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Ballard 'very impressed' with new UNC president

The Daily Reflector

Thursday, August 26, 2010

East Carolina University Chancellor Steve Ballard said he is looking forward to supporting the system’s new president, Thomas W. Ross, who was unanimously elected Thursday by the UNC Board of Governors.

“I am very impressed with Dr. Ross,” Ballard said, “and we will do all we can to support him and continue to move higher education forward.”

Ross, president of Davidson College, will replace the retiring Erskine Bowles. A former North Carolina Superior Court judge and foundation executive, Ross was named to the position following a specially called meeting of the UNC Board of Governors Thursday morning. Bowles announced in February that he would retire this December after five years in the post.

Ross will begin his tenure on Jan. 1, 2011.

“Our nationwide search attracted talent from many different professional backgrounds and from every part of the country, but in the end, that long road led us back to North Carolina, to one of our own,” UNC Board Chairman Hannah Gage said.

“In a time of great challenge and constant change, Tom Ross’ thoughtful leadership, his proven integrity, his deep understanding of North Carolina, and his lifelong commitment to improving the lives of people in every corner of our state make him the perfect choice to lead the university in the years ahead.”

Ross has served as president of Davidson College since 2007. He earned his bachelor’s degree in political science from Davidson in 1972.

“To accept this job will require that I leave a job and place I love dearly,” Ross said. “Davidson College is one of the top liberal arts colleges in this country, and it is also my alma mater and the place that nurtured me and helped me grow as a student and, again, as its president.”

Ross said making the decision to leave Davidson was an emotional struggle.

“But I do so feeling called to this position and to this university,” he said. “I love this state of ours, and there is no institution more important to North Carolina and her future than the University of North Carolina.”

Ross graduated with honors from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s School of Law. After a short stint as an assistant professor of public law and government at UNC-Chapel Hill’s School of Government, Ross joined a Greensboro law firm in 1976.

He left the firm in 1982 to serve as chief of staff in the office of U.S. Congressman Robin Britt. The following year, at the age of 33, Ross was appointed by Gov. Jim Hunt to fill a vacancy on the North Carolina Superior Court. He held the position for the next 17 years.

In 2001, he left the bench to serve as executive director of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, a Winston-Salem-based philanthropic organization. He took the position of president at Davidson in 2007.
The Associated Press

Tom Ross, left, is congratulated after the University of North Carolina Board of Governors elected him as the new president of the 17-campus public university system.
Gerry Broom

Editorial: ECU deserves equal attention from new UNC system head

Friday, August 27, 2010

Considering his demonstrated commitment to public service, Thomas Ross seems to be a qualified selection to lead the University of North Carolina’s 16 campuses. His experience in education leadership, fundraising and the legal profession should serve the system and the state well when he assumes office.

A strong, vibrant university system is best achieved when all 17 schools are encouraged to grow and flourish in an equitable manner. Ross should strive to ensure that principle is upheld. Doing so would best serve East Carolina University, which should join with fellow UNC institutions to wish him success.

In accepting the position of UNC system president on Thursday, Ross spoke warmly of four predecessors — Erskine Bowles, Molly Broad, C.D. Spangler Jr. and William Friday — noting that the shoes he steps into will be difficult to fill. He is most assuredly correct, though his resume inspires confidence that he is more than capable.

Ross comes to the UNC post from Davidson College, from which he graduated in 1972 and where he served as president since 2007. He is the former head of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, a respected charitable organization. With a law degree from UNC Chapel Hill, Ross has served as a N.C. Superior Court judge, the state’s youngest following his 1984 appointment, and led the Administrative Office of the Courts.

Certainly North Carolina has been fortunate to have, on the whole, progressive, talented and committed leaders for that all-important education post. It would seem Ross will follow in those footsteps and his familiarity with both the state and its politics will be crucial as the UNC system seeks to serve a growing student population. Current enrollment stands at about 215,000, and thousands of state residents depend on the campuses for employment.

That is certainly true in eastern North Carolina, where East Carolina acts as an engine for economic growth and innovation. Bowles showed throughout his tenure that he recognized the value of East Carolina’s mission to the region and was an enthusiastic supporter of the university at every turn. That was refreshing because UNC Chapel Hill and N.C. State University have been known to divert needed attention from other institutions.

East Carolina should look for Ross to continue Bowles’ commitment to work for the betterment of all 17 schools. Though the responsibility is immense, Ross should relish his new opportunity.
Governor to appoint ECU grad to Taft's board seat

By Jackie Drake
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, August 26, 2010

An East Carolina University graduate will be appointed to the State Board of Education. The governor’s office plans today to announce the appointment of Plymouth resident Jean Woolard to the seat formerly held by Greenville native Kathy Taft, who died after being attacked by an intruder in March.

Woolard, who has a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in education from ECU, will represent the first state education district which covers more than a dozen counties including Pitt. The eight districts and three at-large seats all are filled by appointment by the governor and confirmed by the state Legislature.

“The governor is excited to have her join the board,” Chrissy Pearson, director of communications for the governor’s office, said Thursday. “She is a longtime educator with many years of experience. The governor believes she will bring a level of energy and creativity to the board.”

According to Pearson, Woolard has been a teacher in Plymouth and has been involved in the N.C. Teacher Academy. Woolard could not be reached for comment Thursday.

“The governor always looks for someone who will represent their community well,” Pearson said. “She has the kind of experience the board needs, she knows what it’s like to be in the classroom.”

The Taft family has been notified of the appointment, according to Pearson.

“Kathy was such a leader and represented the Greenville area so well,” Pearson said. “She and the governor were dear friends who shared a passion for providing a quality education for every North Carolinian. While Kathy can’t be replaced, we are excited to have Jean on the board.”

Contact Jackie Drake at jdrake@reflector.com or (252) 329-9567.
Uptown Greenville toasting success
By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, August 26, 2010
Downtown revitalization advocacy group Uptown Greenville spent Thursday night showing people around three businesses new to its focus area: Appogee, Manpower and ISP sports. Each is located in the aging buildings that densely line two blocks of Evans Street, renovated to accommodate their particular needs and image.
But those are only a sample of the new businesses cropping up in downtown Greenville. At least three others have opened or are opening soon along Evans. Still more have been retooled or renamed to suit the atmosphere Uptown promotes: An inclusive, walkable community.
The businessmen and women who have chosen to locate there say it’s working.
East Carolina University’s multimedia partner, ISP Sports, was set up on Arlington for four years before it moved to the former Hookah Haze location two months ago.
“Don (property owner and Uptown member Don Edwards) came to us with the opportunity,” ISP Account Executive Seth Horton said. “Living in Greenville, all you hear about is revitalization uptown. When it was possible ... it was an easy decision.”
Manpower, a staffing company, relocated to Evans Street one year ago from Red Banks Road and Branch Manager Ryan Stocks said staff members love the look of hardwood floors and exposed brick. Manpower’s corporate parent liked the idea of being in a revitalized area, he said.
“We wanted to join this uptown fever,” Stocks said. “We eat down here, are closer to ECU and our industrial customers on the other side of the river.”
cont’d...
As a creative company looking for unique space, Appogee co-founder Tim Hassett said he and Kristie Esposito also were drawn to the historic feel of the Evans Street structures. Appogee sells and services Apple products and software to ad agencies and other businesses. They’ve outfitted their suite, of course, to include the high-speed ethernet network needed to stay cutting edge. Copper & Vine is expected to open next month and will serve small plates, wine and craft beers and traditional cocktails from a two-story space in the Blount-Harvey Building at Fourth and Evans streets. Consultant Brandon Monroe said downtown offered the urban feel the owners were looking for by encompassing retail, art and food — even if it’s consolidated in just a few blocks. Uptown Greenville Executive Director Denise Walsh said it’s not unusual for Uptown member businesses to frequent one another and collaborate. Taff Office Equipment, another Uptown business located a few blocks away on Eighth Street, furnished each of the three businesses featured Thursday. Downtown Diner Co-owner Lisa Daniels described how she and chef Christian Brown designed their menu by looking for a new niche. They opened last week at the corner of Fifth and Evans streets selling everything from pancakes to meatloaf at low prices. Daniels said they soon hope to be open 24 hours daily.

“We filled a slot we thought was needed,” she said. “We don’t have cheeseburgers, hot dogs or pizza (because you can get those other places downtown).”

For all the benefits, occupants have wish lists, too. Vidal Thorpe, owner of the newly formed Fitness by Vidal above the Tipsy Teapot, wants to see everything from more trees and water fountains to a small hotel and a day care. He also thinks more residential space should be available for young professionals and retirees, not just students. Uptown Greenville representatives agree.

“It would keep the flow of people going, day and night, and that makes things safe,” Walsh said. She noted that upstairs space above storefronts is often under-utilized and could be retrofitted as apartments in many cases.

Claire Edwards said she’d love a downtown coffee shop, which would feature local art and anchor the image of the center city. She’ll be displaying ECU student work herself and holding receptions on a brand-new balcony at Uptown Art Supply and Gallery, a part of the University Book Exchange which she took over almost a year ago.

“Community involvement, culture,” is what Uptown should aim for, she said. “It’s the core of our city.”

Potential sites and funding for a downtown parking deck also float around from time to time — most recently last month at a Greenville Redevelopment Commission meeting. There is space to dream and develop, Walsh said.

A literal vacant lot sits on Evans between Dale’s Indian Cuisine and Oshun’s Hair Design. A restaurant space on Cotanche used to house an Andy’s Cheesesteaks and Cheeseburgers. Then it was Jericho, a Middle Eastern and Mediterranean restaurant which folded after less than a year. The former Blackwood’s Salon site is on Evans within spitting distance of the courthouse, but remains available after approximately two years on the market. Kelly Boutilier closed five-year-old Moxie Clothing on Fifth Street this month to move into promotions. The large, open-refurbished downstairs portion of the building housing Appogee and Manpower still hasn’t been leased.

Nearby Dickinson Avenue is practically a clean slate. Uptown Greenville Board Member Ryan Webb owns two properties there and said property owners must not forget that those buildings must be maintained to attract interest.

“Dickinson’s potential has to do with art and antiques,” Webb said, noting the opening of the Art Encounters gallery there this year and the longtime workspace of metal sculptor Jonathan Bowling.

Cont’d...
GO-Science is still in negotiations to purchase the former Pugh’s Tire & Service Center on Dickinson with plans to open a permanent science center, augmenting its education outreach efforts.

Walsh said her organization will install Uptown Greenville light pole banners along the avenue soon so that people can begin to identify that as part of the center city, too. For many of these businesses and nonprofits, Uptown members welcome them to the neighborhood. They point entrepreneurs toward facade improvement or small business grants. “We advocate for the area,” Walsh said. “We bring events here, promote (the businesses). Strip malls and things don’t have that.”

Contact Kathryn Kennedy at kkennedy@reflector.com or (252) 329-9566.
Scott Mooneyham: Audit finds inflated state employee performance reviews fall below expectations
Friday, August 27, 2010
I’m shocked, I tell you shocked, that a recent audit examining the performance reviews of state employees found that results are inflated.
What’s next? Could it be a finding that cronyism and nepotism exist in state hiring? How about a determination that donors give money to political campaigns to improve their access to politicians?
OK, so maybe the findings of State Auditor Beth Wood aren’t all that startling. Wood’s office, citing earlier state Office of Personnel findings, said that less than 1 percent of state workers were rated as working below expectations on performance reviews. Eighty-one percent of workers were rated as very good or outstanding.
The larger problem isn’t the results, according to the audit. Rather, it’s that supervisors in state government waste time compiling these things only to have them end up in a file folder largely unread.
The audit, which focused on three state agencies, also found that the criteria used to judge employees was weak and that when employees failed to meet expectations no plan to try to improve work performance was established.
Wood noted another disconnect between the employee reviews and any larger purpose: The state doesn’t tie pay to performance, instead giving across-the-board raises. Wood said the across-the-board raises may not be compatible with a performance review system intended to promote excellent performance.
Maybe so. But suggestions that the state should have some form of merit raises are usually greeted with skepticism by key legislators. After all, if only 1 percent of employees don’t measure up under the current review system, doesn’t most everyone perform meritoriously?
The bigger fear is that office politics and the aforementioned cronyism would play into any merit pay system. Tying pay to objective measures used to judge job performance can lead to a system like that which currently exists, with the measures set so low that most everyone reaches them.
If you work in the private sector, by now you may be thinking that none of these findings sound all that unique to the public sector.
Many people who collect a paycheck and work for a decent-sized company go through a perfunctory and mostly useless employee evaluation each year.
At most companies, if you show up to work and get your work done, you’ll typically receive a good evaluation. In good economic times, that means you’ll get a 2- to 3-percent raise. In bad times, you hope it means you won’t get laid off.
And most people understand that the employee performance reviews are really about creating a paper trail when management decides to fire someone.
Of course, what the private sector does with its money usually isn’t the concern of the broader, taxpayer public.

Wasteful, inefficient practices in state government are the taxpayers’ concern. It’s also Wood’s job to bring that waste to the public’s attention.

In this case, though, feigned shock is a lot easier than the real thing.

Scott Mooneyham writes about North Carolina government and politics for the Capitol Press Association.
East Carolina coach leads team like a father figure

GREENVILLE, N.C.  
By Ed Miller  
The Virginian-Pilot  
© August 24, 2010

Even before his players dubbed him "Papa Ruff," patriarch of the East Carolina football family, dispenser of fatherly love, discipline and quite possibly more hugs than any coach in the college game, Ruffin McNeill was not an easy act to follow.

Ask John Wiley. He coaches linebackers and serves as McNeill’s associate head coach at ECU, and he worked with McNeill in the mid-1990s at Appalachian State, succeeding him as the defensive coordinator there.

Wiley was not worried about the technical football part of following Ruff, as nearly everyone calls McNeill. Wiley knew the App State defense inside and out. He realized, though, that he could never be the motivational force of nature that McNeill had been. Best to not even try.

"His biggest gift as a coach, and I recognized it early on, is a unique ability to motivate kids," Wiley said. "Everybody thinks he (just) loves 'em up, and he does love 'em up, but that allows him to be extremely demanding.

"I've never seen a guy able to get on someone as hard as he can get on them, and have them almost thank him for it."

Yes, Papa Ruff can "love 'em up," a phrase repeated by several members of his staff at ECU’s football media day. McNeill views himself as a surrogate father to his players, runs his team like a family, they say.

Of course, most coaches claim to operate that way, even those who prefer the coach-as-CEO management style. That model is one of the archetypes of the modern, money-driven game, which is above all a business. It is the big man, running his multi-million dollar enterprise from behind a big desk, with layers of coaches and staff between him and his employees, er, players.

For better or worse - and because he has yet to coach a game at ECU no one can be quite sure which - that's not McNeill's style.

"It's a choice," he said. "People in coaching, they choose to run their programs in an IBM CEO-type mode, and that's OK. I choose to run it more as a family because I want the kids to feel good about coming into our offices and speaking to our coaches, understanding that everybody's accountable, everybody works to put food on the table.

"That's how it was in my family. Everybody worked, everybody ate at the table, everybody put in the same amount of effort."
The son of a pair of teachers and himself a 1980 ECU grad, McNeill took over at his alma mater in January. He succeeded Skip Holtz, who parlayed four straight winning seasons and consecutive Conference USA championships into the head coaching job at South Florida. It is McNeill's first head-coaching job, after 25 years in the business.

McNeill, 51, immediately announced that he expects it will be his last one as well, saying he does not view ECU as a stepping-stone job, nor little, out-of-the-way Greenville as a stop on his journey toward brighter lights.

McNeill also made clear how he plans to run his team. Consider me your father, he told his players. The assistant coaches are your uncles.

"It caught us off guard a little," said Steve Spence, a junior linebacker from Norfolk. "Like, 'What are you talking about?"

"The first time I met him, though, I went into his office to talk to him and he gave me a big hug. Right then it was like, 'Oh, yes.' For the last eight months, it's been like a family."

McNeill's family-oriented approach is more than lip service, said Donnie Kirkpatrick, ECU's inside receivers coach and recruiting coordinator, who has known McNeill for 26 years.

"Ruffin is running the team in a way where he is not really involved daily in the offense or the defense or the special teams," Kirkpatrick said. "He's running it more as the father to the kids.

"He spends all his time with an open door, helping the kids, counseling the kids, and there's a huge need for that right now in the world."

Holtz and his staff preferred a more business-like approach, several players said. Though it was hard to argue with Holtz's success, McNeill's style has been a welcome change, quarterback Brad Wornick said.

"I think Ruff really brings a personal vibe to the team," Wornick said. "You can tell he really cares for you as one of his own."

Perhaps that's because McNeill is one of ECU's own - eastern North Carolina's, too. He grew up in Lumberton, about 140 miles from Greenville.

The story goes that former ECU coach Pat Dye discovered McNeill while watching film of another Lumberton High player. McNeill, a defensive back, was running around "knocking the fool out of people," Kirkpatrick said.

McNeill would eventually receive offers from South Carolina, Southern Methodist and several other major programs, but chose the school that had recruited him first.

A three-year starter at defensive back and team captain for two seasons, McNeill returned home to coach at Lumberton High after graduating from ECU. He stayed four years before becoming a graduate assistant at Clemson, where he got a master's degree in counseling and embarked on a college coaching career as a defensive assistant.
McNeill made seven stops in a dozen years before landing at Texas Tech in 2000 as part of Mike Leach's first staff. Coaching defense under Leach, a guru of the spread offense, was a bit like being in charge of salads at McDonald's. It was not what the brand was known for.

McNeill brought credibility to Texas Tech's defense, however. He took over as interim coordinator for the final nine games of the 2007 season, and the Red Raiders led the Big 12 in defense over that stretch.

He became the official coordinator in 2008 and was thrust into the interim head coaching job when Leach was fired last December, days before the Alamo Bowl against Michigan State.

It appeared to be a thankless task. Leach had been fired amid allegations that he had mistreated receiver Adam James, son of ESPN analyst Craig James. Allegations were flying back and forth. Leach would eventually sue Texas Tech, a case that has yet to be resolved. Red Raider fans stood behind the popular and outspoken Leach, who had put Texas Tech's program on the map.

McNeill walked on the field arm-in-arm with players. After a 41-31 win, he walked off to chants of "Ruffin! Ruffin!" Players said he'd been the rock the team had clung to during a chaotic week.

"We love Ruff," running back Baron Batch said afterward. "I'm sure you could see that, just by how hard everybody played."

Texas Tech passed on McNeill, however, hiring former Auburn head coach Tommy Tuberville instead.

"It was one of the most challenging times of my career, then one of the most rewarding times, and then one of the most down times, after I didn't get the job," McNeill said.

McNeill's performance as interim coach caught the attention of Terry Holland, ECU's athletic director. Holland had been looking for someone with head-coaching experience to replace Holtz and initially focused on Middle Tennessee State coach Rick Stockstill. After Stockstill withdrew his name from consideration, Holland took another look at McNeill.

"Being able to step into that situation at Tech was pretty incredible," Holland said.

Holland liked McNeill's local roots, his background as the son of educators, his emphasis on family and his vision of what ECU's program could become. He seemed to be a good fit.

He has been, Kirkpatrick said. McNeill's background makes him able to relate well to ECU's players, many of whom are small-town athletes who weren't heavily recruited.

And nobody needs to explain to him the underdog mentality that has traditionally come with the territory at East Carolina.

"We kind of enjoy having that chip on our shoulder," Kirkpatrick said. "We're the left-out school, kind of in the left-out area; we get everything last and we're Pirates. It all kind of fits."

McNeill brought much of Leach's staff to Greenville with him. He will run Leach's spread offense,
which terrorized defenses for years. He plans to play an attacking, blitzing defense also modeled on the one he employed in west Texas.

Brian Mitchell, ECU’s defensive coordinator and the former cornerbacks coach at Texas Tech, said the decision to follow McNeill to Greenville was easy.

"As an assistant, you want to run through a wall for the guy," Mitchell said. "I don't feel like we come to work, per se. We feel like we get a chance to come in, have fellowship, hang out, put together our plan and watch it work."

How well will it work? The Pirates lost 28 seniors from last year's team and must replace nine starters on defense. They are implementing new offensive and defensive schemes. Papa Ruff’s motivational skills will be counted on more than ever. Players say no team will play harder.

"You kind of don't want to let your father down," cornerback Emanuel Davis said.

Nor do they want to let fans down. Holland said McNeill was initially not a popular choice. However, his daughter monitored fan message board comments during McNeill’s introductory news conference and reported that the coach quickly began winning skeptics over.

"He's just a tremendous human being," Holland said. "Of course, that is all out the window unless we can win."

It may be a family business, after all, but it's still a business.

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Our comment policy: We've made a few changes to keep things civil; read about them here.

Ross has savvy, ties for the job

BY ERIC FERRERI - STAFF WRITER
Tags: local | news

CHAPEL HILL -- Though wise in the ways of public service and state politics, Tom Ross was still a higher education neophyte three years ago when he took over as president of Davidson College.

So to better understand the inner workings of his alma mater, Ross sat down and thumbed through its budget.

"Where the money goes is where the priorities are," Ross explained Thursday after being officially named as the fifth president of the University of North Carolina system. "I'll do that here as I did there."

The public university system that Ross will preside over starting Jan. 1 will have a smaller budget than it used to. The system has cut nearly $700 million over the past four years. Ross will be charged with limiting future cuts while continuing revenue streams for enrollment growth, student aid and other top university priorities.

But Ross, 60, doesn't appear daunted.

"Budget challenges are always difficult, but I don't think we ought to spend all of our time dwelling on it, because I think you have to continue thinking about the future," he said.

Ross's view of future budget battles is likely colored by his previous successes in the hallways of the state legislature. In the early 1990s, Ross, then a Superior Court judge, led a 23-member commission that pushed through reforms to the state's criminal sentencing laws. Those changes won wide praise and raised Ross' stature as a public servant.

"I've had a pretty good amount of time working with the legislature," he said. "I don't shy from it in the least."
His experience as a judge, reformer, foundation expert and college leader swayed UNC system leaders, who chose him from a pool of about 50 applicants to succeed current President Erskine Bowles. The workaholic former White House chief of staff will step down at the end of the year.

Ross will earn $525,000 annually, slightly less than the $550,000 ceiling that university officials had previously defined.

"We were looking for a rare combination of skills," said Hannah Gage, chairwoman of the UNC system's Board of Governors, which hired Ross on Thursday. "With Tom Ross, there was no one single quality or characteristic that outshone the others. It was the entire package."

Like Bowles, Ross is a politically connected product of North Carolina, and his savvy in dealing with legislators will be tested immediately. But his varied background gives him an edge, said John Sanders, the former director of the Institute of Government at UNC-Chapel Hill. He has also directed the administrative office of the state's court system and headed the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, a philanthropic organization.

He's ready to go

"His whole working career has been in North Carolina," said Sanders, who also served the UNC system as its vice president for planning and as a member of its governing board. "He has a lot of familiarity with the state, so he'll bring a lot of credibility and knowledge to the job that others would have to establish."

In his first year, Ross may be dealt some legislative wild cards. Along with the annual battle for state funding, the fall elections may change the political landscape.

Still, Ross won't have a big learning curve, said Burley Mitchell, the former North Carolina chief justice who is now serving on the UNC system's governing board.

"He knows the legislature, and they know him," Mitchell said. "He can go to work this afternoon."

Although he has had to eliminate jobs, Ross concedes he hasn't had to go through what Bowles did last year in cutting more than 900 positions across the system.

"It is, I'm sure, a very difficult thing," Ross said. "I don't look forward to that being a possibility, and I'm always hopeful it won't be necessary."

From small to huge

Davidson is a small, well-regarded private institution of about 1,700 students just north of Charlotte. By comparison, the UNC system is a 17-campus goliath of 220,000 students and a budget of more than $7 billion.

Ross has led organizations large and small and sees similarities.

"What I think I've learned is that a lot of the issues, problems and strengths you face are the same," he said. "There may be a difference in scale."

A collaborative leader

At Davidson, Ross directed a long-term strategic planning process that will lead the college to expand academic programs and its international student enrollment. The process included input from all groups on campus, said Mackey MacDonald, chairman of Davidson's Board of Trustees.

"One of the strengths of his leadership was the sharing of responsibility across these different groups," MacDonald said.

Ross also proved an adept fundraiser. Last year, Davidson recorded its best fundraising year ever, bringing in $55 million in private donations.

He was also praised at Davidson on Thursday for wanting to be a part of the campus culture. He'd regularly invite college seniors over to his house for dinner. A "tremendous" basketball fan, he usually was one of the loudest people cheering at games.
A 1972 Davidson graduate, Ross said Thursday that the decision to leave his alma mater was "heart-wrenching."

"It is the place that nurtured me and helped me grow as a student and again as its president," he said. "It has been an emotional struggle to decide to leave."

In speeches at Davidson, Ross was known for recounting exactly how many days he had been on the job - a reminder, he'd say, of how blessed he was to be there.

His final day there will be Dec. 31 - his 1,249th day as president.

Staff writer Jane Stancill and April Bethea of The Charlotte Observer contributed to this report.

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IMAGES

THOMAS W. ROSS

Age: 60
Current position: President, Davidson College, since 2007.
Education: Bachelor's degree, Davidson College; law degree, UNC-Chapel Hill.
Family: Wife, Susan Donaldson Ross; children, Mary Kathryn Ellis and Thomas W. Ross Jr.
Next UNC system leader: In his own words  

On the budget

"Budget problems come, they've come, and hopefully they go. They're here now, but I think we can work through those and keep our eye on the ball of what the mission of this university is."

On partnerships with community colleges

"We've got to look for ways to work together to educate more people and to do it in a quality way. There are new technologies that come available all the time. ... We've got to figure out how to be ahead of it, get on top of it and use it to better educate students."

On moving from a small private college to a large public university system

"I suspect that in some ways there won't be a huge difference. It is just a larger, more complex organization. There will be issues I'm sure that I haven't faced, but budget issues, personnel issues, those kinds of issues are still there."

On his experience in higher education

"What I've learned about higher education is excellence is important. Excellence is part of the mission of this university, and that ought to be our goal in everything we do. So I don't have a specific agenda at this point. I have a lot to learn about where we are and about where the university is headed."

On tuition and affordability

"What Davidson has been fortunate to be able to do and what I hope the university can also continue to do is to provide financial aid for those students who need that aid, and try to give people access and an opportunity, because that's so important to the state. If you look at changing demographics, not just in this state but everywhere, the question of affordability is growing more and more every day."

On lobbying the legislature

"Starting in 1990, I spent probably ... eight or 10 years at least in the legislature walking the halls a lot, because I was chair of the N.C. Sentencing Commission from 1990 to 1999. That commission addressed what I think was a serious problem in this state, but it took a lot of time and energy to work with legislators, to educate them and to encourage them to support that. And we were able to get that legislation passed with a near-unanimous vote. ... This state has great leaders from both political parties, and I've worked with a number of them over the years, and I hope I can continue to do that."

On the length of his tenure

"It's my intention to stay and serve this university for the foreseeable future. I don't think in terms of this period of time or that period of time. So I have no minimum. My wife probably has a maximum. But in the interim, I'm going to give it all I have. I'd be surprised if the Board of
directions. So I'm here, I'm here for a while. I'm committed to this.

On the decision to leave Davidson to become UNC president

"It's been a real struggle. I want something I can't have, which is both. ... What won out was really a feeling of commitment to the state and to public service and the need to answer the bell."

Staff writer Jane Stancill
UNC probe expands to academic misconduct

BY KEN TYSIAC - STAFF WRITER
Tags: college | sports

CHAPEL HILL -- North Carolina's investigation into possible improprieties in its football program took another serious turn Thursday night with the announcement of possible academic misconduct. The allegations involve a tutor who formerly was employed by Tar Heels football coach Butch Davis.

Chancellor Holden Thorp, athletic director Dick Baddour and Davis explained the new twist at a news conference at the Kenan Football Center on campus.

Baddour said a player interviewed during the NCAA's investigation into possible improprieties with sports agents shared information about the academic situation that led to the second prong of the investigation.

Former athletic faculty representative Jack Evans and former faculty president Lissa Broome are heading the investigation, which Baddour said the NCAA agreed should be conducted by the university.

Thorp apologized to those who love the university as he announced the new findings.

"Academic achievement and fairness are at the heart of the University of North Carolina and our department of athletics," Thorp said. "We are treating this issue with the seriousness that you would expect from this university. We will straighten this out. We are still gathering information, but our hope is that the scope of this is limited."

Baddour declined to say how many players are involved, saying the investigation is ongoing. He said the improprieties existed outside the
coaches" or academic advisers for his son, some from inside the university and some from outside the university. His son, Drew, is 17 years old and the starting quarterback at East Chapel Hill High School.

"To be honest with you, I think we're a little surprised and possibly disappointed," Davis said of learning one of his former employees was involved, "but there's been no revelation as to the extent or exactly what has transpired."

A clause in Davis' contract says that if an NCAA violation occurs in the program that he reasonably should have known about, the university can fire him without owing him payment for the remaining years on the contract.

With the investigation now taking on what Baddour called a second prong, Thorp was asked at what point a lack of institutional control becomes evident.

"Right now I think that what we need to do is determine the facts," Thorp said. "We are still in the middle of that, so it's a little early for me to say what it is that would make me feel one way or another about that question."

Baddour defended the program's integrity, explaining in depth the education on rules and academic integrity that athletes at the school receive, and that he feels good about the school's academic support program.

Thorp said he has every confidence in the ability of Baddour and Davis to lead the university through the investigation.

North Carolina opens the season Sept. 4 with a nationally televised game against Louisiana State in Atlanta, but since July details of the investigation have overshadowed talk about the game.

An undisclosed number of players were interviewed when NCAA investigators visited campus July 12 and 13, and investigators conducted more interviews during a return trip earlier this month.

Defensive tackle Marvin Austin and wide receiver Greg Little were among the players interviewed. The investigation also involves associate head coach John Blake.

One potential violation of NCAA rules occurred when former North Carolina defensive tackle Kentwan Balmer paid for Austin and then-Tar Heels defensive tackle Cam Thomas to train in California in summer 2009. Thomas confirmed that Balmer paid for the trip, which may be construed as an extra benefit by the NCAA.

Thomas and Austin trained at Proactive Sports Performance in Westlake Village, Calif. That facility is where clients of California-based agent Gary Wichard of Pro Tect Management train for the NFL draft.

Blake, the North Carolina assistant coach, is a former Pro Tect vice president and a longtime associate of Wichard, who also is Balmer's agent.

With the investigation now taking a new turn, Davis pledged the full cooperation of the football team. And Thorp vowed to find out what happened.

"It's a privilege to put on the North Carolina uniform and represent this university," Thorp said, "and it's our job to make sure that the people who do so have earned that privilege."

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A different kind of hooking up at UNCW event

By Wayne Faulkner
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Josh Tobey and Jennifer Witkowski came to the UNCW campus Wednesday evening for dates.

Not with other women or men and not with each other.

Instead their dates were with accountants, lawyers, insurance experts and sources of finance.

The two young owners of start-up companies were taking part in a speed dating event at UNCW – spending 15 minutes with individual experts in their efforts to gain contacts and advice on how to run their businesses.

The event was sponsored and run by the Entrepreneurship Center at UNCW, and experts came from the Rountree, Losee & Baldwin law firm; the RSM McGladrey accounting firm; RBC Bank; Senn Dunn Insurance, the Wilmington Investor Network; Shay Group accountants; TaylorGray and the UNCW Cameron School of Business.

"I was hoping to make some contacts and get some information," said Tobey, speaking above the din as a score or so would-be and newbie businessmen and women talked, sipped drinks and made their way from expert to expert until an announcement signaled it was time to move on.

Tobey owns 13th Shadow, a web development services company that builds websites, content management systems and e-commerce.

"I've talked to an accountant. That was helpful because I can't afford an accountant," he said, adding that he was hoping also to speak with Janis Mueller of the Small Business and Technology Development Center at the university.

Tobey, who graduated from UNCW in 2006, acknowledged that he's got a lot of competition around town. But he's targeting small businesses – such as boutiques – that bigger companies find impractical to serve.

Tobey said wasn't speed dating to find an investor. Because he's a one-man firm operating out of his house with very low overhead, he doesn't yet need the investment, Tobey said.

But financing was top of mind for Jennifer Witkowski, who owns Hearts and Hooves of North Carolina.

Her company is in the midst of building a 32-stall horse barn near Hampstead with outdoor and indoor lighted arenas that will serve two purposes: to use horses as therapy for people with severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia; and to offer
full-service boarding and riding opportunities for the public.

Witkowski emphasized that Heart N Hooves' equine therapy program is different "because we are clinically run by psychiatrists.

"It's a huge need," said Witkowski, who works as a communities support team worker to help integrate the mentally ill into the community.

"It's very tough to get housing and food for these people," she said, adding, "they have nothing to go out and do; they have very few recreational opportunities."

Horse boarders will provide income – at a charge of about $475 a month, the midpoint for the area's market, which runs $350 to $550 a month, she said.

But because equine therapy is recognized medically, those services can be billed to the clients' insurance just as any other medical service, said Witkowski.

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Credit card reform has companies treading lightly on campus

By Ylan Q. Mui
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Credit card reform came too late for 20-year-old Tamaira Shaw.

The junior at the University of the District of Columbia got a preapproved credit card from Bank of America in the mail her freshman year of college. It had her name on it and a $500 limit, and she took it as a license to spend. Within three days, she bought a cellphone, clothes and textbooks - and maxed out her card. Her mother is still helping her pay off the balance - plus hundreds of dollars in finance charges and fees.

"They randomly sent it to me," Shaw recalled this week as she started another semester at UDC. "I was just excited."

The landmark federal legislation that overhauled the credit card industry is reaching into college campuses to protect students like Shaw as they return to school and attempt to juggle not only their education and social lives but also how to pay for it all.

The law, which was passed in 2009 and phased in this year, bans issuers from providing credit cards to people younger than 21 unless another adult co-signs for it or the student can show an independent source of income. It also prohibits the companies from offering students freebies, such as T-shirts or pizza, in exchange for signing up for a card on campus or at school events, and college groups are required to make public any partnerships they have with card issuers.

Consumer advocates have long criticized the industry for wooing young people who often don't realize the risks involved, sucking them into a vicious cycle of debt. "Their goal is to hook you on credit," Ed Mierzwinski, consumer program director of the advocacy group U.S. PIRG, said of the industry's business model.

The new credit card law was designed to target what lawmakers dubbed "unfair or deceptive" practices by issuers and implemented the most sweeping change in the history of the industry. Among the most aggressive provisions were banning interest rate increases on existing balances and prohibiting issuers from raising rates when their customers miss payments on an unrelated account, such as a mortgage or an electric bill. The final phase of the law, which took effect Sunday, limits penalty fees and requires gift cards to be honored for five years.

The legislation spells out unique protections for young consumers, an attractive market for card companies seeking to grow their business. According to the student loan company Sallie Mae, about 42 percent of college students have a credit card. In 2008, the most recent data available, college students graduated with an average credit card debt of more than $4,100, up from $2,900 four years earlier. And
only 15 percent of freshmen had a zero credit card balance, plummeting from 69 percent in 2004, Sallie Mae said.

"If you were a student and you could fog a mirror, you could get a credit card," said Adam Levin, co-founder of Credit.com and former director of the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs.

Many students use credit cards for legitimate reasons, such as buying textbooks and meals or building a credit history. But lawmakers and consumer groups have attacked issuers for inappropriately marketing to students by holding giveaways on campus, mining alumni association databases and negotiating lucrative partnerships to provide university-branded credit cards. Several large issuers have been dialing back their promotions. Chase said it stopped using student mailing lists in 2006 and ended marketing on campuses and at athletic events by 2008.

Bank of America said it no longer sets up marketing tables at colleges, but it still maintains partnerships with about 700 alumni associations, athletic departments and some Greek organizations to offer college-branded credit cards to recent graduates. For example, it has a $2.8 million, seven-year contract with the Georgetown Alumni Association and its student credit union, which gives it access to the groups' mailing lists and pays a $50,000 bonus if the bank signs up 1,800 accounts in a year. On its Web site, the alumni association says the contract helps students because it pays for reunions, grants and scholarships, as well as a Sept. 11 memorial garden. The contract bans on-campus marketing and limits the number of direct-mail and e-mail campaigns.

Other Washington area universities, including Catholic University and Howard University, have similar agreements. A spokeswoman for Howard said the school is renegotiating a credit card contract with its alumni affairs department to ensure that students do not take on unnecessary debt, but she declined to elaborate. The college has also launched two financial-literacy programs for students, she said.

Under the new law, card issuers must submit any contracts they have with collegiate groups to the Federal Reserve, which will compile a report detailing the nature of the relationship. A Fed representative said the central bank is reviewing more than 1,000 agreements. Consumer advocates said they hope the legislation will increase transparency for such partnerships.

Still, sometimes even the strictest oversight cannot stop students from making mistakes.

Melanie Mirowitz, 21, a senior at American University, said she got a credit card with the blessing of her parents. They thought it would be a good idea to help build her credit history - as long as she used the card responsibly, she said. But paying the bill slipped her mind for a few months, and she racked up $500 in penalty fees.

"That wasn't a good conversation," said Mirowitz, who now tries to pay her balance on time each month. "They don't really explain it to you how it impacts you."

AU law student Steve vonBerg, 30, said his credit card initiation occurred shortly after he graduated from college. He racked up $7,000 in debt to fund a start-up business, which eventually shut down. It took him four years to pay off the card, he said.

Now older and wiser, he offered this advice to the new crop of students learning to juggle their budgets: "Don't take it into bars with you. Realize it's not free money."

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