the recommendations, though changes could take years to implement.

"The economic crisis is probably not over, and we want to shelter research and teaching as much as we can," Chancellor Holden Thorp said Tuesday. "The more we know about our research and teaching and how it's funded, the better we can protect it."

The report found that the campus, with an annual operating budget of about $2 billion, spends more on administrative costs than it does on academics, a balance Thorp said he'd like to flip-flop.

The administrative costs likely grew over the last decade or so in large part for two reasons: the university's success in attracting private research funding -- which brings with it staffing demands -- and the construction boom fueled by the 2000 higher education bond program. UNC-CH has spent about $500 million on new buildings and renovations to existing facilities since 2000, a massive infrastructure expansion that brought with it new administrative costs as well, Thorp said.
The Bain report was paid for with private funds from an anonymous donor.

It examines administrative structures and spending practices across the university and proposes dozens of areas where money could be saved.

Some examples:

- **SUPERVISION**: UNC-CH is 10 layers deep in some areas, meaning that a worker has nine people above him on the organizational ladder. And more than half of campus supervisors oversee three or fewer workers. UNC-CH should eliminate some supervisors and give more control to those who continue in those roles, the report said. Fewer management layers would lead to fewer meetings and less duplication, and could save up to $12 million annually, it said.

- **STANDARDIZATION**: The university has more than 100 academic centers and institutes but no standard reporting structure for them.

Most have their own finance, human resources and information technology staffs. Combining many of those support services and streamlining the way these centers report to supervisors could reap up to $6 million in annual savings, according to the report.

- **STREAMLINING**: UNC-CH conducts a massive amount of funded research, but technology in the offices supporting that work is inadequate. There are overlapping responsibilities in some places that create confusion and redundancy, and these support offices are scattered across campus and, in some examples, off campus. An investment in automation and some other resources within research support could save money over the long run, the report said.

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**A CONTROVERSIAL CONTRACT**

Earlier this year, UNC-Chapel Hill hired Bain & Company, a management consultant, to look for ways to streamline its operation and cut costs. The hiring was controversial on campus because it was funded by a private donor who requested anonymity. The funds spent on the hiring went through the university’s private fundraising foundation and thus was not considered public information. UNC-CH Chancellor Holden Thorp defended the decision, saying the private gift allowed the university to get an outside expert to cast a critical eye on its processes.

**SEE THE REPORT**

The full Bain & Company report is available at universityrelations.unc.edu/budget.

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LIFE & STYLE | JULY 21, 2009, 8:11 PM ET

What Grew Amid the Ashes

By ARNIE COOPER

When the Jesusita wildfire roared through Mission Canyon back in May, it showed little respect for the area's only tourist attraction—the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden. Over 60 of its 78 acres were either damaged or destroyed, along with 8,800 specimen plants. And the only thing remaining of the Gane House, a 100-year-old Craftsman-style residence that housed all the gardening tools, were three brick chimneys.

Untouched, however, was the garden's centerpiece, the kaleidoscopic wildflower meadow. This was the result not of divine intervention, but of a state-of-the-art irrigation system that supplied enough moisture to fend off embers propelled by 70 mile-per-hour winds.

Good thing. Herb Parker was set to begin work on a massive nature-based sculpture on the north end of the parcel the following week. "When I heard about the fire on the news I assumed the garden was going to cancel out or postpone, but they decided they needed something else to focus on," he says.

One problem: When Mr. Parker got there, only one shovel was left. (His own tools were late in arriving.) Fortunately, the garden rounded up six volunteers—including a dancer, a bookkeeper and a former free-lance photographer—to assist the 56-year-old sculptor. Moreover, despite a continuing walkout prompted by a series of firings the previous month, the remaining staff, much to Mr. Parker's surprise, also lent a hand.

"In most places I've been to, the staff go out of their way to avoid eye contact so they won't have to help—but not here," Mr. Parker says. This lessened the arduous task of constructing his sculpture: a 13-foot-high, 40-foot-wide temple-like structure with a living green roof kept alive by its own custom-made watering system.

Assembling the work took three weeks of 12-hour days. It began with Mr. Parker and his crew using string to lay out the design. That was the easy part. Next came the real challenge of building the roof, which involved welding 15-foot sections of rebar and sewing a highly durable nylon mesh normally used in deep-sea fishing. The idea was to keep maintenance people from falling through and hold the sod in place.

Then, after digging enough holes for the 138 13-foot redwood supporting columns, Mr. Parker summoned every able-bodied individual on the premises to hoist the 500-pound rods into position before eventually covering the frame with 450 18-inch-by-45-inch grass slabs.

Though his Santa Barbara creation is unique, Mr. Parker's sanctuary joins a list of 45 other such structures that have graced parks, conservatories and natural areas in his home state of North Carolina, the Deep South, the Midwest, the Southwest and such foreign locales as Italy and Japan.

Mr. Parker's devotion to turf-turning began at age 4 or 5, when his father took the family on tractor excursions to the shoulder of nearby Route 17. "I grew up in the rural northeast corner of the state on the edge of a swamp, and on Saturdays we'd spend the day digging up sod on the high ground so we could make a backyard. We can't be arrested at this point I don't think," a laughing Mr. Parker says.
This may not be your idea of a good time, but for this unpretentious earth child it was part of an “idyllic” Southern childhood. “My parents had a little country store in the middle of nowhere along with a slaughterhouse. In the morning they’d put you out in the yard, you’d spend all day playing, and at supper time they’d bring you back in, hose you down and feed you.”

However, getting some much needed shut-eye was no easy task with—as clichéd as it sounds—five sharing his bed. Mr. Parker lived with his extended family, comprising his parents, grandmother, aunt, uncle, brothers and cousins.

Of course, being a sod pilerer does not an artist make. But after seeing his father’s childhood sketchbook “of mostly cartoon characters,” Mr. Parker started drawing as well. Not that his family viewed his artistic endeavors as a viable career. “Where I’m from, art was nothing more than duck prints and dogs pointing at game,” Mr. Parker says.

His main encouragement came from Maxine Ferrell, a local painter who gave him lessons one summer when he was 8 years old, but it wasn’t until college in the 1970s that Mr. Parker found his calling by burrowing into the rich loam on the grounds of East Carolina University.

Thanks to the influence of early earthworks artists such as Robert Smithson and Richard Long, and the “system manipulation” theories of conceptual artist Hans Haacke, Mr. Parker felt compelled to expand his studio sculptures to work on a larger scale. But lacking the necessary resources, he opted to borrow from the landscape by drawing from his childhood turf adventures. Unlike his current focus on building, Mr. Parker’s earlier pieces were more about excavation and the resulting geometric patterns.

“I’d dig up the sod, but since I had to put it back where it came from or the university grounds people would kill me, I carefully kept the stuff in good shape, putting it off to the side. Then when I was done I noticed how the sod had changed, and how with time the whole thing slowly dissolved back into the landscape.”

Before finishing his BFA in sculpture, Mr. Parker took a detour, joining the Marines from 1974 to 1976 “to clear my head.” Two years later, he did a stint in the Peace Corps, teaching woodworking and handicrafts in the Grenadines. He finally completed his MFA from ECU in 1983. Later that year, he became an instructor at the Sage College of Albany. Since 1991 he’s been a professor at the College of Charleston in South Carolina.

Mr. Parker has also held numerous visiting artist positions, but perhaps his most memorable was as project artist in residence at Kotoji Temple, in Osaka, Japan, in 2001.

During his six-week stay, Mr. Parker had the chance to delve into the history of the region, creating his first work that incorporated both the context and culture of the site. Situated at the base of the Takihata Falls, 40 miles outside the city, his bamboo and stone creation mimicked the early dwellings of Japan.

Another innovation was Mr. Parker’s desire to encourage conversation. “Once we thatched the structure, it became very quiet and we had two seats inside each tower so you could sit and carry on a normal discussion.”

The same holds true for his Santa Barbara piece. Its labyrinthine interior forces visitors to slow down and reflect on the views, which now feature leafless trees and the occasional empty space where a house used to stand. Yes, the surrounding neighborhood was ravaged by the firestorm, but one need only step outside the structure and glance at the roof to attain a more hopeful perspective.

Instead of covering it with a green lawn, as he had intended, Mr. Parker was encouraged by the garden’s staff to plant it with native grasses and wildflowers—thus serving as an extension of the land below. It’ll be several more weeks before the aerial prairie matures, but when it does it will join the meadow as a promising hint of what the ash-covered surrounding terrain will eventually look like.

—Mr. Cooper is a writer in Santa Barbara. His home, a half mile from the Botanic Garden, was destroyed by the Jesusita fire.