THE DAILY CLIPS

August 3, 2009

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

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Profitable Pirates

Economic woes haven't kept ECU fans from buying tickets

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector

Monday, August 03, 2009

This is the first of a three-part series detailing how East Carolina's athletic department is faring during these tough economic times. Tuesday, we'll focus on how ECU is approaching its production of media guides, which some schools have stopped printing altogether.

If there were some way to measure the number of hands Matt Maloney has shaken versus the number of Pirate Club members he's successfully recruited, Maloney would have a high average.

It's hard not to encounter Maloney, East Carolina's assistant athletic director for major gifts, at an ECU sporting event, and that might be a good indication of why the fund-raising arm of ECU athletics is defying the unsteady economy by again boasting big numbers in what has proven a five-year boom for ECU.

Since the arrival of Director of Athletics Terry Holland in 2004 and head football coach Skip Holtz in early 2005, the numbers have grown drastically for both Pirate Club returns and football season ticket sales, two critical components for success in college sports. And now, even with the athletic department trying to trim as much fat as possible, the support for ECU athletics is burgeoning.

"Our fans have been terrific," said Jimmy Bass, senior associate athletic director for external operations. "It shows how much they care about the program, how much they care about the progress the program has been making over the last four years with Skip here and coach Holland here. Everybody wants to see that progress continue and the vision that was brought here five years ago come to fruition."

Bass has plenty of numbers to support his claim about fan support.

ECU sold 14,866 season tickets for football in 2006, Holtz's second season at ECU. One winning season and a bowl game later, that number leapt to 21,000, or "the most season tickets we can work with under the current configuration," according to Bass, who's been on board with Holland since 2006.

Last year, the number fell slightly to 20,160. This year, despite Americans tightening belts en masse, the number is 20,825, as of Aug. 1.

"We actually think by the first week in August, when we ship tickets, it should be pretty close to where we were last year," said Bass, who added this year's season ticket numbers are 1.81 percent behind last year's. "The bare numbers suggest it's good."

The numbers are similar in terms of not only the membership of the Pirate Club, but also the amount of money being pledged and collected to help fund future athletic projects, like ongoing field and stadium upgrades.

The current Pirate Club pledge amount has reached the $5 million plateau for the first time ever, and currently exceeds $5,280,000. That's more than $30,000 past the Pirate Club's 2009 target already.

As of June 30, the total amount of collected Pirate Club dollars (called unrestricted support) was $4,009,959. At the same time last year, the figure was $3,810,464. As of Aug. 1, there were 12,680 renewed members in the Pirate Club, a near 5 percent increase over last year's numbers at the same point.

The total number was 9,474 last year, way up from the 2007 total of 6,995 and 5,879 in 2006. In just a single day in June, Bass said the university took on 250 new Student Pirate Club members.

"I think it's winning, and the confidence that our Pirate Club members and our university community have in the program," Bass said. "I think what we're concerned about from a management standpoint is there is an
increase every year, whether it's 4 percent or 5 percent or 8 percent. I don't think anybody is thinking we're going to have a 35 percent increase."

But maybe that's not too far fetched, even in a tough economy. According to Bass, Pirate Club membership is up 19.5 percent over the last three years.

The Pirate Club's funds do not include endowment dollars, or money people are paying into stadium seats or into the Circle of Excellence campaign, which is in its fifth and final year and which has also generated more than $5 million in pledges, according to Bass.

"That's helped us do so many things — redo the football practice facilities, the football meeting rooms, the football locker room, the football offices," Bass said. "It's really made a difference in where this program has gone the last five years. All the sports, basically, have been touched by the Circle of Excellence dollars."

The stressful economy has actually allowed ECU fans to take advantage of some pre-existing options when it comes to buying season tickets. Bass estimated one-fourth of ECU football season ticket buyers this year are on a payment plan, many more than in years past.

Fans can divide the cost into six, interest-free monthly installments. Bass said there has also been talk of instituting a year-long plan that would encompass football, basketball and baseball seasons in one plan.

So while it hasn't been easy, Bass said ECU has weathered the storm thanks to its mass of outside support.

"It's been a struggle," he said. "We've had to communicate with our donors and our season ticket purchasers. We've had to listen to them, assure them that we're going to work with them to get through tough financial times. It's been a chore, and I can't emphasize enough the loyalty and the love that our donors have for this program."

"We've tightened our belts, squeezed every dollar."

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@coxnc.com or (252)329-9595.

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NC lawmakers give details of delayed state budget

The Associated Press

Monday, August 03, 2009

RALEIGH, N.C. — North Carolina legislators are releasing copies of the two-year state budget hashed out after weeks of negotiations.

The public and rank-and-file members of the General Assembly will get a good look Monday at the details of the month-late budget bill.

One of the key details is how many hundreds of state positions would be eliminated if lawmakers pass the budget this week as expected and Gov. Beverly Perdue signs it into law. Perdue had said for weeks she wouldn't accept a budget that damaged public schools.

Earlier House and Senate proposals sought to save more than $300 million annually by eliminating funding for 6,000 teacher positions. That idea was replaced with a deal giving schools flexibility to use textbook or other money to hire as many teachers as possible.

Aug 03, 2009 - 07:17 a.m. EDT

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ECU notes: Club baseball earns national attention

ECU News Services
Sunday, August 02, 2009

More than 40 million children play organized sports, and fewer than 5 percent who graduate from high school will play a varsity college sport.

But students at East Carolina University have the opportunity to continue playing the games they love through club sports.

One club sport at ECU, Club Baseball, has been turning heads across the country.

The National Club Baseball Association has recognized ECU’s Club Baseball program as one of the top 20 programs in the country. In early June, the NCBA released a poll ranking ECU No. 17 out of 118 teams. Schools that shared top 20 recognition included the universities of Arizona, Maryland, Florida, Oregon, Texas and Virginia Tech.

The popularity and prestige of ECU Club Baseball has grown rapidly, and with popularity comes a sense of privilege for those students who hold one of the 23 spots on the team roster.

“Each year, close to 70 kids will try out for the team,” Gray Hodges, assistant director of Club Sports, said.

This year, several players warranted the national spotlight for the first time in program history.

On June 18, the National Club Baseball Association released the official listing of 2009 club sports All-Americans. First-team NCBA All-Americans from ECU were second baseman Casey Ide and starting pitcher Patrick Williams. Second-team NCBA All-American honors were awarded to outfielder Nicholas Morrison and relief pitcher Andrew Danak.

In addition, the NCBA recognized several Pirates as top hitting and pitching talents: Nicholas Morrison for leading in home runs (five), Jerrod Bornman for runs scored (40) and stolen bases (28), and Dennis Butts for RBIs (36).

ECU’s team competed in the 2009 National Club Baseball Regional Tournament in Chesapeake, Va., in May. Although the Pirates ultimately suffered a season-ending loss to the University of Maryland, ECU succeeded in making it closer to the club World series than ever before.

Coach Joe Caracci is in his fourth year leading the program. Caracci said his program is “highly organized and that the players practice year-round.”

“The kids appreciate how serious we take it,” he said. “This program is not only an outlet to play a competitive sport but adds structure to their school day.

"I've learned a lot from the guys. I'm very appreciative for the group I have and how dedicated the Club Sports office has been in supporting our program."

Williams is glad to have the opportunity to play baseball in college. Born and raised in Aurora, the rising senior who majors in industrial distribution and technology, has been part of the club baseball team since his freshman year.

“I hate to hang up my cleats just yet,” said the pitcher whose fastball was clocked at 93 mph this year. “I guess when I’m done playing in college, I’ll play softball or something. I think that’s what you do when you get older.”

To learn more about the ECU Club Baseball team, visit [http://www.ecu.edu/org/clubbaseball/](http://www.ecu.edu/org/clubbaseball/).

Researcher to study youth health curriculum
An ECU pediatrician will study the effectiveness of a school-based approach to tackling obesity and encouraging healthy lifestyles, thanks to a three-year, $300,000 grant.

Dr. Suzanne Lazorick, an assistant professor of pediatrics and public health at the Brody School of Medicine at ECU, is leading a study of a youth wellness education program called MATCH, or Motivating Adolescents with Technology to Choose HEALTH. It will evaluate the effectiveness and feasibility of this innovative middle school-based obesity intervention in eastern North Carolina.

MATCH was started in 2006 by Tim Hardison, a science teacher at Williamston Middle School. It incorporates wellness themes into the existing health and science curriculum and includes goal-setting, physical activity and motivational strategies to help students reach a healthy weight.

Lazorick will study the results of the program among seventh graders at schools in Ayden, Robersonville, Hertford County, Washington County and Williamston by assessing body mass index measurements, eating choices and other factors.

Lazorick's research project begins this month, will last through June 2012 and is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Physician Faculty Scholars program. She is one of 15 scholars nationwide to be funded by the program this year and is the first ECU researcher to receive this award.

The Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation has funded the development of Hardison's curriculum.

Lazorick works with several statewide efforts for obesity prevention in North Carolina and has served on several state committees for the Division of Public Health.

Part of her clinical work is at the ECU Pediatric Healthy Weight Research and Treatment Center.

She is the daughter of longtime Greenville residents Don and Sylvia English. Her mother is a retired nurse who worked as a diabetes clinical nurse specialist. Her father is a yoga instructor.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans. More information about the foundation is online at http://www.rwjf.org.

Physician to chair wellness trust fund

Dr. Charles Willson, an ECU pediatrician, is the new chair of the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission.

Willson was unanimously elected at the commission's July 16 meeting.

He succeeds Gov. Beverly Perdue, who has chaired the commission since its inception in 2001. Willson has served on the commission since 2001, has chaired the Research, Education and Prevention Task Force and remains a member of the Obesity and Wellness Task Force.

"Dr. Chuck Willson has been a committed and highly valued member of the commission and a passionate advocate for the health of North Carolina's citizens," Perdue said. "I am confident that the commission with continue its critical mission with the benefit of his exceptional leadership."

A pediatrician and dedicated child advocate, Willson is a clinical professor of pediatrics at the Brody School of Medicine at ECU and serves as co-director of the Center for Children with Complex and Chronic Conditions. He also worked for 19 years in private practice.

Willson has served on the Executive Committee of the N.C. Pediatric Society since 1986 and is a former president of the North Carolina Medical Society. He also is a member of the N.C. American Medical Association delegation. Last year, the Medical Alumni Association of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill presented Willson a distinguished service award.

Willson has been involved in the development of a physician-led primary care case management model for Medicaid patients in North Carolina.

He held the position of medical director for the Community Care Plan of Eastern Carolina for 12 years, serving more than 100,000 patients in 27 counties.

Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, the Health and Wellness Trust Fund has invested $199 million to support preventive health initiatives and $102 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs.

Get more information online at www.healthwellnc.com.
ECU upgrades on-campus security

Chris Lavender
2009-08-01 15:38:36

GREENVILLE — East Carolina University’s residence halls will have a new look when students return in late August.

“It’s a good summer for construction,” said Aaron Lucier, director of operations and associate director of Campus Living. “Every summer, we take advantage of the three months we have to do as much work as possible.”

All 15 of ECU’s residence halls are being upgraded with new features that include electronic locking systems and exterior wheelchair ramps. Full renovations are under way at Scott Hall on College Hill, a project that will be completed in fall 2010.

When completed, Scott will be the largest dorm on campus with the capacity to house 613 students. The building’s previous eight-person suites will be converted to two, four-person suites with a bathroom for every four students.

When students return to the residence halls next month, they will no longer need a traditional key to access their assigned hall. Instead, they will use an electronic key to gain access through an exterior door.

Lucier said the upgrade will enhance the residence halls’ security systems, which includes security cameras monitored by ECU police. ECU officials will be able to quickly deactivate lost or electronic stolen keys and track in real-time anyone who enters or attempts to enter a building.

The system can also lockdown residence halls to protect residents in emergency situations.

“This system does not necessarily change what we do — our doors have always been secure and locked 24 hours a day — but it does enhance it,” Lucier said. “People view electronic security as being more secure, and anything we can do to increase both the reality and perception of security on campus is a good thing.”

Two residence halls, Jones and Aycock, are being fitted with fire protection sprinkler systems. The project brings ECU closer to its goal of having sprinkler systems in all residential buildings by 2012.

ECU spokeswoman Christine Neff contributed to this report. Chris Lavender can be reached at (252) 559-1078 or clavender@freedomenc.com.
Historically black college alums network with students

By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector

Sunday, August 02, 2009

Graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities are fiercely loyal to their schools. And their sports teams.

Hang out with a crowd of them for more than 10 minutes and you're sure to hear about how Greenville Mayor Pro-Tem Mildred Council's Shaw University Bears are going to trounce your team. Or a joke about how a J.H. Rose High School coach's Fayetteville State University Broncos are always bringing up the rear.

They're also on a mission to ensure their alma maters are a visible option to high school graduates and returning students. And though many local alumni chapters are active advocates for their own schools, they joined together for the first time this year to host a back-to-school cookout Sunday afternoon at River Park North.

Patti Sanders-Smith, a Winston-Salem State University alum, is the president of the HBCU Coalition of Pitt County. The organization has been in existence from the mid-1990s but she said they've experienced a renewed commitment in the past year. They plan to hold three annual events: the cookout, a college fair and some type of community-service project.

"We want to give people in Greenville another option," Saunders-Smith explained. "HBCUs aren't for everyone, but some students need that smaller, nurturing environment."

While young people snacked on chicken, hotdogs or hamburgers, the elders spoke about the things they were able to accomplish with a HBCU education — sometimes viewed as easier or inferior to larger schools, Sanders-Smith said. She said that's simply not true. By attending an HBCU, graduates say there's a built in network of potential mentors and employers.

"We want to say we're here for you, and we can help you," Council said. "To buy a book, to help find a scholarship, as a shoulder to cry on. Sometimes there are issues you have to deal with."

Council talked about her achievements, and so did Greenville Police Department Chief William Anderson. He and his wife Sandra Anderson, a housing administrator for Greenville, attended Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach.

Alumni and students also represented North Carolina Central University, Elizabeth City State University, St. Augustine College, Oakwood College and Tuskegee University.

There were around 50 people present at the height of the five-hour event. Saunders-Smith said when they arrived to set up at noon, rain was pouring and the wind whipped under the picnic shelter.

"The rain kind of put a damper on it," she said. "But we decided to tough it out."

Regardless of reduced numbers, the message was loud and clear.

"All of us older ones owe a debt to the black colleges," said Bishop A.H. Hartsfield, a Greenville resident who attended N.C. A&T University. "They helped me through. I'd have never made it. Don't let them die, for God's sake. Keep them alive as long as possible."

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Pitt board to tackle parking at ECU football games

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Saturday, August 01, 2009

The Pitt County Board of Commissioners will discuss allowing East Carolina University football fans to use county-owned parking lots for home games when it meets at 9 a.m. Monday at the County Office Building.

Agenda items indicate that county staff is proposing to allow football fans to park in the county lot between Second Street and Third Street in downtown Greenville.

ECU would be in charge of cleaning the lots if the proposal is passed by the commissioners. The county could withdraw permission to use the lots within 30 days if there are any problems.

ECU is adjusting parking for football games because several lots are being used for new athletics fields and requested the use of the county-owned lots to give fans more parking space.

The commissioners also will discuss a naming policy for county facilities to determine how parks and public buildings are named for citizens who make contributions to Pitt County.

The commissioners will tour the Pitt County Detention Facility following the regular meeting to check out the recently opened expansion.

The board also will hear an update on Pitt County Schools from Superintendent Beverly Reep, discuss the inspections division fee schedule, the Candlewick Sanitary District and the County Home Road widening project that will put a turning lane near the Pitt County Schools and Recreation property.

Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9565.

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Laurels — To a jump in home sales in Pitt County between May and June. Low interest rates and a federal tax credit for first-time homeowners combined to bump nationwide home sales to the highest level since November, a trend reflected in Pitt County. Let's hope that progress is here to stay and the housing market will continue to rebound.

For the home teams

Laurels — To the successes of local baseball and softball teams in recent tournament play. Pitt County is known for its depth of teams in Little League, Cal Ripken, Babe Ruth, Jackie Robinson and American Legion baseball. And several Babe Ruth softball teams under the Pitt County Girl's Softball League earned state and regional titles this year — including the 16-and-under team now headed to the World Series in New Jersey. All are to be commended for a fantastic season.

Darts — To 35 Pitt County athletes making the long trip westward to compete in the Senior Games in San Francisco today through Aug. 15. Games involving local competitors include archery, badminton, bowling, golf, softball and basketball. We're proud of their accomplishments and wish them good luck and a safe return home — hopefully with plenty of hardware to show.

Darts — To the need for local officials of youth-league baseball games to call for improved sportsmanship among parents and other spectators. As difficult as it is to keep emotions in check during these intensely competitive ballgames, it's important to remember that these experiences help shape the lives and attitudes of the young athletes at the center of all the competition and attention. A few years ago, Greenville was named Sportstown USA by Sports Illustrated magazine. We should always strive also to be "Sportsmanship USA."

Laurels — To residents of a Greenville neighborhood for working with police and Pitt-Greenville CrimeStoppers to help fight crime. Homeowners in Chesapeake Woods subdivision, after forming a new neighborhood association, put up a matching $5,000 reward through CrimeStoppers for information about crimes in the area. The action reflects residents' frustration over break-ins and vandalism occurring in recent months. It's an appropriate response to Greenville Police Chief William Anderson's call for community involvement in crime prevention, and one that should be repeated in neighborhoods across the city.

Compiled by Mark Rutledge, writer/columnist for The Daily Reflector. Contact him at 329-9575 or via e-mail at mrutledge@coxnc.com
UNC review: All universities should seek efficiency

Saturday, August 01, 2009

A release of a report outlining the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's top-heavy administration could be a watershed moment for that institution. Assuming some heavy lifting can eliminate redundancies to improve efficiency, North Carolina's flagship school will strengthen the quality of its research and education.

Lawmakers and officials at the 15 other UNC campuses should monitor that progress intently, with an eye toward considering regular reviews of all member schools. If North Carolina can make its universities leaner as well as more effective, the entire state would benefit.

Shortly after taking office, UNC-Chapel Hill Chancellor Holden Thorp proposed a comprehensive study of the school's operations in an effort to become more effective and efficient. That initiative reflected the state's precarious budget situation and the likely loss of some funding, as well as the need to streamline a massive organization.

The full report, released July 22, identified millions in potential savings through changes in a $2 billion operating budget. It highlighted the fact that UNC spends more on administration than academics, and that bringing the rate of administrative expenses per student into line should be a priority.

The other UNC schools may not suffer from so large an imbalance as that which exists in Chapel Hill. East Carolina University, for instance, is fairly lean by comparison. But they all might benefit from a similar examination of expenses and efficiency.

The UNC-Chapel Hill study was conducted by a global business consulting firm and funded by private donations for an undisclosed sum, so the cost of expanding such an overview to other schools or conducting it through the state would be significantly different.

That said, considering a rolling, series of auditing two UNC schools each year might be interesting fodder for discussion in Raleigh. Were the state to fund such reviews, it might allow for improved practices at one school to be implemented at others and for efficiency to be given greater prominence as a system-wide goal.

Even North Carolina's public universities, a model for other states, can be improved through thoughtful examination. Doing so regularly merits consideration.

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Pesticide poisoning demands attention

By Ginger Livingston
The Daily Reflector

Friday, July 31, 2009

Last week's hospitalization of seven Lenoir County men for suspected pesticide poisoning brought attention to an under-reported and often unrecognized problem, state health experts said.

The seven farm workers who became sick last week had applied a pesticide to a home garden they were tending then ate a watermelon from the patch. When all became sick at the same time, they were taken to a local hospital, where they told doctors about the watermelon.

Most confirmed pesticide poisonings are accidental, caused by people who didn't follow the chemical's instructions or who were unaware they were being used, according to data from the N.C. Pesticide Illness and Injury Surveillance Program and other agencies.

The N.C. division of Public Health, Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology Branch started the surveillance program in 2006 because officials believed the state needed to monitor the effects of pesticide use due to the amount of pesticides used in North Carolina compared to other states. Data collection about possible pesticide poisonings started in January 2007. In the first two years, the program has found:

1,536 cases were reported;
637 were confirmed poisonings;
137 were suspected work-related cases
68 were confirmed work-related poisonings;
Three deaths were confirmed; an accidental child poisoning in 2008 and two suicides.

Sheila Higgins, a state occupational health nurse who collects the surveillance data, said she believes there are more cases that go unreported.

"Our agricultural prominence and the type of crops out there, I would think the risk is substantial, but we're not seeing in the numbers," she said.

A 2006 report from the American Association of Poison Control Centers states centers may only collect 52 percent of any type of poisoning data because it is a voluntary system. Doctors and other health care providers are required to report suspected poisoning cases, but Higgins said some don't know they are required to do so while others may not correctly diagnosis symptoms as pesticide poisoning.

Pitt County Memorial Hospital has treated 11 suspect cases of pesticide poisoning in its emergency room since early 2008, a hospital spokesman said.

Of the 68 work-related poisoning cases identified in North Carolina, 25 percent occurred on a farm, Higgins said. The rest happened in manufacturing, office settings, service establishments such as parks or during emergency response situations. Sixty percent of the workers who were exposed were applying or mixing and loading the pesticides, according to Higgins' data.

Robin Tutor, interim director of the N.C. Agromedicine Institute, a University of North Carolina center located at East Carolina University, is working to prevent those poisonings by educating people about handling pesticides.

North Carolina farmers who use pesticides are heavily regulated, Tutor said. North Carolina requires users of agricultural and commercial pesticides to receive yearly certification through N.C. Cooperative Extension, Tutor said. Her organization makes additional programming available through AgriSafe-NC, a program designed to provide medical exams and wellness education for agricultural workers.
"We find most people will read application directions but they don't read about the safety equipment necessary," she said. Respirators, gloves, protective clothing are important to tools for handling pesticides but often aren't fitted properly. Tutor and others in her organization will meet with pesticide handlers on-site to show them how to properly fit the equipment.

"We want people to know they need to take the time to protect themselves," Tutor said.

Since the early 1990s Iowa and North Carolina along with the National Cancer Institute, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have conducted the Agricultural Health Study of nearly 90,000 private and commercial pesticide applicators and their families to learn about the short-term and long-term effects of pesticide exposure. An updated report released earlier this year found:

Rates of prostate cancer are higher among farmers participating in the study compared to the general North Carolina population of men the same age.

It appears long-term pesticide exposure may increase risk of developing Parkinson's disease, a neurodegenerative disease.

It appears there is a link between diabetes and some types of pesticides.

"We don't want to scare people," Tutor said. "The point is to use good sense, your good hygiene and protect yourself."

This advice applies not only in the commercial and agricultural users but to home gardeners, she said. People who use off-the-shelf brands of pesticide should immediately change clothes and wash them separately from their family's laundry. They should take a shower before touching children or pets. Shoes should be cleaned and left outside so pesticides aren't embedded in carpeting.

"Pesticides are called pesticides because they kill things," Tutor said. "It can harm you too."

Contact Ginger Livingston at glivingston@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9570.

Farmers and commercial pesticide applicators can have their safety equipment properly fitted by contacting the N.C. Agromedicine Institute at (252) 744-1000.

Homeowners who was to learn more about pesticide safety can download the Environmental Protection Agency's "A Citizen's Guide to Pest Control" at http://www.epa.gov/oppefed1/Publications/Cit_Guide/citguide.pdf.

Visit www.toxicfreenc.org/informed to learn about non-toxic pesticide management.

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Parents file hazing lawsuit

Lenoir-Rhyne sophomore died

BY ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer

When the blindfold came off, fraternity pledge Harrison Kowiak stood in a pitch-black field. He was ordered to run to the other end and find a rock with his name on it. Doing so was all that stood between him and membership in the fraternity.

As he ran, he was repeatedly pushed and tackled by the fraternity members he hoped to soon claim as brothers. Instead, he suffered head injuries and died hours later.

These details, alleged in a lawsuit filed Friday in Durham County Superior Court, are part of a narrative explaining the death of Kowiak, a 19-year-old sophomore at Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory.

"Once you ran the gantlet... once you picked up your rock, you were a member of the fraternity," said David Kirby, a Raleigh attorney representing Kowiak's family. "This was supposed to be a fun evening and an evening of accomplishment. But it turned into an evening of complete tragedy."

His parents are seeking more than $10,000 in damages and have named the Theta Chi fraternity, the university, two Lenoir-Rhyne administrators and 21 fraternity members in the lawsuit. The suit was filed in Durham partly because a Durham resident, Guy Crabtree, is the administrator of Kowiak's estate.

The 27-page complaint accuses the fraternity of a long history of hazing and claims the university didn't do enough to enforce anti-hazing policies. A Lenoir-Rhyne spokeswoman
declined to comment Friday.

Kowiak was one of two pledges involved in the event, which capped off Theta Chi's "Hell Week," according to the lawsuit.

It claims that on Nov. 17, Kowiak suffered a severe brain hemorrhage after being repeatedly knocked to the ground. Kowiak, of Tampa, Fla., was a golf team member who weighed 160 pounds; some of the fraternity members who engaged in the event, known as "bulldogging," were football players weighing more than 250 pounds, according to the lawsuit.

Kowiak and the other pledge had been told to wear light-colored clothes. The fraternity brothers wore dark clothing and were barely visible, the lawsuit states.

"He was hit so hard he couldn't physically get up," said Kirby, the Kowiak family attorney. "They literally drug him over the finish line. It was the kind of thing hazing policies were adopted to prevent."

Further, the fraternity brothers didn't take Kowiak's injuries seriously at first, accusing him of faking, the lawsuit alleges. They eventually drove him to a regional medical center and told workers there Kowiak was hurt while playing football or basketball, the suit claims.

Kowiak was eventually flown to Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte and died the next day.

No charges pressed

Local authorities investigated, and in January, Catawba County District Attorney Jay Gaither declined to press charges against any of the fraternity members.

"I don't think anyone ever believed that group of people went out there with the intent to harm this individual," Capt. Roy Brown of the Catawba County Sheriff's Office said Friday.

The university and the Theta Chi fraternity each has anti-hazing policies prohibiting intentional actions that produce "mental or physical discomfort."

Theta Chi has 11 chapters at North Carolina universities, including at UNC-Chapel Hill, Duke University, N.C. State and Wake Forest.

Dale Taylor, executive director of the national Theta Chi organization, said Friday that he had not yet seen the lawsuit and thus could not comment.

Kowiak received both academic and athletic scholarship money to attend Lenoir-Rhyne, Kirby said. He grew up in New Jersey rooting for the New York Yankees and Knicks, and liked snowboarding and skateboarding in addition to golf, according to a November Tampa Tribune account of a memorial service held for Kowiak on the Lenoir-Rhyne campus.

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NCSU band bound for Ireland again

BY NAUREEN KHAN, Staff Writer

Pack the trombones and start reading your James Joyce, N.C. State band members. The Ireland trip is back on.

About 150 members of the university's band and chorus will be marching in Dublin's St. Patrick's Day Parade in March after all. Interim chancellor James Woodward came to their rescue after the band director and the head of the music department canceled the trip last month.

Administrators said traveling overseas might look bad when the campus faces an uncertain budget and is caught up in controversy surrounding the hiring of former first lady Mary Easley. Band members were upset, particularly because they were paying for the trip themselves.

The cancellation didn't sit well with Woodward, either.

"He was not happy with that decision," said NCSU spokesman Mick Kulikowski. "I think his thing is that the undergraduate experience is really important, and budget cuts or no budget cuts, that has to be preserved. Plus, the fact that there's not any state money going into it anyway."

Band director Paul Garcia said Friday that a News & Observer story last week led him and other administrators to "re-evaluate the policies that were in place."

Band members were ecstatic.

"I've been checking my e-mail every day ... just hoping something would change," said Megan Myers, a rising junior who plays the alto saxophone. "It's very exciting. It just makes the trip even more worth it now that we had to work to get it back."

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School officials fear H1N1 virus

Worry is that pandemic flu will thrive among gathering throngs

BY SARAH AVERY, Staff Writer

As schools and colleges prepare to welcome students back into session this month, they face an unpredictable yet unavoidable disruption -- pandemic flu.

The H1N1 virus has been circulating all summer, shutting down overnight camps and keeping doctors' offices busy. Now health officials are bracing for an even bigger spread of the novel virus as students of all ages congregate in the close quarters of buses, classrooms, dorms and cafeterias.
Complicating matters is the lag between the start of school and the anticipated October delivery date for the first, limited batch of vaccine.

"We're concerned about a second wave in September," Dr. Jeffrey Engel, state health director, said about the flu. "We know it's here now, and active. We're thinking all it's going to require [to spread] is crowding."

State health leaders -- along with officials from county health departments, public schools and area universities -- are drafting plans for handling large-scale flu outbreaks within their ranks.

Much depends on additional guidance from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which leads the public health response.

Last week, the CDC issued a list of who should receive the first inoculations in October, when between 120 million and 160 million doses of vaccine are expected to be delivered. Pregnant women, people who tend babies under 6 months old, and health-care workers who treat patients will stand first in line for the initially tight supply.

Among those also considered high priority are children and young adults up to the age of 24. As a result, flu shot clinics may be planned at schools and colleges as the vaccine becomes available.

And the clinics would likely run twice, because the new vaccine calls for two shots -- an initial inoculation and a booster about 21 days later to ensure protection against the new virus. Those shots are in addition to the regular seasonal flu jab, which must be given separately.

Wake County health officials are discussing how to run mass vaccination clinics for the first time at schools, and are talking with area pediatricians about the best approach for reaching the estimated 140,000 public school children in the county and thousands of others who are homeschooled or attend private academies.

Dr. Peter J. Morris, medical director for Wake County Human Services, said one idea is to divide the duties, with mass clinics targeting children at schools, and pediatricians concentrating on preschool children and youngsters who have complicating illnesses.

"We're all brainstorming," Morris said, noting that the scale of the H1N1 vaccination drive is likely to dwarf the typical demand for seasonal flu shots. About 40 percent to 50 percent of children usually get vaccinated.

No one knows, however, how much pandemic flu vaccine will be shipped and when.

"The details are just not clear at this point," said Dr. Mary Covington, assistant vice chancellor for Campus Health Services at UNC-Chapel Hill.

She and others said the unpredictable nature of the expected outbreak makes planning a challenge, but at least one factor appears unchanged. So far, the virus has not mutated into a more lethal strain. Most people who have been infected with the bug have had mild to moderate symptoms.

In addition, she said, it continues to respond well to anti-viral drugs that ease symptoms, and such drugs are especially helpful for people who are at high risk of complications. Counties all have stockpiles of the anti-virals in case retail supplies grow scarce.

As a result, worst-case scenarios of massive school closings and business shut-downs are not at the top of response plans.

Instead, contingencies are being set up to function with elevated absentee rates among students, faculty and support workers, while officials drum the message that people should
stay home when they’re sick, wash hands regularly, and cover coughs and sneezes.

Though the virus has been widely apparent in North Carolina this summer -- state officials estimate as many as 30,000 people have been infected, with 554 confirmed cases and eight deaths -- Wake County schools have had few troubles this summer among year-round programs.

"It's been one of the smoothest openings," said Michael Evans, chief communications officer for Wake schools.

Still, there are thorny issues to be ironed out for the fall, particularly for universities and residential academies, where students cannot simply be sent home to recover for a week.

Sick students will be told to isolate themselves in their dormitories if they live on campus, and some arrangements will be set up to deliver box meals or otherwise ensure that ailing students aren’t lining up in cafeterias.

But there won’t be wholesale closures, especially with the virus primarily causing moderate illness.

A small taste of that complication arose last month at Duke University, which shut down a residential camp for 260 academically talented teens after more than 25 of them either tested positive for flu or had symptoms.

Before the camp session was canceled, the sick children were isolated in a separate dorm and tended to as best as possible. Once the decision was made to close the session, parents arrived from far and wide, since many of the children lived out of state. At least two were from foreign countries.

"If someone is sick, you’re not supposed to put them on an airplane," said David Jarmul, associate vice president for news and communications at Duke. He said university officials worked to make housing arrangements for the sick campers while they awaited their parents or recovered enough to fly home.

Dr. Christopher Woods, an infectious disease expert at Duke who worked closely with the camp officials on the closure, said shutting down operations is not a viable option for colleges.

"It’s a different situation when you have older, young adults who are not easily gathered and sent home," Woods said. "Our focus is on maintaining operations as best as possible."

At the same time, he said, every thing could change if the virus suddenly began triggering more severe illness.

"I think we’re in a good position globally to detect that," Woods said, referring to the geographic pattern of influenza viruses that generally hit in the Southern Hemisphere before arcing northward into the United States.

Having that head start on the flu’s activity is about all local health officials, school planners and a wary public can hope for.

"It’s going to be an interesting year, that’s for sure," said Judy Butler, community health services supervisor for the Orange County Health Department.

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If the flu strikes

Stay home if you have flu symptoms:
• Fever
• Headache
• Extreme tiredness
• Dry cough
• Sore throat
• Nasal congestion
• Body aches

Seek medical care if symptoms escalate:
• Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
• Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
• Sudden dizziness
• Confusion
• Severe or persistent vomiting
• Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

SOURCE: N.C. Division of Public Health

H1N1 shot priority

• Pregnant women
• People who tend babies under the age of 6 months
• Health care workers and emergency responders
• Children and young adults up to 24 years old
• People who have chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes and compromised immune systems

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
New Benefits Help Veterans Go to College
The new GI Bill will help veterans—and their families—pay college tuition

By Anna Mulrine
Posted August 3, 2009

The U.S. government was not kind to its returning World War I veterans. Former troops were cast out of work when the Great Depression hit. Denied war bonuses that could have ameliorated their plight, tens of thousands of veterans and their families marched on Washington in 1932 to demand government support. President Herbert Hoover promptly ordered them suppressed by the same Army in which they had served.

It was this callous treatment that Congress had in mind when it passed the original GI Bill on the heels of World War II. The law was designed to offer a constructive pursuit—earning a college education—to millions of returning veterans, largely in the hopes of avoiding the sort of violent upheaval the nation had seen in the previous decade. It worked, and in the course of providing college education for millions of returning vets, it also stirred a social revolution, creating a solid foundation for a middle-class America, says Glenn Altschuler, professor of American studies at Cornell University and author of The GI Bill: A New Deal for Veterans.

The family plan. Under the new GI Bill passed by Congress in 2008, another generation of war veterans—and their families—will begin receiving expanded educational assistance this year. The benefits are considerable—more than some Defense Department officials, who were concerned about the possibility of U.S. troops leaving the military to take advantage of the bill, had backed. The federal government will cover tuition and fees for vets at any public university. If they choose private universities, the government will cover the equivalent of the cost of the state's most expensive public university. The law also gives a $1,000 stipend for books and a fairly hefty monthly grant for room and board, equal to the military's housing allowance. Perhaps most striking, troops can transfer these benefits to their spouses and children, a measure that had been proposed by World War II widows—and promptly rejected by Congress.

About 100,000 student vets and their families are expected to take part in the program this school year. They will be further aided because some 575 private universities have joined
what's known as the Yellow Ribbon program, in which the institutions have agreed to offer grants that will cover the difference between their own pricier tuition and that of state schools. To encourage schools to sign up, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will pick up half of the cost of the program.

But despite these benefits, some hurdles to student veterans remain. The cost of attending even the priciest public universities in some states is so low that vets will qualify for little federal reimbursement if they choose to attend the far more expensive private schools.

And the recession has reduced the endowments and income of some colleges to such an extent that they now are not able to make up the difference in grants or take part in programs like Yellow Ribbon.

The legislation also has some puzzling loopholes. Thousands of National Guard members who have served on active duty for years, for example, will not be eligible because they were called to service under Title 32, a measure that governs response to domestic emergencies or homeland-security missions. Congressional officials attribute such oversights to hurried negotiations in the run-up to last year's vote on the bill, and defense officials say that they plan to offer a legislative fix in the 2011 budget.

In the meantime, historians say that although the new GI Bill might not result in the sort of sweeping social change that was ushered in more than half a century ago by the sheer numbers of returning vets, "it has the potential," says Altschuler, "to transform lives of young service members and their families." The challenge now, add student veterans, will be making sure that campuses provide the sorts of services that will help battle-hardened soldiers adjust to student life. Brian Hawthorne, 24, regional director of Student Veterans of America and an undergraduate at George Washington University in Washington, says that good mental-health care on campus will be key. So, too, the Iraq war veteran adds, will be building a sense of community with the incoming freshmen and the older vets who are just beginning their college careers. "This fall, you're going to see the largest influence of vets on college campuses since Vietnam," says Hawthorne. "We'll be changing the landscape of American classrooms."

Tags: tuition | veterans | paying for college
Jobless grad sues college for $70,000
NYC woman claims Bronx school’s career center didn’t help her find jobs
The Associated Press
updated 6:30 a.m. ET, Mon., Aug 3, 2009

NEW YORK - A New York City woman who says she can’t find a job is suing the college where she earned a bachelor’s degree.

Trina Thompson filed a lawsuit last week against Monroe College in Bronx Supreme Court. The 27-year-old is seeking the $70,000 she spent on tuition.

Thompson says she's been unable to find gainful employment since she received her information technology degree in April.

She says the Bronx school's Office of Career Advancement hasn't provided her with the leads and career advice it promises.

Monroe College spokesman Gary Axelbank says Thompson's lawsuit is completely without merit.

The college insists it helps its graduates find jobs.

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