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Group airs town-gown concerns
By Ginger Livingston
Thursday, July 26, 2012

Government, education and business leaders reported on their legislative successes and continuing concerns during a Wednesday meeting at Pitt Community College.

The Town-Gown Organization gives representatives from those entities the opportunity to discuss matters of joint interest for the betterment of the community. Wednesday’s meeting allowed PCC to show one of its automotive labs in its recently opened Construction and Industrial Technology Building.

Representatives from the community college, Pitt County Schools and East Carolina University said their organizations experienced fewer budget cuts following this year’s legislative session.

The Legislature approved a bill that allows ECU to keep income it generates by renting its facilities to private businesses, Philip Rogers, the chancellor’s chief of staff, said. The revenue will be invested in health sciences, he said.

Rick Niswander, vice chancellor for administration and finance, reported the first section of the new dental school building will open early next month.

PCC saw a slight drop in its curriculum enrollment during the 2011-12 school year while its continuing education increased, meaning enrollment
numbers were about the same, said Pamela Hilbert, vice president for academic affairs.

The school’s literacy education budget, which funds its GED, adult high school and similar classes, suffered a loss of $82,781. Its supplies, software and training budget also was cut by $30,000.

PCC students are benefiting from a change in the state’s lottery funding. It can be used for need-based financial aid. PCC has received $524,226 in 2012, she said.

Budget cuts scheduled for Pitt County Schools were not as drastic as predicted in the new budget, Superintendent Beverly Emory said.

While school leaders across the state have complained the General Assembly didn’t make extra money available to cover the loss of federal stimulus dollars, Emory said her staff recognized the money was only temporary and had developed ways the last several years to absorb the losses in the new budget.

Preserving revenue sources was a concern of government officials.

The Legislature’s cap on the state’s gas tax will limit how much money municipalities receive to repair city road systems, said Chris Padgett, Greenville’s interim assistant city manager.

There also was some discussion, but no action, on having municipalities take over the maintenance of state-owned roads within city boundaries.

Legislators made technical changes to legislation preventing city-initiated annexation, called force annexation by its opponents, after North Carolina courts said some provisions were unenforceable.

While Greenville rarely pursues annexations, Padgett said officials believe the right should not be taken from municipalities.

County Manager Scott Elliott said changes in how revenue generated by the 911 surcharge on telephone bills allowed the county to use that money to purchase vehicles for the sheriff’s office.

When the General Assembly reconvenes in January, counties will be on alert to legislation that would end electronic monitoring, which allows courts to release inmates without posting a bond.

Elliott said Pitt County has about 100 people participating in the electronic monitoring program, and if they all had to return to jail, it would create a crowding problem.
Susanne Sartelle, president of the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce, said her organization is reviving its education cabinet to examine ways the business community can help students prepare to pursue higher education through the community college or university systems. Her group also is working with community leaders to pursue more economic development opportunities.

This will include hiring a consultant to review the communities readiness in the job creation arena, she said.

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Even the most optimistic Greenville residents can be forgiven for abandoning hope of seeing land acquisition begin for the 10th Street connector project, the thoroughfare that will provide a vital east-west link into the heart of the city. Discussed for more than a decade, the proposal suffered from the type of delays so common to road construction in this area.

While signs of life on this project are welcome indeed, the community cannot overlook the casualties of progress, namely those residents and business-owners who will be displaced. Though it is upsetting to inflict such hardship and inconvenience on these families and entrepreneurs, it is certain that the city will be served by completion of this roadway in the years to come.

More than a decade has passed since city officials began working on a proposal that would link Stantonsburg Road to 10th Street, replacing the miserable mess that sees road and rail intersect at Dickinson Avenue. When completed, the new thoroughfare will connect the main and medical campuses of East Carolina University and provide a new, more attractive entrance to the city for those traveling east from U.S. 264.

There are numerous reasons supporting this major change to the city’s traffic patterns, among them a key issue of safety. Currently, ambulance travel east from the hospital to points east — the downtown district, for instance — requires crossing the railroad tracks at the intersection of Dickinson and 10th Street, which can be delayed by the trains passing through. The connector intends to fix this, making access to emergency care quicker to all parts of the city.

It is also the rare project that represents a collaborative work by many of the major forces operating in Greenville. Work on the project has already received funding from the city, East Carolina and the hospital as well as the N.C. Department of Transportation. All stand to benefit from the new roadway and all have contributed toward seeing the proposal completed.

In the face of this progress stands more than 200 residents and business owners who live and work in the construction corridor. They are being asked to uproot and move, a traumatic experience, and must be generously
compensated for the tremendous inconvenience. There is no question that lives will be irreparably changed as a result.

Yet, the likely benefits of this project justify the impact to this community. Greenville stands to reshape its face and make residents safer, reasons to push forward on this valuable project.
Amtrak connection closer to reality
By Wesley Brown
Thursday, July 26, 2012

Out-of-town travels may become much easier for local residents as Amtrak officials and Pitt County leaders neared an agreement Wednesday to bring a motorcoach to Greenville with direct access to the federal rail operator’s train station in Wilson.

While no start date has been set for the shuttle, an Amtrak representative told The Daily Reflector on Wednesday that bus stops and route schedules are being finalized.

“Right now, we are working with local communities (in the Greenville area) to expand our throughway service in eastern North Carolina,” said Christina Leeds, media relations manager for Amtrak’s press office in Washington, D.C. “We expect to release more information on the project really soon.”

Leeds’ announcement comes less than 24 hours after the Greenville Metropolitan Planning Organization passed the city’s second resolution in six weeks in support of a connecting shuttle to Wilson.

The momentum for the legislation adopted by the planning board — led by the mayors of Greenville, Ayden, Winterville and Grimesland — rested squarely on the shoulders of economic development.

The organization felt strongly that a connecting service to Amtrak rail lines would help relieve highway congestion and reduce harmful fuel emissions in and around Greenville, while serving as a “vital” link between local communities and larger coastal cities up and down the Eastern Seaboard.

A similar resolution was adopted by the Greenville City Council on June 11.
“There is a vital need to provide passenger rail transportation to Greenville’s regional medical health centers and hospital, and to East Carolina University, a major state university with more than 30,000 students, faculty and staff,” the resolution reads.

Amtrak data shows ridership reached record levels in 2010, with 28.7 million passengers boarding trains.

Most northeastern states have a share in the 500 destinations and more than 21,200 miles of routes the federally subsidized rail line serves.

In North Carolina, Amtrak serves 15 metropolitan areas, with the closest stations being in Wilson and Rocky Mount.

Amtrak engineers, though, have been studying the business feasibility of expanding its passenger rail service into eastern North Carolina, as long-range rail plans drafted by the state indicate a direct connection to the Greenville area is possible.

For the moment, though, the focus remains on opening a passenger station in Greenville on Reade Street between Third and Fourth streets that could transport people to Wilson.

“Amtrak has been very proactive in their expansion and we are extremely eager to tie-in to this market and provide not just Greenville, but the whole region with a safe and secure way to access the rail service’s main line,” Thomas said in support of the rail link’s plans.

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STATE COLLEGE, Pa. -- Penn State football players looked on stoically as two teammates announced to the world: “We’re going to see this thing through.”

There were no smiles among the more than 30 players who huddled outside the school’s football facility Wednesday morning. After the statement was read, they turned and walked back into the building.

“We want to let the nation know that we’re proud of who we are,” senior fullback Michael Zordich said, flanked by his fellow players. “We’re the true Penn Staters, and we’re going to stick together through this. We’re going to see this thing through, and we’re going to do everything we can for the university. We know it’s not going to be easy, but we know what we’re made of.”

But some players will weigh whether to transfer, with other schools wooing them. The NCAA said Tuesday that Penn State cannot restrict its football players from pursuing transfer options. The biggest name is running back Silas Redd, who rushed for 1,241 yards as a sophomore last season. Redd has yet to reveal his plans.

N.C. State coach Tom O’Brien said there were a handful of Penn State players the Wolfpack would contact.

“We have recruited some before and know about some of them and have had relationships with some of them,” O’Brien said at the ACC Kickoff in Greensboro on Monday.

N.C. State previously recruited senior receiver Justin Brown, sophomore tackle Donovan Smith, sophomore safety Tim Buckley, sophomore running back Bill Belton, freshman linebacker Nyeem Wartman and freshman running back Akeel Lynch.

Buckley is from Raleigh and was a star running back at Cardinal Gibbons, where he rushed for almost 1,800 yards and 36 touchdowns as a senior in 2010.
Brown would potentially offer the most immediate help. The 6-3, 209-pound receiver from Wilmington, Del. is a two-year starter and was second on the team with 35 catches for 517 yards.

N.C. State has to replace two of its top three receivers from last season and in particular could use some size in its receiving corps.

Penn State coach Bill O’Brien told ESPN on Wednesday that all of his players have been recruited and some have received scholarship offers from 50 schools. Opposing coaches needed only to email or fax the Penn State compliance department to receive clearance to speak to players. O’Brien said Central Florida’s George O’Leary, Syracuse’s Doug Marrone and Iowa’s Kirk Ferentz reached out to him.

Illinois spokesman Kent Brown confirmed assistant coaches traveled to State College on Wednesday to talk to some Nittany Lions players. Brown said Illini athletic director Mike Thomas informed Penn State of the trip and that it came after Nittany Lions players contacted the Illini.

Cornerback Stephon Morris, who attended the news conference, tweeted: “We have chosen to stay at PSU & other opposing coaches are outside our apartment. Was that the intentions of the NCAA.” He added the hashtags “LeaveUsAlone” and “WeAre.”

Recent NCAA sanctions will keep the Nittany Lions out of a bowl game for the rest of these players’ careers, and the NCAA is allowing them to transfer to another school and play immediately. But on Wednesday, at least 13 players listed as first-stringers on the preseason depth chart affirmed their commitment to staying in Happy Valley, including senior quarterback Matt McGloin.

Neither Zordich nor senior linebacker Michael Mauti – both sons of former Penn State players – mentioned former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky by name during the impromptu news conference.

“We take this as an opportunity to create our own legacy,” Mauti said. “This program was not built by one man and it’s sure as hell not going to get torn down by one man. This program was built on every alumni, every single player that came before us, built on their backs.”

Staff writer J.P. Giglio contributed to this report.
Faculty review of fraud at UNC-Chapel Hill nearly complete
By Jane Stancill - jstancill@newsobserver.com
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CHAPEL HILL A faculty subcommittee that has reviewed investigations of academic fraud at UNC-Chapel Hill has found no fault with the probes. But it will recommend that the university bring in outside experts to weigh the balance between academics and athletics on campus, the faculty chairwoman said Wednesday.

The full report of the subcommittee is almost complete and will be considered this fall by the full Faculty Council, faculty chairwoman Jan Boxill said.

Meanwhile, the university’s Board of Trustees is interviewing consultants who may be hired to assess whether new rules and procedures are adequate to guard against future problems.

“Our focus at this time should be on assuring that measures are put in place so that if academic fraud occurs in the future, it will be quickly detected,” trustees Chairman Wade Hargrove said.

On Wednesday, Boxill reported to a trustee committee about the work of the faculty group. She said the three-member panel met with 31 people on campus in May and June. The group has looked at the results of an internal investigation that identified dozens of courses in the African and Afro-American Studies department that had little or no faculty supervision. Some of those courses were heavily populated with athletes.

She said faculty have so far been quiet about the situation for a reason. Professors are passionate about the issues, she said, but wanted to conduct a thorough review before speaking out.

“Indeed, critical thinking is central to our mission as educators, researchers and leaders,” Boxill said. “A rush to judgment could not only lead to actions that are ultimately detrimental to this mission, but such a rush is antithetical to what we stand for.”

She said one forthcoming recommendation has caught the eye of Chancellor Holden Thorp: appointing a group of outside experts who can provide “an independent, comprehensive analysis of the complicated relationship

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between athletics and academics at UNC, and propose recommendations for its management.”

Last week, Thorp sent an e-mail to faculty outlining the work that has been done to overcome the scandal.

“I understand some faculty question the role of intercollegiate athletics at Carolina,” he wrote. “I personally believe we can find the right balance, but I also know that it will be a challenge.”

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UNC freshman Cowie officially world’s best freestyle soccer player
By Tim Stevens - tstevens@newsobserver.com
Published Wed, Jul 25, 2012 10:47 PM

CARY -- Indi Cowie is the best freestyle soccer player in the world and she has the paperwork to prove it.

Cowie was recently named as the FIFA Street World Street Champion for soccer freestyle by World Player of the Year Lionel Messi of Barcelona. She also entered the Guinness Book of World Records by doing 102 heel taps with a soccer ball in a minute.

That was all during spring break.

“Other people went to the beach,” said her mother, Judith Cowie, who moved with husband Logan to North Carolina from Stevenston, Ayrshire, Scotland, 20 years ago.

But soon after spring break, the University of North Carolina freshman was playing in an exhibition match against Virginia when she tore the anterior cruciate ligament in her left knee. The injury, and the resulting surgery, means she has curtailed her 90-minute a day freestyle practice and she probably won’t play for the Tar Heels this fall.

“I’m being positive about it,” Cowie said. “By having to watch, I’m seeing the game a little bit differently.”

Right now she can’t do any heel taps or her famed around-the-world, where she kicks the ball in the air and sweeps her leg around the ball or even lie on her back and endlessly bicycle the ball. She can balance the ball on her
forehead, though, or on the back of her neck. But nothing that would strain her repaired knee.

Cowie was born in North Carolina, but has played on the Scottish U17 national girls team and spent a semester with relatives in Scotland. Despite missing a semester of high school, she graduated from Cary Green Hope High a semester early in December 2011 and enrolled at UNC in January. She almost immediately began training with the Tar Heels, Cowie’s favorite team since she got Mia Hamm’s autograph at a Toys-R-Us store when she was 5 years old.

Cowie, who never played high school soccer, found a group of teammates at Chapel Hill who embraced the freestyle soccer skills that have made her an international star, if not a local household name.

“I feel incredibly at home,” she said.

**Video displays**

Cowie does things with a soccer ball – juggling with your feet is an imprecise and incomplete comparison – that have put her in demand for appearances around the world. She was an invited guest at Champion League finals in Spain and Italy and performed before 76,000 fans at a Chelsea-Manchester United game in London.

She was at the Champion League final in Spain when her advertisement video for the Champion League was shown on the stadium’s big screen. The ad was aired in 58 countries but not in the United States.

For the video, shot in Prague, the producers asked her to don a dress and go one-on-one with a defender from the Czech national team. Nothing was staged or rehearsed and she dazzled, kicking the ball through his legs.

“I thought I recognized the music and then I saw the girl in the dress,” Indi Cowie said of watching herself on the stadium screen. “The stadium went wild. It must have been embarrassing for him. People still talk about the girl in the dress.”

During this year’s spring break, Cowie made and edited another freestyle soccer video that was submitted to EA Sports as part of its promotion of a new video game, FIFA Street. Soccer players from all over the world submitted their videos. Some used special effects, but Cowie went pure freestyle and did her six or seven tricks in one take, unlike some entries who assembled highlight videos.
The more than 80 entries were eventually whittled down by public vote to the four that Messi viewed.

“He watched my video,” gushed Cowie, who says the Argentine is her idol. He named her as the world street champion.

“It’s the best thing that has happened in my freestyle career because I went head-to-head with the best freestylers on the planet and had Messi watched my video and selected me, which was unbelievable,” she said.

The world record

The same week she did her video for the contest, Cowie tackled another lifetime goal. She had loved reading the Guinness Book of World Records since she was a small child and wanted to add her name to a soccer record.

With three video cameras running and a protocol sheet from Guinness in her mom’s hand, Cowie started tapping the ball with her heels, notching the record 102 in a minute.

She has shown some fancy footwork with NCAA regulations, too. The NCAA has ruled that freestyling with a soccer ball is not the same thing as playing soccer. Just like former N.C. State quarterback Russell Wilson, who was a professional baseball player but could play NCAA football, Cowie can be a pro in freestyling and still be an amateur in soccer.

“They are two different things,” said Judith Cowie.

Cowie can be paid for clinics and appearances as a freestyler and retain her amateur status in women’s soccer, although each of her freestyle functions must be approved through the UNC compliance office. The NCAA hasn’t ruled on whether she can market herself as a freestyler.

Cowie would like to start a fashion line that might include things like the black and pink “Individual freestyle” T-shirt she sometimes wears. “It is good to promote the sport,” she said.

Soon after spring break, Cowie was playing an exhibition and looked down as she twisted. She saw her left knee jolt out at an awkward angle.

“Surprising, it didn’t hurt much,” she said.

For the first time in years, she can’t do her 90-minutes a day routine of freestyle exercises. She no longer gets up at 4:30 a.m., to go to the parking deck to practice bouncing the ball with various parts of her body.
She misses it and hopes to return to freestyling within the next few days, but UNC women’s soccer coach Anson Dorrance plans for her to redshirt this fall.

“If I can practice, it will be OK,” she said. “I love my teammates and I want to be with them.”

The injury helped her bond with her teammates. Since her dorm room was on the fourth floor of a building with no elevators, some of the girls invited her to stay with them to avoid the stairs and others helped her get to classes.

Even with the help, she blistered both her palms while using her crutches.

Fortunately, when you are a freestyle soccer player, you don’t need hands to juggle.