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Brody forum addresses national health care debate

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Monday, August 10, 2009

The debate over national health care reform continued Monday night at a forum sponsored by the State Employees Association of North Carolina at the Brody School of Medicine.

About 100 people listened to several panelists make presentations on the need for health care reform and some form of government-sponsored health care for the millions of uninsured and under-insured Americans in this country.

Dana Coop, president of SEANC, said the organizations is fighting for insurance options for the thousands of state employees in North Carolina whose only choice is Blue Cross/Blue Shield, the company that provides insurance to 96 percent of all North Carolinians.

"Blue Cross/Blue Shield is leading a national effort against health care reform," Coop said. "It's time we stand up and highlight these things that don't pass the sniff test."

Coop said the insurance company has a "sweetheart deal" with state government in the form of a no-bid contract to provide insurance to state employees.

"Health care needs to be a basic human right, it doesn't need to be for only people who can afford it," Coop said.

Chuck Stone, a former president of SEANC, said that 78 percent of the uninsured people in the state have jobs.

"Why are we even having a debate about insuring people who get up, go to work and are law-abiding citizens?" Stone asked.

The panel took questions from the audience that got heated when someone who was against any form of national health care took the microphone.

Larry Misser, a Greenville business owner, said that it could put him out of business to have to pay an extra $50,000 to provide health care for his employees.

"I am not for government health care," he said. "I don't want the government running something so important in my life."

Supporters of health care reform want individuals to be able to choose between a public option and whatever is available from their employer.

The SEANC is sponsoring 11 similar health care forums across the state this month.

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

By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector

Monday, August 10, 2009

Uptown Greenville will have to wait another month before it can count on any funding from the city, following a lively debate by City Council members Monday night.

The local nonprofit is requesting a contract with the city that would pay it $50,000 for services rendered for the current fiscal year only. City staff has recommended paying $25,000 to the organization for business recruitment and retention services, beautification efforts, events and promotion, and guidance for public infrastructure downtown.

City Manager Wayne Bowers noted that Uptown Greenville faces a $29,000 budget shortfall for the current calendar year. Executive Director Denise Walsh said that the request is appropriate regardless of economic stressors, and that 41 other North Carolina cities partially fund similar organizations.

The money would come from the Community Development Department’s budget. The Redevelopment Commission voted in June to fund ongoing façade grants through bond money this year, freeing up $25,000.

Councilman Max Joyner Jr., who said he himself is a member of Uptown Greenville, spoke out against the proposal immediately.

“This is the worst idea I’ve heard in the year and a half I’ve been on City Council,” he said. “Things are tough all over.”

Joyner said he’s heard from business owners and organizations citywide who would love funding but aren’t getting any. He said the city does plenty for that area.

Councilwoman Rose Glover agreed with his comments and said funding Uptown Greenville would set a dangerous precedent.

Councilman Calvin Mercer spoke in favor of a contract.

“What we’re being asked to do is make payment for services rendered,” he said. “The city does it all the time.”

Mercer highlighted events that Uptown Greenville provides that the city can’t afford or staff, like the Umbrella Market, Freeboot Fridays and PirateFest.

Both Councilmen Bryant Kittrell and Larry Spell had questions about what services in particular would be provided and if the Redevelopment Commission intended for those funds to aid Uptown Greenville.

Joyner made a motion to deny the funding request and Glover seconded it, but Spell introduced a substitute motion to continue the topic until September. It passed 5-1, with Joyner voting against the postponement.

Much less controversial was the unanimous vote purchasing land for a seventh fire-rescue station in the city. A 1.92-acre plot off Fire Tower Road will be purchased from Parker and Becky Overton for $440,000. The property is valued at $610,000 but the Overtons indicated the difference should be considered a donation.

Fire-rescue personnel and city staff hope to receive $1.5 million in stimulus funds to help pay for facility
construction. City Manager Wayne Bowers cautioned that the grant is very competitive but added, "We've got as good a chance as anyone else."

City Council members also voted to involve local Realtors in the West Greenville 45-Block Revitalization Area Affordable Housing Development Program. The program rehabilitates and constructs homes to be sold to first time homebuyers with low- to moderate-incomes.

Community Development Housing Administrator Sandra Anderson said the program has placed 18 homes on the market since its inception. There are eight houses for sale now that are not moving due to economic conditions, she said.

Realtors will help attract homebuyers and show the property and will be paid a 4 percent finder’s fee upon sale.

Joyner commented that it’s a lower cut than the usual finder’s fee, and called the program "a great idea." Kittrell, who works in commercial real estate, also applauded the inclusion of Realtors.

City Council will meet again at 7 p.m. on Thursday. Members also decided Monday to meet a third time this month, Aug. 24, in order to discuss crime across the city.

Contact Kathryn Kennedy at k kennedy@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9566.

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Breast-feeding may avert cancer

Study finds lower risk of early-onset breast cancer for those with a family history.

BY SARAH AVERY, Staff Writer

Women who have a family history of breast cancer could reduce their risk of developing early onset of the disease by 59 percent if they breast-feed their babies, scientists at UNC-Chapel Hill and other centers reported Monday.

The current research offers the strongest evidence yet that breast-feeding is a powerful cancer-prevention tool among high-risk women, specifically younger women who have not gone through menopause.

The benefit, which is more effective than taking a preventive regimen of the anti-cancer drug tamoxifen, appears to occur even when women breast-feed for a short period.

"The bottom line is this is really good news for women with a history of breast cancer," said Dr. Alison Stuebe, lead author of the study and an assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology in the Division of Maternal Fetal Medicine at UNC-Chapel Hill.

The study, which focused on the cancer risk for women prior to menopause, was published Monday in the Archives of Internal Medicine.

Breast-feeding advocates hailed the results as clear evidence that women should try to nourish their babies naturally. In North Carolina, about 76 percent of women initiate breast-feeding, but only 51 percent continue to eight weeks, according to the N.C. State Center for Health Statistics.

"I think this is huge," said Mary Overfield, a lactation consultant at WakeMed and an advocate with the N.C. Breastfeeding Coalition. "I have several friends who are breast cancer survivors, and you better believe they'd have done anything they could to cut their risk."

She said efforts to encourage women to try breast-feeding often focus on benefits to the baby, including fewer weight problems, allergies and ear infections.

Mothers also reap health advantages, notably a reduced risk of type 2 diabetes. Some studies had noted the lower risk of developing breast cancer, while other studies found no association.

Anything to cut risk

Catherine Kurmay, a mother of four in Apex, said she had banked on the earlier studies when she chose to breast-feed her first child seven years ago.

"It was the No. 1 reason," she said, noting that her aunt, grandmother and great-grandmother had breast cancer. "I wanted to cut my risk in any form or fashion."
Enlisting more than 60,000 participants from a massive study of nurses, the breast cancer arm of the study was specifically designed to explore links between breast-feeding and breast cancer.

Researchers surveyed participants about childbirth and breast-feeding, as well as cancer occurrences, at regular intervals between 1997 and 2005.

Among women whose mothers, grandmothers or sisters had breast cancer, those who breast-fed their babies had a 59 percent reduction in incidences of premenopausal breast cancer compared with women who bottle fed.

Other findings

The findings provided other surprises.

Women who did not have a family history of cancer saw no statistically significant protective effect of breast-feeding.

Also, among the high-risk participants who did breast-feed, it didn’t matter how long they kept it up or whether they supplemented breast milk with formula.

And high-risk women who did not breast-feed and took drugs that were once widely used to inhibit milk production after their babies were born also saw decreased incidences of cancer.

Stuebe said the results, which warrant more study, suggest there may be a correlation between breast engorgement after giving birth and cancer later in life.

"This is a huge, huge exclamation point to the understanding of the health benefits of breast-feeding," said Dr. Miriam Labbok, director of the Carolina Breastfeeding Institute in UNC-CH’s Gillings School of Global Public Health. "It can save lives, and it can save health-care costs."

savery@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4882

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Online

Go to TriangleMom2Mom for links to breastfeeding resources: www.trianglemom2mom.com /breastfeeding-resources .

Reasons N.C. women don’t breast-feed

Had other children to tend: 25.7 percent

Baby was sick: 1.9 percent

I was sick or on medication: 11.6 percent

Too many household duties: 16.4 percent

Didn’t like breast-feeding: 46.3 percent

Didn’t want to be tied down: 14.2 percent

Was embarrassed to breast-feed: 12.2 percent

Went back to work/school: 22.9 percent

Wanted body back to myself: 13.7 percent

Source: N.C. Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System
Holtz has his share of running back choices

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector

Saturday, August 08, 2009

The running backs are back in force at East Carolina, and after a year of problems in his backfield in 2008, head coach Skip Holtz has a good problem this year.

He’s got too many ball-carriers and only one football he can hand out per play.

Holtz gave the nod for junior Jonathan Williams to come back to the program after his suspension. Junior Norman Whitley, the team’s leading rusher from a season ago, had also been given clearance to return despite his own issues with Holtz and injuries to his hip and groin that will delay his return. Senior Dominique Lindsay is finally at the end of his year-long knee rehab.

And while the others were away, newcomer Brandon Jackson and former transfer J.R. Rogers grabbed their own share of the carries. Now, it’s up to Holtz to figure out who will be handed the ball on Sept. 5 when the Pirates open the season against Appalachian State.

“We’re going to let them all compete for that job, and those decisions will be made in the scrimmages,” Holtz said. “Right now, Brandon Jackson has obviously put himself in a great position with Jon Williams, Dominique Lindsay and Norman Whitley not able to go through spring practice. He made the most of his opportunity, and he’s put himself right in the middle of it.”

Holtz said he wasn’t ruling out using some two-back sets this season in order to best utilize his backfield talent.

Rehab assignments

Holtz said there are seven players who are considered to have rehab status this month, and have a limited status with the team. They do not practice, work out with or have meetings with the team, and are only allowed to train with Director of Strength and Conditioning Mike Golden and work with Head Athletic Trainer Mike Hanley in the training room.

“Many of them are due to injuries and surgeries during the season,” Holtz said of his rehab list, which includes starting right guard Doug Palmer (shoulder), Whitley (hip/groin), linebacker Matt Pick (knee), defensive lineman Robert Jones (knee), wide receiver T.J. Terrell (knee), fullback Ben Herlocker (knee) and offensive lineman C.J. Brown (asthma).

The future of senior placekicker Ben Hartman is also in question, as a long-term hip injury has haunted the man who stroked the game-winning field goal at the 2007 Hawaii Bowl. The same injury kept Hartman on the shelf for the beginning of the 2008 campaign.

“They have reared their ugly head on him again this summer,” Holtz said of Hartman’s recurring problems. “They started up about three weeks ago. He was kicking really well, had a good spring and it flared up on him again. He is seeing specialists, and doing everything he can to find out what his status is going to be, and whether or not this is going to be a surgical procedure or not. We just don’t know.”

Hartman has kicked 37 field goals in his career, and has kicked with 63.8 percent accuracy.
Out the door

Four players have opted to leave the program in attempt to transfer and finish their careers elsewhere, and all four had invested at least some time into the Pirate program.

Sophomore safety Julian Carter, junior linebacker Lorenzo Osborne, sophomore wide receiver D.J. McFadden and junior defensive back Deandre Jones are no longer with the team. Carter was being groomed to take on a much greater role, while Osborne was redshirted last season after two active seasons. McFadden failed to develop a regular role at wide receiver, and Jones saw limited action in the Pirates’ secondary.

“They’re good young men and I certainly hope they hit the goal of trying to get their degree and have the opportunity to play this great game of college football,” Holtz said.

Also, Holtz said redshirt freshman defensive end Allen Crowder has been handed a season-long suspension for an undisclosed violation. Because of academic issues, junior college transfer running back Giavanni Ruffin will also be out of the mix for the start of the season.

Scholarship additions

Four former transfers were awarded scholarships for the new season.

Senior wideout Reyn Willis, who transferred two seasons ago from Alabama before walking on; former Kentucky transfer Brandon Jackson, a sophomore who is the odds-on-favorite to start the season as the Pirates’ top running back; junior defensive tackle Josh Smith, who transferred from Western Carolina; and senior N.C. State transfer Levin Neal, who will enter the season as the likely starter at strong safety, all were added to the team’s scholarship list.

Position changes

Senior Rob Kass has made an anticipated move from being the top backup quarterback to playing tight end, where he hopes to make an impact in his final collegiate season.

Size won’t be a problem, as Kass enters camp at 6-foot-4, 240 pounds.

“We are moving Rob there full time to give him an opportunity to earn a spot on the two-deep depth chart and earn a role on this team,” Holtz said. “He wants to make this move, he was the one that approached me about it.”

After enduring a shoulder injury in the midst of his first season, linebacker Cliff Perryman will now carry the title of defensive end, and was drawing praise from defensive tackles coach Rock Roggeman during Saturday’s second practice.

The Rock

The team announced Saturday that Roggeman, who has been on board for all five of Holtz’s seasons at ECU, has been diagnosed and is undergoing treatment for non-Hodgkin Lymphoma.

“He is going through some difficult times,” Holtz said of Roggeman. “Rock was diagnosed with a form of cancer in June, and has begun his treatments in July to go through this battle and this fight that he has taken on. He doesn’t want to be the main story in this entire thing, which tells you a little bit about the unselfish nature of Rock Roggeman and who he is.

“Having people on our staff like (offensive coordinator and cancer survivor) Todd Fitch, who has been through a similar situation and gone through a year where he’s had to battle cancer and the treatments, has been very helpful to Rock. We’ve got great respect for him.”

Holtz said it was uncertain whether Roggeman’s treatment will affect his ability to coach, adding it was a day-to-day evaluation.
Pirate qualifies for Amateur

The Daily Reflector

Saturday, August 08, 2009

Rising East Carolina sophomore David Watkins earned medalist honors in sectional qualifying Friday to advance to the U.S. Amateur Championship.

In the 36-hole qualifier played Thursday and Friday at Walnut Creek Country Club in Goldsboro, Watkins fired an 8-under par 136 (69-67) to finish in first place and earn his first invitation to the U.S. Amateur.

Watkins, a native of Hamlet, won the qualifier by six strokes. The U.S. Amateur will be held at Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa, Okla., Aug. 24-30.

— ECU Media Relations

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August 9, 2009

Unpaid Work, but They Pay for Privilege

By GERRY SHIH

With paying jobs so hard to get in this weak market, a lot of college graduates would gladly settle for a nonpaying internship. But even then, they are competing with laid-off employees with far more experience.

So growing numbers of new graduates — or, more often, their parents — are paying thousands of dollars to services that help them land internships.

Call these unpaid internships that you pay for.

"It's kind of crazy," said David Gaston, director of the University of Kansas career center. "The demand for internships in the past 5, 10 years has opened up this huge market. At this point, all we can do is teach students to understand that they're paying and to ask the right questions."

Not that the parents are complaining. Andrew Topel's parents paid $8,000 this year to a service that helped their son, a junior at the University of Tampa, get a summer job as an assistant at Ford Models, a top agency in New York.

"It would've been awfully difficult" to get a job like that, said Andrew's father, Avrim Topel, "without having a friend or knowing somebody with a personal contact." Andrew completed the eight-week internship in July and was invited to return for another summer or to interview for a job after graduation.

Andrew's parents used a company called the University of Dreams, the largest and most visible player in an industry that has boomed in recent years as internship experience has become a near-necessity on any competitive entry-level résumé.

The company says it saw a spike in interest this year due to the downturn, as the number of applicants surged above 9,000, 30 percent higher than in 2008. And unlike prior years, the company says, a significant number of its clients were recent graduates, rather than the usual college juniors.

The program advertises a guaranteed internship placement, eight weeks of summer housing, five meals a week, seminars and tours around New York City for $7,999. It has a full-time staff of 45, and says it placed 1,600 student interns in 13 cities around the world this year, charging up to $9,450 for a program in London and as little as $5,499 in Costa Rica.

The money goes to the University of Dreams and the other middlemen like it. Officials at the company say they are able to wrangle hard-to-get internships for their clients because they have developed extensive working relationships with a variety of employers. They also have an aggressive staff who know who to call where. Their network of contacts, they say, is often as crucial as hard work in professional advancement.
“Students don’t have problems finding internships, students have problems getting internships,” Eric
Normington, the company’s chief marketing officer, said by telephone from Hong Kong where he was overseeing
the local program. “We can secure those exclusive positions.”

Employers say the middlemen save them time and hassle. “They make the search process a lot easier,” said
Sarah Cirkiel, the chief executive of Pitch Control Public Relations, a small New York firm that started four years
ago and has taken in 20 summer interns, all from the University of Dreams. “I feel like they hand-select their
interns for the specific agencies to make sure it’s the right fit. They just show up at our doorstep, ready to go.”

But many educators and students argue that the programs bridge one gulf — between those who have degrees
from prestigious colleges or family connections and those who do not — only to create a new one, between the
students who have parents willing and able to buy their children better job prospects and those who do not.

“You’re going to increase that divide early, on families that understand that investment process and will pay and
the families that don’t,” said Anthony Antonio, a professor of education at Stanford University. “This is just
ratcheting it up another notch, which is quite frightening.”

Julia McDonald, the career services director at Florida State University, questioned the need for these programs.
“The economy has had an impact, but there are more than enough internship opportunities out there still,” she
said. “That’s like buying a luxury car.”

Other college advisers cautioned that while the desire to help is understandable, parents who pay for an
internship program are depriving their children of the chance to develop job-seeking skills or to taste rejection
before they have to fend for themselves.

The industry dismisses the criticism.

“Universities forget that they themselves are, in essence, businesses,” said C. Mason Gates, the president of
Internships.com, an online placement service. “Just because they’re doing it in a nonprofit fashion doesn’t mean
that those of us doing it for profit are doing it incorrectly.”

The University of Dreams has several smaller competitors. One is the Washington Center, which places students
at institutions like Amnesty International and the Canadian Embassy in Washington. The center is a nonprofit
but charges summer participants a $5,195 program fee on top of a $60 application fee. If students choose to pay
$3,395 for 10 weeks of prearranged housing — and more than 90 percent do, the center said — the total comes to
$8,650.

Online start-ups that match students with internships have joined in, too, as have auction services that have sold
internships worth thousands of dollars.

Francois Goffinet entered the University of Dreams program in 2007 as a student at William and Mary College,
he said, because he wanted an internship at a top bank but those banks did not recruit at colleges like his. The
University of Dreams advisers polished Francois’s résumé. They coached him on interviews and then helped him
secure an internship at UBS, which he then converted into a job offer.

“We wanted the biggest and the best,” Francois’s mother, Lynn Andrews, recalled. “No one had the direct route.”

Gerry Shih is a summer intern at The Times. He is paid.
College-bound

Chris Lavender
2009-08-08 20:04:23

It’s proving to be an exciting time for first-year college students as they prepare to leave home for campuses statewide.

Five recent graduates of Kinston and Greene Central high schools will travel to their respective colleges this month, eager to begin a new life away from the comforts of home.

Several colleges — including East Carolina University and the University of North Carolina — will host freshman orientation programs before classes start later this month. The programs are designed to help incoming freshman become acclimated to college life.

Here are the stories of five local students who are ready to embark on the next chapter of their lives.

Tar Heel for life

Tory Whitson graduated from Greene Central during June and will attend the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill this fall. Whitson, 18, plans to participate in the university’s pre-college program this month, which allows 170 freshmen to stay overnight for a couple of days in cabins about 30 miles from the main campus.

“Basketball coach Roy Williams and some members of the student government are going to visit us,” Whitson said. “We are going to get a taste of Carolina before we get there.”

Whitson’s major will be international studies; she has already registered for 13 credit hours. She plans to sign up for one more additional class before her classes start Aug. 24.

Until then, Whitson said she will continue to prepare for her trip to Chapel Hill. Both of her parents are ECU graduates.

She’s said she received several comments and strange looks from her parents about her Carolina Girl T-shirt.

“They asked me if I’m really going to wear this shirt,” Whitson said. “Carolina is where I belong. It’s where I fit.”

Whitson will move into her dormitory Aug. 19. She instantly became a fan of the university’s campus when she visited a friend who attends UNC.

“The campus is gorgeous,” Whitson said. “I am all excited about my education.”
Let’s get acquainted!

As with UNC, ECU will host an event before classes begin Aug. 25 in Greenville. The ninth annual Pirate Palooza will be held from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. Monday, Aug. 24 at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium.

The free event will feature live music, inflatable attractions, give-aways, food and the opportunity to meet ECU athletic coaches.

Justin Pressly of Kinston will likely be among those who attend Pirate Palooza. Pressly graduated from Kinston High School in June and will enter ECU as a sophomore.

Pressly, 18, will study accounting at ECU and plans to also earn a masters degree in accounting from the school.

“I’m looking forward the most to my microeconomics class,” he said. “I have always enjoyed studying numbers.”

While still in high school, Pressly took advantage of ECU’s dual enrollment program and online college courses so he could enter ECU as a sophomore. He plans to work for the Whitley Law Firm in Greenville while he attends college.

Pressly leaves for ECU on Aug. 12 and will live in Campus Towers. He said his parents agreed it would be best for him to live on campus and not commute to college from Kinston.

“I wanted to get the full college experience,” he said.

Pressly said Kinston’s Will Barker encouraged him to attend ECU to study accounting. Pressly took part in a job shadow at Barker’s accounting firm and decided to pursue a career in the field.

Looking forward, Pressly said he was both excited and intimidated about his new life at ECU. He’s already registered for 16 credit hours and is looking forward to eating college food.

“I was surprised about how expensive everything is,” Pressly said. “The meal plan alone cost $4,000 a year.”

Former Kinston football standout leaves early for camp

As with Pressly, Dorian Edwards graduated from Kinston during June. Edwards, 18, left for college Wednesday to report early for Salisbury’s Livingstone College football camp.

As a former football standout for Kinston, Edwards said this week he plans to make the best of his experience at Livingstone. He will study business administration while in Salisbury.

“It’s going to be my first year living without my mom,” Edwards said. “I’m going to make
the right decisions and hang with the right crowd.”

Edwards was a center and defensive tackle on the Kinston football team last year. He thanked his former coaches for helping him have a successful season last year.

“They got us in the weight room and believed in us,” he said. “Training camp at Livingstone is going to be tough but I can make it through it.”

Edwards earned a full student-athlete scholarship to attend Livingstone. He acknowledged that doing well in college classes is a top priority for him.

**Avoiding first-year college pitfalls**

Doing well during the first year of college is also important to Greene Central 2009 graduates Jason Fostanes and Shanequa Evans. Fostanes, 18, will attend Pitt Community College in Winterville, while Evans, 18, will attend Campbell University in Buies Creek.

As with many first-year college bound students, Evans and Fostanes have received advice from family and friends on how to succeed.

“I plan to stay away from credit cards and save my money,” Fostanes said.

Fostanes plans to move from Greene County to Winterville soon to live with his sister, who is a PCC graduate and Pitt Memorial Hospital employee.

“I plan to study radiology and become a radiology tech,” he said. “I haven’t decided if I will continue my education after I finish the two-year program.”

Evans said she plans to study English education while at Campbell. She also said she is aware of the pitfalls college freshman make during their first year.

“The statistics show 50 percent of freshman who start college don’t graduate four years later,” Evans said. “I will stay focused.”

Evans was among 200 recent high school graduates statewide to earn a teachers fellow scholarship. The scholarship will provide Evans with $6,500 annually towards her college education.

She leaves for college Aug. 19.

“It’s been stressful getting ready,” Evans said. “I am going to be on my own and can’t rely on mom and dad to get me through college.”

Evans said she knows who her roommate will be but hasn’t met her yet. Evans attended an orientation at Campbell during June. She feels well-prepared to start her new college life.

“I am going to like the smaller class sizes,” Evans said. “That’s one reason I chose to attend Campbell because I will have more contact with the instructors.”

Chris Lavender can be reached at (252) 559-1078 or clavender@freedomnc.com.
Duke student shot in attempted robbery

From Staff Reports

DURHAM - A Duke University student was shot early Sunday morning while trying to defend himself against a would-be robber, police said.

The student was walking with a woman on the 500 block of Watts Street around 4 a.m. when a man armed with a gun approached them from behind, police said. The man ordered the student and woman to put their hands on their heads while he searched them.

A struggle over the gun took place soon after, and two shots were fired, police said. The student was shot in the abdomen, and the suspect fled, according to police.

Police said the gunman was limping when he fled and may have been shot. The student victim was being treated at a local hospital. The woman was not injured, according to police.

Anyone with any information about the incident should call CrimeStoppers at 683-1200.

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Pirates aspire to be major players in BCS

BY J.P. GIGLIO, Staff Writer

GREENVILLE - If confidence wins football games, East Carolina is ready to run the table in 2009.

The Pirates weren't afraid to verbalize their goals for this season at Saturday's media day -- repeat as Conference USA champions and qualify for a spot in one of the five bowl games in the Bowl Championship Series.

With 17 starters back from a team that won nine games, the Pirates are thinking big and talking big. They're not afraid to use the letters "BCS."

"We don't want to shoot lower than that," junior receiver Dwayne Harris said. "Every year we've built on the success from the year before and now the sky's the limit."

The Pirates have progressed from five to seven to eight to nine wins in coach Skip Holtz's first four seasons. To get to a BCS bowl, they'd have to take another step.

Since 2004, the four teams from conferences without an automatic bid to crash the BCS each
finished the regular season unbeaten.

ECU started 3-0 in 2008, knocking off Virginia Tech, the eventual ACC champion, and West Virginia, a Big East power, in the first two weeks of the season. The upsets catapulted the Pirates to No. 14 in the national rankings.

Then, senior defensive end C.J. Wilson said, the Pirates got caught up in their own hype.

"We lost our focus," Wilson said.

The 3-0 start was offset by a three-game losing streak, started by an overtime loss at N.C. State on Sept. 20.

The Pirates recovered, going 6-1 to close out the regular season, including a 27-24 win over Tulsa in the C-USA title game.

Holtz believes his team learned a lesson from last year's midseason stumble.

"What we learned from a year ago was we lost our focus," Holtz said. "We tried to play for something that wasn't ours."

Focus alone won't get the Pirates to 12-0, not with return dates against Virginia Tech and West Virginia, plus in-state tests against Appalachian State and at North Carolina.

Senior safety Van Eskridge admits the idea of ECU crashing the BCS seemed far-fetched, but that was before last season's success.

"If we take care of business every Saturday, we can end up in a BCS bowl," Eskridge said.

Holtz, who's 29-22 since inheriting a program that went a combined 3-20 in 2003 and '04, likes that his players have big expectations, but he also knows the reality of the situation.

"We're not going to get there by talking about it," Holtz said.

The Pirates might also have to get there with a new kicker. Senior Ben Hartman, who has a collection of winning kicks over Tulsa last year and UNC and Boise State in 2007, has not reported to preseason practice.

His future is uncertain with a hip flexor injury that limited him last season, and Holtz said Saturday it will keep him out indefinitely.

Sophomore Ben Ryan, who made one of three field-goal attempts in '08, enters camp as the starter.

The Pirates got roster help with the return of guard Doug Palmer, cornerback Emanuel Davis, and running backs Jonathan Williams and Norman Whitley from suspensions.

Receiver Jamar Bryant is still serving a suspension, dating to the sixth game last year, but is expected to be a part of the program this season.

Holtz also announced that defensive end Allen Crowder was suspended for the season and safety Julian Carter has left the program.

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