ECU students walk past a Storm Ready University sign as they make their way up College Hill on Wednesday afternoon. (Rhett Butler/The Daily Reflector)

**Hurricane threat prompts local preparations**

By Jennifer Swartz  
The Daily Reflector  
Thursday, August 25, 2011

Local officials were taking precautions Wednesday even as a forecast track predicted Hurricane Irene would cut a more easterly path away from the Greenville area.

High school football games and an East Carolina University soccer game were moved from Friday night to tonight as the Category 3 storm churned southeast of the Bahamas.

Saturday concerts and a car show planned for Winterville's Watermelon Festival have been postponed until Sunday. Concerts set for tonight and Friday are going forward.

Early Thursday, the storm was thrashing the Bahamas with widespread damage reported on at least two southern islands. It was a powerful Category 3 hurricane with winds at 115 mph.

Forecasters said the winds will ramp up quickly over the next day and Irene was expected to blow into a monstrous Category 4 with winds at least 131 mph.

It could hit the Outer Banks on Saturday afternoon, according to the National Weather Service. It's predicted to chug up the East Coast, before a much-weakened storm reaches land in Connecticut. Finally, it should peter out in Maine by Monday afternoon.

A hurricane watch was issued early Thursday for much of the North Carolina coast including the Outer Banks. A hurricane watch means hurricane conditions are possible within 36 hours. Also, a tropical storm watch was issued for much of South Carolina's coast.
Meanwhile, a new tropical depression formed far out over the Atlantic early Thursday, with the National Hurricane Center saying it would likely become a tropical storm later in the day.

The hurricane's projected path proposed some relief locally. An influential cold front descending from Canada into the Midwest continued to press eastward, shoving the storm farther into the ocean.

Landfall between Wilmington and Cape Lookout was considered less likely as Irene appeared, at least for now, to favor the Outer Banks or even east of the barrier islands, forecasters said late Wednesday.

“The National Hurricane Center has slowly shifted their track slightly eastward with every update,” Casey Dail, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service, said Wednesday.

“It does not look as ominous as it did a few days ago for eastern North Carolina,” she said, adding that the region should still expect violent weather.

“All of eastern North Carolina should prepare to see a strong hurricane,” Dail said. East Carolina University officials welcoming students back to class this week would continue preparations until the threat was over, said Tom Pohlman, environmental manager for ECU Environmental Health & Safety.

“I've been here for 20 years, and I think I've seen all the hurricanes that affected North Carolina, and they are fickle, so we don't let our guard down until it has passed us,” he said.

ECU is one of 87 universities nationwide to be classified by the National Weather Service as an official StormReady site.

There are 1,797 locations in 48 states, Puerto Rico and Guam that met the criteria for receiving and issuing weather warnings, staffing an emergency operations center and playing a role in community preparedness.

At ECU, which earned its status in 2009, early preparations for Irene may include placing flood guards at key sites, checking roof and storm drains and ensuring generators are fueled and functional, officials said.

About 48 hours before a storm hits, the university will assess the impact and begin making decisions, Pohlman said. Food, water and fuel supply campuswide is considered; medical services are checked and equipment is protected.

Graduate and research efforts could be halted so work can resume once the storm passes, Pohlman said.
Canceling campus events also will be decided about that time, officials said. ECU soccer's home game against UNC Wilmington was moved to 7 p.m. today, university officials said.

Also on Wednesday, city officials said the Greenville-Pitt County 8K Road Race, set for Saturday, would be postponed until March 10. Pitt County Schools officials also announced all high school varsity football games would be held tonight.

Whether the university closes and attempts are made to send students home depends on the severity of the storm, which on Wednesday looked to be lessening, Pohlman said.

“We were getting pretty concerned when we saw the storm track going right through Wilmington,” Pohlman said. “Now it's moving toward the east and we're feeling a bit more comfortable.”

The Associated Press contributed to this report. Contact Jennifer Swartz at jswartz@reflector.com or 252-329-9565.
AHOSKIE — On a day when an earthquake rattled parts of North Carolina, officials from East Carolina University and Roanoke Chowan Community Health Center moved some earth themselves when they broke ground Tuesday for a health care complex that will include an ECU dental center.

The center will be built near the corporate offices of RCCHC at 113 Hertford County High Road in Ahoskie. It is one of five dental center sites that have been announced and the first one to break ground.

Site work has begun on the dual-purpose facility, and it should be completed by March. ECU will build the $3 million, 8,000-square-foot center where dental faculty members, residents and students will provide care and students and residents will learn what practicing in a community setting is like.

The center will have 16 dental chairs and employ local staff members.

“What we're looking at here in Ahoskie is for this clinic to become not only a model for health care in rural areas of this country, but a model for the future of dental education as well,” said Dr. Greg Chadwick, associate dean for planning and extramural affairs at the ECU School of Dental Medicine. “This marks the first time we've co-located a dental school facility and a federally qualified health care center together. We are very excited about our partnership with Roanoke Chowan Community Health Center and look forward
to providing quality dental care to residents of Hertford, Bertie, Northampton, Gates and surrounding counties.”

Ahoskie, a town of 5,000 near the Chowan and Meherrin rivers in northeastern North Carolina, was one of the first sites named for what eventually will be 10 such centers across the state. The other sites identified are Elizabeth City, Lillington in central North Carolina, and Sylva and Spruce Pine in the western part of the state.

“We're energized by the opportunity we find here,” Dr. Phyllis Horns, vice chancellor for health sciences at ECU, said.

Ahoskie and surrounding counties have seven dentists. Dr. Benjie Brown has worked in the area since joining his father's dental practice in 1977. He said the ECU center and the dental school will be good for people who cannot travel long distances for dental care.

“We have a lot in this area who need to get to facilities and can't because of transportation or whatever,” Brown said. “I hope (the center and school) will bring more dentists to eastern North Carolina.”

North Carolina averages about four dentists for every 10,000 people, below the national average of 5.8, according to the federal Institute of Medicine. The ratio has declined recently as the population has increased faster than the supply of practitioners.

“What we're doing is basically stretching the wires and moving the fourth floor of our school in Greenville out to the rural, underserved areas of the state,” Chadwick said. The center should be complete in time for a dental residency program to start next summer.

The ECU School of Dental Medicine admitted its first 52 students, all North Carolina residents, this month, with plans to admit about 50 each year.

The new two-story Community Health Center facility will become the home of RCCHC-Ahoskie, medical and corporate offices. There will be space for 48 exam rooms, larger improved laboratories and an in-house pharmacy.

RCCHC's new medical center and ECU's dental facilities will be built on land deeded to RCCHC and the university by Roanoke-Chowan Alliance. That property is 27.6 acres and includes the RCCHC building, Northside Behavioral Health and the ViQuest wellness center.

The architect of the two buildings is The East Group of Greenville. The general contractor is A.R. Chesson of Williamston, and site work is being done by S.T. Wooten of Wilson.
UNC project digs into arthritis
BY THOMAS GOLDSMITH - Staff Writer

A joint effort between UNC-Chapel Hill's medical school and thousands of Johnston County residents has produced a one-of-a-kind data mine that is benefiting patients, scientists and doctors all over the world.

For the past two decades, the Johnston County Osteo arthritis Project has studied randomly selected Johnston County residents over 45 who agreed to extensive interviews and head-to-toe X-rays, physical exams and bone density scans. Scientists have documented the progress of thousands of the Johnston residents as some developed osteoarthritis, a degenerative joint disease.

The huge database arising out of the project, as well as thousands of blood and tissue samples kept in subzero freezers in Chapel Hill, has provided fodder for more than 100 peer-reviewed studies. It has led to significant discoveries about the ways in which heredity, lifestyle, occupation and ethnic backgrounds intertwine. For instance:

-- The association between fatigue and arthritis is so strong that some people can be treated simply with more sleep at night.

"Sometimes the best thing we do for people is getting them sleep," said UNC's Dr. Joanne Jordan, director of the project. "They didn't need another big drug, or knee injection; they might not have just been sleeping enough."
-- People with high levels of exposure to lead, experienced by anyone who was alive before the introduction of unleaded gas in 1972, are more likely to develop osteoarthritis.

-- Routine environmental exposure to a broad variety of products such as mercury and other metals - all more common in low-income groups - could predispose people to autoimmune disease such as arthritis.

-- People who have legs of different length are more likely to develop osteoarthritis of the hip and knee.

Results of the project have included the identification of biomarkers - substances present in blood or urine - that can diagnose or predict the development of osteoarthritis.

Researchers also have looked at the ways that people from different ethnic and economic backgrounds deal with the pain and depression that accompanies the disease.

And most recently, data have been used to study the presence of genes that indicate a predisposition to arthritis. The various markers are being studied for potential use in treating and even preventing the development of osteoarthritis.

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Johnston County Osteoarthritis Project

As the project has created changes in the way arthritis is diagnosed and treated, it also has produced a lasting community of technicians, doctors, researchers, participants and family members.

Anne Cogdell, participant

"The program does a lot for people if they are willing to participate," said Cogdell, 78, who, like all participants, lives in Johnston County.

The project sends people door to door in Johnston neighborhoods to enlist participants, who receive small fees in addition to the detailed exams and follow-up. After Cogdell was recruited for the project, she became an interviewer herself.

As a result of what she has learned from the project, Cogdell has been exercising regularly, getting on her stationary bike for 30 minutes each morning. She also practiced tai chi as part of study that showed the Asian martial art's beneficial effects on arthritis.

"Old folks can't stay in bed; They get to where they can't move," she said.

Joanne Jordan, project leader

Jordan, who has headed the study since the beginning, was just getting her degree in epidemiology in the early 1990s, when UNC's Thurston Arthritis Center was setting up a partnership in Johnston County. Researchers wanted to change the usual protocol for such tests, in which people are recruited, then have to travel to research facilities, often in large cities, for relatively short-term trials.

"We know that people that make it to the doctor, particularly to Chapel Hill, are very different from people who don't go to the doctor," Jordan said. "We knew that really the way to find out what was going on was to go to the communities themselves. We enrolled about 3,200 people in the early '90s."

Johnston was selected for its demographics that included a mix of races and rural and suburban residents.

Participants weren't asked whether they had arthritis. But they have answered dozens of questions about their lifestyles, backgrounds and family histories. They have been given bone density and blood pressure tests and even have had clippings from their toenails taken. The study is unusual in the number of rural and African-American people who have taken part.

"There was more arthritis in this rural population than in other populations around the country," Jordan said.

The doctors and staffers involved in the study don't treat participants whose health problems are revealed through their workups, but refer the information to their own physicians.
"We have had incidents where we discovered things that people had no idea about," Jordan said.

**Spencer and Beverley Braswell, participants**

Smithfield retiree Spencer Braswell, 76, discovered in 2002 that he had osteoporosis because of the bone density scan he received as a participant in the project. He and his wife, Beverley, 72, signed up after hearing from a friend at church about the study.

"It's pretty neat to know that something you're involved in could help somebody else 20 years from now," Beverley Braswell said. "The byproduct was that Spencer got this help."

Tipped off by the bone density scan, Spencer Braswell started therapy involving the drug Fosamax and regular exercise. His bone density has increased, putting him at significantly less risk for the fractures and bone weakness that come with osteoporosis.

Spencer Braswell has a farm background and had a long career in manufacturing. His wife worked in a doctor's office for 35 years. They continue to give back to the community that they have made their home for decades.

"In the past five or six years, I have started helping transport people who are having cancer treatments," he said.

**Lynn Joyner and Georgene Capps, clinical workers**

At the clinic where participants get their thorough going-over, Joyner and Capps have spent more than a decade as clinical workers, increasing their technical skills as time progresses. By design, everyone who works for the project is from Johnston County.

Joyner and Capps spend time every week, in addition to their clinic hours, going into the community to interview possible participants.

"You establish a relationship with these people," Capps said. "Even though they only get a follow-up every four or five years, you see them at the grocery store, you see them at church."

Some participants also come back for specific studies on subjects such as whether tai chi benefits older people with arthritis. (It does.) That led to a therapist associated with the center offering tai chi courses to the community.

"We understand our data goes all over the world," Joyner said. "We're amazed when we see an article somebody wrote on the other side of the country and it will say, 'Information from the Johnston County Osteoarthritis Project.'"
The Wilmington Star News

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The Class of 2015 assembles at the Clock Tower on the campus of UNCW for the revealing of their class flag on Aug 22, 2011. After the unveiling of the class flag they walked to Trask Coliseum for their first official campus welcome from faculty and staff.

Photo by Mike Spencer

UNCW, incoming freshmen reaching for top of the class

By Jason Gonzales
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It's not a secret why UNCW students choose Wilmington.

The beach, the coastal Carolina blue skies and the warm Southern weather are among the top answers.

And each year as students flock to the annual Beach Blast at Wrightsville Beach to enjoy the start of the year, the answers don't change much.

But the campus and makeup of the student body have changed.

As the University of North Carolina Wilmington has grown, the school has attracted a new breed of Seahawks who have achieved much in high school and come with high expectations.

The nearly 2,000-strong freshman class of 2015 collectively holds a 3.97 grade-point average and scored 1,178 on the SAT, officials said. GPA and
SAT averages have increased year over year for the past 10 years. The average GPA and SAT numbers in 2001 were 3.47 and 1,091, respectively.

"It is a school that has some prestige," said freshman Tara Johnson, 18, from Huntersville. "And it's definitely an up and coming school that could be one of the top in the nation."

The 4.0 student and future nurse said she has big goals for herself and the opportunities the school will provide.

Attracting students like Johnson has been a goal for the administration.

"It starts with an institutional commitment to quality and excellence that is shared throughout the university," said Terry Curran, associate provost for enrollment management.

And it continues through the activities and opportunities the school provides, he said.

Jon Kapell, associate director of campus activities and involvement, said at Tuesday's Beach Blast that the freshman class has demanded a lot from the faculty and staff, and has been one of the most involved the school has ever had. He said the school tries to educate students about what's on campus, but students this year have been proactive.

"They have a high energy level," he said. "And we are seeing more that have been involved with the events we have put on."

Lauren Holland, a freshman from Raleigh, said the medical program drew her to the school, but the number of opportunities on campus made the school her only choice.

The university has about 233 clubs on campus. Kapell said that's significantly more than last year.

Holland said she wants to take advantage of what the school has to offer.

"I want to get involved, I want to join clubs and see what's out there," she said.

But don't forget the beach, said freshman Ryan Ward, 18, decked out in his beach attire.

"The academics and opportunities got me here," he said at the event. "But this just puts it over the top."

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UNC AD search committee to meet

The committee that will recommend candidates for the athletic director job at North Carolina will hold its first meeting Friday morning.

UNC is seeking a replacement for Dick Baddour, who announced in July that he is retiring to allow a new athletic director to hire a replacement for football coach Butch Davis.

Lowry Caudill, a trustee and adjunct chemistry professor, chairs the 13-member committee.

Chancellor Holden Thorp recently said the committee is eager to help him and called the athletic director position "very attractive." The new athletic director will face the challenge of steering a football program that is facing NCAA allegations of nine major violations but will inherit an elite basketball program and strong Olympic sports programs.

"We're looking for somebody who can continue the extraordinary success that Carolina has had," Thorp said, "who can help us make sure we have the financial resources that the kids need, that the student-athletes are taken care of, that compliance is run tightly, and restore the confidence that some of our football fans have lost in the football program."

Ken Tysiac
Online Enterprises Gain Foothold as Path to a College Degree

By TAMAR LEWIN

Harvard and Ohio State are not going to disappear any time soon. But a host of new online enterprises are making earning a college degree cheaper, faster and flexible enough to take work experience into account. As Wikipedia upended the encyclopedia industry and iTunes changed the music business, these businesses have the potential to change higher education.

Ryan Yoder, 35, a computer programmer who had completed 72 credits at the University of South Florida years ago, signed up with an outfit called Straighterline, paid $216 to take two courses in accounting and one in business communication, and a month later transferred the credits to Thomas Edison State College in New Jersey, which awarded him a bachelor’s degree in June.

Alan Long, 34, a paramedic and fire captain, used another new institution, Learning Counts, to create a portfolio that included his certifications and a narrative spelling out what he had learned on the job. He paid $750 to Learning Counts and came out with seven credits at Ottawa University in Kansas, where he would have had to spend $2,800 to earn them in a traditional classroom.

And Erin Larson, who has four children and works full time at a television station but wanted to become a teacher, paid $3,000 per semester to Western Governors University for as many classes as she could handle — plus a weekly call from a mentor. “Anywhere else, it would have cost three arms and legs,” said Ms. Larson, 40, “and as a certified procrastinator, I found that weekly call very useful.”

For those who have the time and money, the four-year residential campus still offers what is widely considered the best educational experience. Critics worry that the online courses are less rigorous and more vulnerable to cheating, and that their emphasis on providing credentials for specific jobs could undermine the traditional mission of encouraging critical thinking.

But most experts agree that given the exploding technologies, cuts to university budgets and the expanding universe of people expected to earn
postsecondary degrees, there is no end in sight for newfangled programs preparing students for careers in high-demand areas like business, computer science, health care and criminal justice.

Chester E. Finn Jr., a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, predicted that all but the top tier of existing universities would “change dramatically” as students regained power in an expanding marketplace.

“Instead of a full entree of four years in college, it’ll be more like grazing or going to tapas bars,” Mr. Finn said, “with people piecing together a postsecondary education from different sources.”

While many students at the nascent institutions offer glowing reviews and success stories, a recent study by Teachers College at Columbia University that tracked 51,000 community college students in Washington State for five years found that those with the most online course credits were the least likely to graduate or transfer to a four-year institution. And traditional professors like Johann Neem, a historian at Western Washington University, see places like Western Governors University as anti-intellectual, noting that its advertising emphasizes how fast students can earn credits, not how much they will learn.

“Taking a course online, by yourself, is not the same as being in a classroom with a professor who can respond to you, present different viewpoints and push you to work a problem,” Professor Neem said. “There’s lots of porn and religion online, but people still have relationships and get married, and go to church and talk to a minister.”

But Anya Kamenetz, whose 2010 book, “DIY U: Edupunks, Edupreneurs and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education,” tracks the new wave of Web-based education efforts, says the new institutions will only continue to improve and expand. “For some people, it will mean going from a good education to a great one,” she said. “For others, it will mean getting some kind of education, instead of nothing.”

The emerging menu of new offerings is startlingly varied, as are the institutions. One unaccredited nonprofit startup, University of the People, gives English-speaking high school graduates a chance to study business or computers free, with volunteer teachers. There are also budding joint ventures between brick-and-mortar campuses and online entities, like Ivy Bridge College — a collaboration between Tiffin University, a nonprofit school in Ohio, and Altius Education, a commercial business, offering two-year online degrees transferrable to dozens of partner four-year colleges.
And there are grass-roots nonprofits like Peer 2 Peer University, where people start study groups on topics as diverse as JavaScript and Baroque art.

Nationwide, almost three quarters of college students attend public institutions, and commercial career colleges like the University of Phoenix and Kaplan now make up almost as much of the remaining quarter as traditional nonprofit private universities like Stanford or Duke. Many of the emerging models are far cheaper than the publicly traded career colleges, some of which have come under scrutiny over the last year for leaving students with mountains of debt and credentials of little value.

Most are still new and very small, making it hard to locate students who have used them, other than those referred by the businesses themselves.

And it is too soon to know which will take off, or what might come along to overtake them.

“I’m just waiting for a Wikipedia University, with high-quality, online, open-source courses provided by a variety of different people,” said Richard Vedder, an Ohio University economics professor who directs the Center for College Affordability and Productivity. “Or the moment when someone like Bill Gates creates Superstar University, finding the best professors for the 200 courses that a good liberal arts college offers, and paying them $25,000 each to put their classes online.”