THE DAILY CLIPS

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Pirate speech camp combines fun, therapy

By
ECU News Services

Sunday, July 26, 2009

Little boys run under a huge color wheel parachute as Pirate Speech Camp Director Julia Morrow holds up several stuffed animals.

"Shall we see if we can make the dinosaurs fly off?" Morrow asks. "Yes," the children yell as she tosses the animals on the tarp. The 10 boys line themselves around the edge of the parachute, pumping their arms to fling the dinosaurs to the floor.

This is the second summer that East Carolina University has offered the five-week camp in space provided by St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Greenville. The camp provides a fun, intensive therapeutic environment to improve the communication skills of children with severe expressive language deficits including autism, said Morrow, coordinator of external clinical education in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders.

Counselors are first-year communication sciences and disorders graduate students in the College of Allied Health Sciences. Morrow also is assisted by Lori Kincannon, a speech language pathologist in the Pitt County Schools.

The camp was originally designed to help children maintain skills during the summer when school is out. "But we've had lots of parents telling us they see lots of growth in their children," Morrow said.

The children are able to have fun, do arts and crafts, play on the playground, and are encouraged to interact and socialize with other children as much as possible, all while working on language skills outside a typical clinical environment, said counselor Taylor Chevning of Wilmington. Another positive outcome has been working collaboratively with other student counselors and learning from each other. "A lot of times you're by yourself in clinic," Chevning said. "Here at camp, we're all together with one goal of helping these kids learn as much as possible."

Camp time is finely structured with a set daily routine to provide group language activities, fine motor craft activities and gross motor activities like the parachute or indoor baseball. "The whole point is to work together," said counselor Karyn Morone of Sapphire.

During story time, all are at the table, watching as the teacher turns the pages of the book and raising their hand to answer questions.

"We will not allow the children to sit in the corner and withdraw, or engage in repetitive behaviors," Morrow said. "They naturally don't want to be engaged and we are prompting and facilitating changes in behavior."

Counselor Kimberly Woolard served as teacher during the week themed "The Five Senses." The counselors take turns as lead teacher and in individual activities.

"It has been a wonderful experience working at the camp, an experience that will definitely be helpful in the future. I have learned a lot about autism spectrum disorder and how to best work with those who have it, and I'm sure that this won't be the last time these skills are used," said Woolard, who is originally from Washington.

Depending on the availability of student counselors, Morrow said they hope to grow the camp to allow 16 children to register next summer.

Society of Safety Engineers Honors prof
An ECU professor has received the President's Award from the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE).

Michael Behm, an occupational safety professor in the Department of Technology Systems, received the honor at the ASSE's annual Professional Development Conference held in San Antonio, Texas June 28.

The award recognizes Behm's work towards organizing virtual meetings of the local ASSE chapter and ECU student chapter. The local chapter includes members from Interstate 95 to the Outer Banks. Recognizing that it would be problematic to have members commute from all over the region, Behm suggested to Chapter President Wesley Thigpen, an ECU graduate, that meetings be held virtually.

"The number of attendees for the local ASSE meetings had dropped in recent meetings," Behm said. "So we decided if the people can't come to us to attend the meetings, then we need to find a way to deliver the meeting to them. Mr. Thigpen was supportive of the idea of virtual meetings form the start."

Behm received help from ECU's Office of Academic Outreach. Using Centra, a web-conferencing program that provides a virtual classroom, anyone with an Internet connection and the proper password can now attend the chapter meetings.

Though Behm received the President's Award, he was quick to note that this was a team effort. "We have conducted five meetings so far in the last two years and they wouldn't have been the success they were if not for the efforts of people like Sharon Collins and John Southworth in Academic Outreach. They help establish connections, passwords and even sat through an early meeting to help troubleshoot user problems."

The ASSE award was given by society President Warren Brown who said ECU's idea of virtual meetings, which helps augment face-to-face encounters, is the future of professional meetings. ECU plans to host more meetings in the 2009-10 academic year for the local ASSE and ECU chapters.

Nursing instructor elected to NCLN post

Mark Hand, College of Nursing clinical instructor, was recently elected president-elect of the board of directors for the North Carolina League of Nursing for the 2009-11 term.

The North Carolina League of Nursing is an affiliated constituent of the National League for Nursing, which promotes excellence in nursing education to build a strong and diverse nursing workforce.

ECU partners to deliver mental health services

Psychiatric services in 13 eastern North Carolina counties will get a boost thanks to a new collaborative effort involving ECU, two local mental health organizations and the state Division of Mental Health.

Working with East Carolina Behavioral Health in New Bern and the Beacon Center in Rocky Mount, ECU's Department of Psychiatric Medicine at the Brody School of Medicine will staff three full-time psychiatry positions through face-to-face interactions with patients and telemedicine interactions.

The services will be offered in Northampton, Gates, Hertford, Bertie, Edgecombe, Nash, Wilson, Pitt, Greene, Beaufort, Craven, Pamlico and Jones counties starting Saturday.

"We believe this project helps us get on the right track for increasing access and availability of quality psychiatric care to underserved and unserved populations while also enhancing regional and local mechanisms to address the pressing shortage of psychiatrists," said Dr. Sy Saeed, department chair.

Saeed said the state's population is growing faster than the state's supply of psychiatrists, setting the stage for an emerging shortage. In addition, he said, the lack of psychiatrists in certain counties means people might not have access to the mental health care services they need, the lack of child psychiatrists statewide has reached a critical stage, and in some counties a shortage of psychiatrists and primary care providers exists, leaving people with mental disorders undiagnosed or untreated.

"The partnership with ECU will create a walk-in crisis psychiatric network, which will increase the access and availability of quality psychiatric care to currently underserved areas of eastern North Carolina," said Roy P. Wilson, chief executive officer of East Carolina Behavioral Health. "We believe the network is a step in the right direction and will become the model program for addressing the shortage of psychiatrists in North Carolina."

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First casualty: Budget delay hits dual enrollment programs

Sunday, July 26, 2009

Dual enrollment programs provide hundreds of Pitt County students a head start on earning a college diploma by allowing them to take classes at Pitt Community College as they finish their high school degrees. At least, they did until this week, when the program was all but terminated due to the ongoing uncertainty over a state budget.

The delay in reaching a budget deal has thus far been measured by lawmakers in dollars lost or days wasted as debate drifts into the new budget year. It should now be measured by dreams deferred as their foot-dragging harms the academic prospects of North Carolina students.

Gov. Beverly Perdue helped scuttle a tentative budget agreement this week, one day after urging lawmakers to act with urgency toward a resolution. She was right to reject that tax plan considering its woeful construct, but she is also correct that pressure to reach a deal rises as North Carolina drifts further into the new fiscal year.

August is a week away, and with the new month comes the start of another school year. Decisions about funding levels will determine staffing decisions and program opportunities in classrooms across this state. Delays in the budget have already forced difficult decisions on local school officials, including those at state universities and community colleges.

So it is in Pitt County, where 600 students hoping to enroll in classes at Pitt Community College will not be able to do so. PCC officials recognized the likelihood of losing funds for dual enrollment programs in the new budget and the need to fill classrooms for the coming semester.

Last week, PCC mailed letters to high school students seeking enrollment, directing them to complete their schedules elsewhere. Pitt County Schools must now scramble to accommodate the unexpected additions.

North Carolina should not accept a haphazard budget or one cobbled together in the interest of expediency. The size and scope of this crisis demand that the Legislature work carefully and deliberately to build a spending plan that reflects a difficult budget year, but protects the state's investment in the future.

But citizens should wonder why lawmakers could not complete that task in the six months they have thus far spent in Raleigh.

Sir Isaac Newton was correct. Each action has an equal and opposite reaction. In this case, a failure to act has harmed North Carolina students, with effects that cannot yet be measured.

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Darts & Laurels

Under debate.

Laurels — To those who attended a Thursday gathering here about the health care reform effort in Washington. The Greenville meeting was the latest in a series attempting to spread information and provoke debate about options facing the country as it undertakes this massive overhaul. Kudos to those actively contributing to the public discourse.

Pass on gas

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Laurels — To citizens who utilize alternative transportation, carpooling and other measures to avoid paying high gasoline prices in Greenville and Pitt County. Since this community pays higher prices than in surrounding counties — with prices 6 cents higher than the state average — reducing fuel consumption would make a strong argument for equity. Ride a bike or take the bus to work next week.

Darts — To Sen. Kay Hagan, for her vote in favor of a bill that would have forced states to recognize the concealed-carry permits issued by other states. It may be that Hagan knew the measure would be defeated, but this amendment would have made North Carolina respect the nation’s most lenient concealed-carry laws. While citizens expect Burr to embrace such a measure, her vote was a disappointing surprise.

Laurels — To a bill in the works that would exert greater oversight on companies that perform fireworks displays, in response to the tragic deaths on Ocracoke in July. That blast, which killed four, called into question the rules about licensing, particularly since the truck that exploded had traveled on a ferry to the island.

Darts — To the paltry turnout at a meeting about the 10th Street Connector project, arguably the most important transportation initiative in the works for this community. Only three people offered input during the Wednesday meeting of a committee that will choose a route for the roadway that will link Pitt County Memorial Hospital with the center of the city, including East Carolina University.

Laurels — To the relatively mild temperatures across eastern North Carolina so far this summer. Highs have generally stayed in the mid-to-upper 80s and low 90s, which is rare in a region that is usually blistering hot at this time of year. Changing weather patterns have affected the climate this year, but the vast majority of residents will have no ill words about the rare respite from the heat.

Compiled by Brian Colligan, editorial page editor of The Daily Reflector. Contact him at 329-9507 or via e-mail at bcolligan@coxnc.com
Mary Easley's days short at NCSU

The former first lady was rarely there over six hours

BY J. ANDREW CURLISS, Staff Writer

Newly discovered logs of the comings and goings of former first lady Mary Easley indicate that she rarely spent full days on the N.C. State University campus while holding the job she is now fighting to get back.

The time-stamped records, which were kept by a special unit of the state Highway Patrol that guarded the first family, include visits by Mary Easley to NCSU since she was hired in 2005 to launch and lead a lecture series as well as co-teach classes.

The logs indicate that Easley was on campus an average of about three days per week during the months she was working full time for NCSU. Much of her time away coincided with extended weekends to Southport, where the Easleys own a home, according to the time logs as well as trooper expense forms and state flight logs.

But they also show her doing other things during workdays, including running errands, getting a haircut or visiting the N.C. Museum of Art, where she was active in money-raising efforts.

On days she was on campus, it was often for less than six hours, according to the logs.

Easley's lawyer and an Easley family spokesman say focusing on her time spent on campus is irrelevant because she got her job done and was a high-performer who received glowing reviews. They also say she worked on her job duties while away from campus, including on weekends.

Under federal law, "hours worked" is not something applied to salaried professionals such as Mary Easley, a university spokesman said. Such employees are entitled to their week's pay if they work as little as one hour, according to federal guidelines.

The Easleys' spokesman, political consultant Ace Smith, said Mary Easley exceeded all expectations.
"N.C. State more than got their money's worth," he said.

A patrol spokesman, Capt. Everett Clendenin, said the logs were started to keep track of the first family but were not intended for historians or others to use as reference for where the family had always been. The logs were kept by rotating desk officers, and the entries that were made seem accurate, he said.

"It was created by the detail to give them an idea of where the first family was located," he said. "If someone approached them, like a detail supervisor, and wanted to know where one of the family members was, they could look at the sheet and give an idea."

The logs contain some blank entries or no entries for some dates, most of which coincide with the Easleys' visits to Southport. The logs do provide dated and time-stamped glimpses of the first family's whereabouts on many days.

Almost all of the entries are one- or two-word descriptions of an everyday activity a member of the family was undertaking at that time, such as going to the Capitol, walking, eating lunch, keeping doctor's appointments, spending time in Southport or appearing at various private functions.

Patrol leaders discovered the time logs recently during an ongoing review of the Executive Protection Detail and immediately turned them over to federal authorities who have previously requested information about former Gov. Mike Easley, Clendenin said.

Federal authorities have since asked NCSU about how Mary Easley spent her time there, specifically requesting in a subpoena information about when she used vacation days and how much she was paid for accrued vacation time.

The university could turn over details of her vacation use as soon as this week. It has previously denied media requests for time cards for Mary Easley.

Full-time status

NCSU officials said Easley was paid about $8,100 for roughly 100 hours of unused vacation time when her position was terminated last month. Easley on Thursday formally began the process of appealing her firing.

When hired in 2005, Mary Easley was required to work a full-time schedule for nine months per year in line with the academic calendar. That was expanded to a full-year schedule after she was given an 88 percent raise to $170,000 per year and expanded duties, including creating a public safety leadership center.

University officials insisted in interviews this past week that her 12-month schedule began July 1 last year, even though other records suggest her work schedule wasn't to begin full time until mid-August.

Nonetheless, the logs for 2008 indicate that Easley was on campus about half the workdays during the first four months of the year. On days she did appear, she often spent less than six hours on campus.

After the July raise, she was on campus more frequently but was still not there regularly for full days of more than six hours. On the day in September before the UNC Board of Governors voted to approve her position, for example, she was on campus for about an hour and then is listed as doing "errands" from 2:26 p.m. to 4:26 p.m., according to the patrol log.

The log shows Easley attending some off-campus crime-related meetings in the latter part of 2008 that appear also to be connected to her NCSU position's role in leading a public safety initiative.
In all, according to the logs, Easley was on campus about 143 workdays last year. About 60 percent of the time -- 85 days -- she was there for less than six hours.

Other years were similar, according to the logs. In February 2006, for example, she was on campus many days -- but only once was it for more than six hours. Two months later, in April 2006, the logs indicate she went to campus on only seven days.

The logs do show that Easley made a handful of visits to campus in summer 2006 and 2007, when her contract with the university did not require her to be there at all.

Asked to drop the matter

NCSU trustees recently formed a committee to review the handling of Easley's job and, if necessary, propose policies. Trustees Chairman Lawrence Davenport said he expects fixes to be made, but he hasn't elaborated.

And while Easley is appealing the loss of her position, Chancellor James Woodward has already asked publicly that the Easleys drop the matter and not "further harm this university." Woodward is a former chancellor at UNC-Charlotte who stepped in when NCSU Chancellor James Oblinger resigned last month over the Easley turmoil.

Woodward ended Easley's five-year contract on the recommendation of university trustees, who said the Easley position had to be cut as a result of the state budget crisis. It happened amid controversy over her salary and e-mail messages that showed the governor's involvement in creating the position in 2005.

University officials said they could not answer all questions specifically about Easley's work time because her supervisor was former Provost Larry Nielsen, who is part of the federal investigation. Nielsen has declined to comment.

In several memos and reviews, though, Nielsen praised her presence on campus, saying she was a great role model for those who met her.

In 2006, he wrote to her: "Although I haven't seen or heard about your teaching (except from you), I am quite confident that your teaching has also been successful. ... I suggest that you expand the sources for students in your courses so that more students can take advantage of your presence." (Easley indicated that her class that year was "tiny.")

In June 2007, he wrote that she "interacted very well with campus" by meeting with "leaders and others."

Last year, Nielsen wrote that she deserved high marks from "everyone for your special appearances in classes and at events."

"Your time here has been a total success," Nielsen wrote to her.

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The back story

Reporter J. Andrew Curliss first wrote about Mary Easley's position at N.C. State in a two-part series in May. That series also raised questions about flights taken by her husband, Gov. Mike Easley.

Curliss is part of The News & Observer's investigative team and has covered state and local politics for the paper since 1997.
Man diagnosed with H1N1 dies, and Marines report a case

From staff and wire reports

The latest H1N1 swine flu virus reports are from opposite ends of the state.

A 55-year-old man in Transylvania County who died last week was diagnosed with swine flu, and a Marine's infection has been confirmed at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point in Havelock.

The Associated Press reported that a man was admitted to a Transylvania County hospital last Monday with pneumonia and flu-like symptoms. It is not yet known whether the virus caused the man's death. His name has not been released. He was the fifth person in the state with H1N1 virus to die.

"The people who get severely ill are the ones with underlying conditions," said state health director Jeff Engel. Those who have become seriously ill or died have had conditions such as asthma, cancer or cardiovascular disease, or were pregnant, Engel said.

Meanwhile, a dozen Marines have been isolated from the public after one of the men in their unit was diagnosed with the H1N1 virus, according to Cherry Point officials. The Marine's symptoms appeared last Monday, and he has been in isolation ever since.

Engel said state officials hope a new vaccine that targets the H1N1 virus will be ready in the fall when the normal flu season starts; they hope to have it by October. Duke University announced last week that it would begin testing a pandemic flu vaccine on as many as 200 volunteers in early August.

Officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention think swine flu has likely infected more than 1 million Americans, with many of those suffering mild cases never reported. There have been 302 swine flu deaths in the U.S. since April.

In North Carolina, 483 cases of H1N1 virus have been reported, and five people have died, according to the N.C. Division of Public Health.

The Asheville Citizen-Times and the New Bern Sun Journal contributed to this report.

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- Go to the CDC's information page on swine flu
- Read our 2006 report on the state's preparation for a flu pandemic