A trusted guide — ECU to hang onto its media books

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector

Monday, August 03, 2009

This is the second of a three-part series detailing how East Carolina's athletic department is faring during these tough economic times.

For roughly the 25th consecutive year, Tom McClellan spent the summer churning out more than 100 biographical sketches of college football players.

McClellan has waded through more than 100 hometowns, heights, weights and career bests. He's updated all of the team's records, statistical leaders and letter-winners. An admitted sucker for sports numbers, the East Carolina University director of media relations had no trouble filling all of the 208 pages he was allotted for the 2009 ECU football media guide.

Still awaiting its final printing last Monday, McClellan was hammering out a fourth edit of the book, which was being distributed at last Thursday's Conference USA video conference. The troubled economy has already taken its toll on college athletics across the country, so this summer, McClellan is happy to have a media guide at all.

At handfuls of other schools, he would have downloaded the information onto a Web page. The thought makes him cringe.

While it might be an archaic notion as printed materials near obsolescence, McClellan thinks it's much better for business when reporters covering ECU football games have media guides at their fingertips.

"What really kills me about the way things are headed ... is I have a hard time taking the service element away, and telling a media person to go look it up on the Web, or here's a CD," said McClellan, whose sports information offices have felt the financial pinch in many ways. But media guides for all sports will continue to roll off the presses for the Pirates.

"If I can give somebody something that already has all the information they need, they can do their job more efficiently," McClellan said.

Some of the nation's most storied football programs have already nixed football guides for good, including Ohio State, Michigan and Wisconsin in the Big Ten and in ECU's Conference USA, Marshall and very likely UCF and Rice.

"Cutting out your media guides is an unusual decision based on the short term," ECU director of athletics Terry Holland said. "But it's certainly one that we've all discussed, so I guess those schools were closer to the point of saying this is something they wanted an excuse to do anyway. We weren't at that particular stage."

If the trend caught on and media guides were wiped out entirely to help cut costs, McClellan feels it would have a lasting negative impact.

"I'm a big believer that this business is based on providing a service," he said. "I always want to be in a position to help people who cover us, people that are part of our staff that use it as a resource tool, coaches and student-athletes."

Instead of a traditional media guide, for example, Marshall will publish what it called eight-page recruiting guides for each sport, but everything else is headed to the Web.

ECU will cut back on the total page counts for many of its guides and will also trim down the total number
produced for each sport, including football. The men’s and women’s basketball guides will face page and circulation cuts.

It seems time is moving backward for McClellan in that sense. The first media guide he worked on was the Sam Houston State women’s volleyball guide back in 1985. He still keeps a copy of it in a brief case in his office. The guide — which is little more than a six-page pamphlet — is one of thousands in McClellan’s office.

But like most SID, the most important media guide to McClellan is the one that just came back from the printer, the 2009 ECU football guide. The difference in pages from his first one to the current is 202 pages.

"It's evolved over time, just like anything else," said McClellan, who has held media relations positions with Sam Houston, Stetson, Georgia Southern and ECU. "Football guides are the labor of love. They're the ones that are the most voluminous, have the most detail, the most information, and require the most work. The most research. They're also the most rewarding."

As a kid, McClellan did what lots of young sports fans did. He wrote to different teams requesting a copy of their current media guide and most obliged. In college, he took it a step further when he used a professional-looking letterhead and envelope to get the guides he wanted. Mostly, he collected pro baseball and football guides, and admits he kept them for a long time.

But evidence is everywhere about how different things really are now. Every C-USA school has planned at least some cuts in terms of media guides. Overall, the league has also announced an attempted 4 percent reduction in its overall operating budget. Holland said ECU athletics has aimed to trim 8 percent from this year's operating budget of $24.75 million.

Included in the changes for both C-USA and ECU are hiring and salary freezes along with cuts in travel and changes in media day formats.

Other than the annual spring conference meeting, C-USA will no longer have any in-person meetings. In fact, last Thursday, C-USA staged its first interactive C-USA media day, as the league’s coaches and selected players fielded questions in a video conference format.

The number of people allowed to travel with C-USA teams will be cut in many sports, including football (66 travelers allowed), men's soccer (18) and women's soccer (20).

Even injured players will no longer make road trips.

Also, C-USA will trim the number of teams playing in postseason tournaments in baseball, women's soccer, men's soccer, softball and volleyball. The women's and men's basketball postseason tournaments will now be combined.

A mere glance across the NCAA landscape suggests those changes, and some much bigger than that, are becoming the norm.

In McClellan's office, like every other college athletic office in the country, there is pressure to rethink the old ways of doing things. While his media guide is safe for now, he knows the issue of eliminating the books has been raised at ECU already. He hopes the school continues to insist on serving up its sports information the old-fashioned way.

"All I can do is point out the positives in what a media guide provides for not only media, but student-athletes, coaches, it helps for recruiting and it helps to tell the story of East Carolina," he said. "I would fight really hard (to keep them in print) but I understand the big picture and I understand some difficult decisions have to be made. The last thing I want to see is those things being extinct."

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Budget leaves cuts to schools

Negotiators agree to a deal that raises taxes $990 million and cuts education 4.8 percent.

BY BENJAMIN NIOLET AND KEVIN KILEY, Staff Writers

RALEIGH - Key Democrats in the House and Senate reached a budget deal Monday that would pass the task of cutting education spending to local school boards across the state.

The budget agreement, which would go to the full House and Senate for votes this week, would feature budget cuts across state spending and include about $990 million in new taxes that Democrats said were needed to offset the most painful cuts to education and social services. The actual budget document was not expected to be completed until late Monday. Budget negotiators warned of steep cuts that would put some state employees out of work.

All categories of state spending would see cuts ranging from 5 percent to 12 percent, said Sen. Linda Garrou, a Winston-Salem Democrat and budget negotiator. The carnage would have been worse without the new taxes.

"I can't tell you the number of teachers we would have lost if you did not have this additional revenue," she said.

The agreement would maintain class sizes from kindergarten to third grade and place the burden for making cuts in higher grades on local officials. The budget would implore local officials to try to protect classroom instruction but leaves it to them to determine whether class sizes would increase. Public education would see a 4.8 percent cut, $1.8 billion, from last year.

Gov. Beverly Perdue, also a Democrat, has said the budget should spare the classroom.

Republicans said the education cuts passed on to local schools would lead to the very cuts Perdue said she wouldn't accept.

"The state can't sit there and say we haven't cut 'x' number of positions when you've reduced funding such that positions will be cut," said Rep. Nelson Dollar, a Cary Republican.

"To me, it sounds like the legislative Democrats decided to increase class size, and the governor signed off on that, but she doesn't want to call it a class-size increase," said Sen. Phil Berger, an Eden Republican and the chamber's minority leader. "You can call it a smart way of dealing with the budget, or you can call it a cynical way of dealing with the public."

Republicans have been largely shut out of budget negotiations. They have been carefully tracking who voted for tax increases along the way, with next year's House and Senate races on their minds. Republicans have said the state had plenty of lower priorities that could have been cut without the need for new taxes.

"The principle of raising over $2 billion in taxes over the next two years at a time when our economy is in the worst shape it's been in in 30 years is a burden working families in our
state shouldn't have to bear," Dollar said.

The tax plan would raise the state sales tax by 1 cent and levy a surcharge on income tax for individuals earning at least $60,000 or couples earning at least $100,000. The state would also raise taxes on cigarettes and alcohol and apply the sales tax to certain online purchases.

The state is facing an unprecedented drop in revenue and is constitutionally required to produce a balanced budget. Democrats contend the deficit is $4.5 billion or more. Republicans say that figure is exaggerated and doesn't properly account for the $1.3 billion in federal stimulus money. Rep. Mickey Michaux, a Durham Democrat and senior budget writer, said the deep recession forced budget writers to make painful decisions.

The state will lose scores of vacant positions. Some state employees will lose their jobs, Michaux said.

"There will be live bodies in there," Michaux said of the job cuts.

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Budget: higher education

Submitted by inkjet on August 4, 2009 - 8:03am.

The budget for the University of North Carolina system includes $137.8 million in federal stimulus funds.

Notable cuts include:

* A $72.9 million cut that should target senior and middle management, centers and institutes, low-enrollment degree programs, faculty workload, speaker series and institutional trust fund balances.

* A tuition increase of the lesser of $200 or 8 percent at all UNC institutions to raise $34.8 million.

* Reduces the Legislative Tuition Grant for students attending private colleges by $100. The grant would go from $1,950 to $1,850 to save $3.2 million.

* Reduces funding to centers and institutes across the state by $12 million. The budget specifies reductions for specific campuses, but allows campus officials to decide how to make the cuts. The proposal also requires the UNC System to reduce funding for centers and institutes by another $1.7 million.

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Greenville Night Out event will highlight city’s crime prevention efforts

By Ginger Livingston
The Daily Reflector

Monday, August 03, 2009

Tonight, local law enforcement and its supporters are sending a message that crime won't get the best of the city of Greenville and its citizens.

The fourth annual Greenville National Night Out celebration is scheduled from 6-8:30 p.m. at the Town Common. This year’s event will feature helicopters from the Pitt County Sheriff's Office and the U.S. Coast Guard, displays from local law enforcement and an expected 65 vendors will have informational booths, games, inflatables and free food.

"It's guaranteed to be a fun time and it's totally free," said Lt. E.D. Carson with the Greenville Police Department and event coordinator. "In this economy, it is a perfect fit."

Started 26 years ago, National Night Out was created to heighten awareness about anti-crime activities in individual communities.

Target is a national sponsor of the event, Carson said, and the local store has provided gift cards that will be given away during raffles and can be won during bingo.

The Winterville Police Department also is holding a National Night Out event from 7-8:30 p.m. in front of Winterville Town Hall. Hot dogs and soft drinks will be served. There will then be a walk from town hall toward W.H. Robinson Elementary School, 2439 Railroad St., and back to the town hall.

The theme of this year's event is “Giving Crime a Going Away Party,” Carson said.

"The event is basically a celebration, celebrating all the efforts the community and the police department have worked on together this year to fight crime and prevent crime," he said.

"This is what we do to send the message to everyone who hasn't gotten the message yet, that the community and law enforcement are working together to address crime."

Activities such as the Police Athletic League, which gives youngsters a place to do homework and play after school while interacting with officers, and school year dances have given people a chance to interact informally with police and build relationships, Carson said. It's helped people become more comfortable with police officers and more willing to offer information when crime happens, he said.

In conjunction with National Night Out, Greenville Area Transit, the city bus system, will give out free rides throughout the day. The last pickup will be from Reade Circle at 9:20 p.m.

Contact Ginger Livingston at glivingston@coxnc.com or at (252) 329-9574.

National Night Out

WHEN: Tonight, 6-8:30 p.m.
WHERE: Greenville Town Common, First Street
WHAT: Free food, activities, information
GETTING THERE: Free GREAT Bus rides throughout the day.
Driving, parking information

Starting at 2 p.m. First Street from Washington to Holly streets will be closed for the National Night Out celebration at Greenville Town Common, Lt. E.D. Carson with Greenville Police Department said.

There will be handicapped parking spaces designated between Reade and Cotanche and First and Second streets when the activities begin at 6 p.m.

Driving, parking information

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Night out: Gathering helps forge lasting bonds

Tuesday, August 04, 2009

When citizens and officers gather tonight at the Greenville Town Common for the city's fourth National Night Out, they do so with a sense of urgency. Confidence in public safety has been undermined by violent crime and replaced with fear and anger.

Tonight's event represents a clear opportunity to build trust between the police department and those it serves. Greenville can send a powerful message with a large turnout as it continues to seek the most appropriate path to battle crime in this community.

In one of his first acts after taking office in 2006, Greenville Police Chief William Anderson announced plans for the city's first National Night Out event. He inherited a department needing to strengthen its relationship with citizens, and recognized the opportunity presented by holding a community gathering.

Tonight's event comes five weeks after the drive-by shooting deaths of two young men shocked the community. These were by-standers, two people standing on a sidewalk, who were gunned down without warning. The incident elicited outrage across the city and prompted a swift response, one that included increased patrols downtown and modified traffic patterns each weekend. Public safety quickly became the top priority of city officials and residents alike.

Despite its high profile, however, that incident represents a fraction of the crime in this community. Greenville may not rank near the top of Uniform Crime Statistics for assaults or property crimes as it once did, but residents do suffer a relatively high rate of violent crime and property damage from miscreants. It seems to be a regional destination for those intent on causing mischief.

There are numerous strategies, both in place and under consideration, that might help to lower the crime rate, but the most effective is an active, professional police department with strong ties to the community.

Those in uniform must know the families they protect and serve. And those who call the city home must trust law enforcement to be sensitive to their concerns and to respond swiftly when needed.

Greenville need not look far into the past to see the benefits of such a relationship. Last month, officers working with community tips and assisted by other agencies raided four convenience stores. Investigators contend the stores were hubs of illegal activity, but the case could not have proceeded without the help of citizens.

National Night Out may be only one time when police and residents come together — when relationship are formed and common goals are made apparent. — but few are more important for this community at this critical hour.

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Abuse by any name?

A lawsuit claiming that a 19-year-old sophomore at Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory died as a result of a violent hazing will again bring to the forefront the old and occasionally deadly initiation "custom" most often associated with college fraternities.

As some sort of test of loyalty or toughness or just for strange, misguided fun, some fraternity pledges have long had to endure rituals involving drinking, or beatings, or other forced traumas to earn membership.

In response to deaths or injuries from hazings, most states, including North Carolina, have passed laws making hazing illegal. But on some campuses, and it remains to be seen whether Lenoir-Rhyne is one of them, hazings seem to have been sort of tolerated with a collective shrug of the shoulders.

In this case, a 19-year-old student from Tampa, Fla., was, the suit alleges, repeatedly knocked to the ground by his brothers-to-be in the Theta Chi fraternity. According to the lawsuit, Harrison Kowiak was standing in a pitch-black field and ordered to run to the end of it to find a rock with his name on it. It was the last event of the fraternity's "Hell Week" last fall. The suit says Kowiak died of head injuries inflicted during the ordeal.

"He was hit so hard he couldn't physically get up," said David Kirby, the Raleigh attorney representing Kowiak's family. The university declined to comment to The News & Observer. Meanwhile, the Catawba County district attorney has declined to press charges.

Both Lenoir-Rhyne and Theta Chi have anti-hazing policies. So do other universities.

Universities should long ago have been much tougher upon discovering hazing, taking stronger punitive steps to end the rituals once and for all. It should not take a young person's death, and there have been some from hazing, and a possible huge monetary loss in a lawsuit, to get the attention of the institutions of which fraternities are a part.

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Correction

In the Aug. 2 editorial "UNC review," it was incorrectly stated that a report about expenditures at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found the school spends more on administration than academics. The rate of spending on administration exceeds that of academics, but UNC-Chapel Hill spends considerably less per student on administration than on academics. The full report is available at the UNC-Chapel Hill Web site.
Campus Contagion?

Colleges are bracing for the spread of swine flu this fall. How they plan to cope.

By Johannah Corinblatt | Newsweek Web Exclusive
Aug 3, 2009

During the 1918 flu pandemic, Harvard officials requested that professors report any suspicious coughers or sneezers. The university also canceled courses with more than 50 students and isolated likely cases in one dormitory. Between the start of classes and the Christmas recess that year, 227 patients with influenza flooded Harvard’s 10-bed Stillman Infirmary, and five died within its walls.

With another strain of the H1N1 virus threatening to invade the cozy quarters of college campuses this fall, Harvard and other universities are making emergency plans. But swine flu seems to be much less virulent and deadly than the 1918 Spanish influenza, and university physicians say the big issue this time around will be containing its spread.

The Centers for Disease Control decided this week to include 19- to 24-year-olds (about 24 million additional Americans) in the first-priority group for the H1N1 vaccine, which will most likely become available in mid-October. Many of the worst cases have struck this age group, and college students are especially susceptible since they live, learn, and socialize in congested settings, according to Dr. Jim Turner, the president of the American College Health Association. "Outbreaks always seem to start in the university and bleed out into the community," he says.

Tom Skinner, a CDC spokesman, says the CDC raised the recommended age cutoff for the vaccine from 18 to 24 in order to limit the impact and spread of the virus. But until it becomes available, it's crucial that colleges and universities make their own plans to limit the spread of the virus, he says.

In Massachusetts, one of the biggest burdens for colleges is the Department of Public Health's mandate that patients be isolated for seven days after the onset of illness, according to Dr. David Rosenthal, the director of Harvard’s university health services. "So, OK, where are we going to put them?" he says. Rosenthal hopes that the Department of Public Health will do away with the so-called "seven-day rule" before classes start since patients tend to "rapidly recover" within 48 hours.

To contain the virus, Harvard first plans to increase the number of beds in its Stillman Infirmary from 10 to 25. The next stage would involve finding beds in the neighborhood. Rosenthal says the university can accommodate
up to 165 patients in buildings around Harvard Square. After that, isolation will get trickier.

Many larger state schools won't even try to separate the sick from the well. With upwards of 20,000 students, UVA doesn't have the space to isolate the infected, says Turner, who is also UVA's director of student health. Instead, students will be sent back to their rooms with masks and instructions on hand-washing.

But at smaller schools like Skidmore, a liberal arts college in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., that enrolls about 2,500 students, isolation still remains an option. If it becomes necessary to separate ill students on campus, Skidmore plans to house them in Wiecking Hall, a three-story dormitory with individual heating and cooling units in each room, so recycled air does not travel through the building. (Although hotels often feature such systems, fresh air is harder to come by on most college campuses.)

While not every college can provide isolated bedrooms with nonrecycled air, university dining services across the country are working on increasing hygiene this fall. Harvard is stocking up on Purell dispensers. Volunteer students at UVA will get meals from the dining halls and deliver them to their sick classmates. In the event that Skidmore has to cancel classes and close dining services, the college will distribute Meals, Ready to Eat (commonly known as MREs). Although Skidmore has not yet purchased MREs, food purveyors have assured the college that there will be plenty of prepackaged beef teriyaki and meatloaf to go around if the need arises.

Still, the ideal solution would be for relatives or friends to come and pick up sick students, university officials say. Skidmore has asked, for example, that students provide two "geographically distinct" places they could go in case of an emergency. And Skidmore also plans to recommend that students "self-quarantine" at home if they exhibit symptoms before returning from summer vacation. Falling behind in coursework shouldn't pose too much of a problem, university officials say. Skidmore and other colleges plan to provide "distance learning"—via online lecture videos and notes—for sick students.

Of course, the vaccination would avert most of these problems, and coming up with a plan to administer the vaccine is now at the top of his to-do list, says UVA's Turner. In the meantime, UVA is "preparing for a surge," Turner says. During a seasonal flu outbreak, the university typically sees about 300 to 400 students. But with the CDC estimating a 40 percent attack rate over the next two years, Turner says as many as 8,000 students—in two or three waves—could inundate the school's infirmary. To accommodate such numbers, health officials have arranged to triage students through a large conference room.

As the start of school approaches, university physicians are watching what's happening in the Southern hemisphere because "that's where the next wave of flu will come in," Rosenthal says. But already Rosenthal says he sees no comparison in terms of virulence between swine flu and its ancestor. "Yes, there are going to be a lot of people who are going to get the H1N1," Rosenthal says. "But I think the severity is not going to be anywhere like the 1918 pandemic."

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