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Answering call to service

Local groups volunteer to honor the memory of Sept. 11 victims

The Daily Reflector

Thursday, September 10, 2009

Local groups are answering the president’s call for a day of service to remember the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001.

The Greenville-Pitt County chapter of Rebuilding Together is working today to upgrade the electrical service of a disabled Greenville woman by painting and installing baseboard heating.

Electricians with Chocowinity Electric began work Thursday to rewire the house on West Fourth Street, and about 20 volunteers will work today to do sheetrock and painting work.

Michaele Dodrow, who lives in the house with her son, has been heating the house with a space heater. The new system will be much more energy efficient, said Jamie Jacobson, a board member with Rebuilding Together.

“The headquarters of Rebuilding Together has asked us to do a project related to energy efficiency to mark this first National Day of Service and Remembrance,” Rebecca Sweet, local group president, said.

Rebuilding Together assists in the rehabilitation of homes for low-income homeowners, particularly the elderly and those with disabilities, without charge. The aim is to preserve affordable home ownership and to revitalize communities.

The new Greenville-Pitt County group completed its first projects in the spring, and will begin accepting applications today for the April 2010 Work Day. Applications will be available at the Lucille Gorham Intergenerational Community Center.

In other efforts, the East Carolina University Wellness Corps held a monthlong drive to collect materials to help children contact their deployed parents with letters or recorded tapes.

Project Heart, a partnership between Pitt County Schools, Martin County Schools, Nash-Rocky Mount Schools, West Craven High School, Lenoir County Schools and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Pitt County, also has been collecting items like paper, stamps, disposable cameras and audio tapes to assist children of deployed National Guard members.

The groups will deliver the items to the National Guard armories in the various counties today.

Today’s events also are intended to encourage others to join AmeriCorps or volunteer in their communities.

Local AmeriCorps members and the North Carolina National Guard have been working together for a service project to honor military families for the United We Serve’s National Day of Service and Remembrance today.

Gov. Bev Perdue signed a Sept. 11 proclamation this week to thank military men and women and applaud the state’s community service efforts during the campaign.

"Through this United We Serve project, North Carolina’s AmeriCorps members and National Guard have shown that it only takes a small effort to give something back to their communities," Perdue said.

"By serving — we honor those who lost their lives on 9/11, and we build strong families and strong communities
all over North Carolina."

The National Day of Service and Remembrance, sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service, is an effort to honor the victims of 9/11 and their families and to rekindle the spirit of service.

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Festival brings international artists, concerts to ECU

BY KELLEY KIRK
The Daily Reflector

The Four Season's Chamber Music Festival brings international performing musicians to Pitt County throughout the year for concerts, master classes and community-outreach events.

The festival began Thursday with its first concert. A second concert will be held at 8 p.m. today. Adam Neiman (piano), Hagai Shaham (violin), Ara Gregorian (viola) and Amit Peled (cello) will perform in A.J. Fletcher Recital Hall for Residency I concert.


The festival, now in its 10th season, flourishes through continued community support.

"Many, many, many people in the community is the reason why this continues to grow," Artistic Director Gregorian said.

He began the festival, which holds two concerts during each of the four seasons, in his second year at ECU.

"I basically started with the idea that I wanted to help to bring this kind of music making on an international level to Greenville, ECU and the community throughout the year," Gregorian said.

There were five concerts during the inaugural year, the very first of which was held in a supporter's home.

"The best idea was to have people in the community support it," Gregorian said.

The community's support has grown, too. Not long into the series, A.J. Fletcher Recital Hall was so full that two concerts were needed per event, one on Thursday and one on Friday.

To celebrate the 10th year, a special invitation-only event will be held Sept. 27. For that event Gregorian's sisters Ani Gregorian and Alicia Gregorian will join their brother along with ECU faculty Paul Tardiff and Keiko Sekino.

"Many, many, many people in the community is the reason why this continues to grow."

Ara Gregorian
artistic director

"We come from a family of musicians, fourth generation on my father's side and second generation on my mother's. It's a thrill to be able to bring them down for this event," Gregorian said.

Ani, who plays violin, received first prize at the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition and performed throughout Austria, Japan and Korea. She's also collaborated with Bono and Bryan Adams. Cellist Alicia is a recent graduate of the New England Conservatory and has performed at the Mostly Mozart Festival, Festival De Musica in Costa Rica, and is a member of the International Chamber Soloists.

Gregorian said that he finds musicians for the concerts in a variety of ways.

"The music world is small place, so I find musicians by performing throughout the world, sometimes through collaborations at others festivals or concerts, sometimes I get recommendations. The most important thing for me is that these people are of the highest caliber," Gregorian said.

This year will introduce the Next Generation concerts at 3 p.m. Nov. 8 and 3 p.m. March 28, 2010, both of which are free and open to the public. These concerts will feature guest artists Michael Kannen (cello) in November and Robert McDonald (piano) in March, as well as ECU faculty, current and former students.

"It's a neat way to combo the guests artists, some of our current students, and former students in a performance," Gregorian said.

He emphasized that these concerts will still be at a world-class level.

Contact Kelley Kirk at kkirkswindell@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9596.
ARA GREGORIAN

FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

Residency I: 8 p.m. today, A.J. Fletcher Hall, East Carolina University
Adam Neiman (piano), Hagai Shamam (violin), Ara Gregorian (viola) and Amit Peled (cello)


Residency II: 7 p.m. Oct. 29 and 8 p.m. Oct. 30
Steven Copes (violin), Soovin Kim (violin), Ara Gregorian (viola) and Raman Ramakrishnan (cello)

Program: Dmitri Shostakovich’s String Quartet #1 in C Major, Op. 49, Maurice Ravel’s String Quartet in F Major, and Franz Schubert’s String Quartet in D Minor, D. 810, “Death and the Maiden”

Residency III: 7 p.m. Jan. 14 and 8 p.m. Jan. 15, 2010
Thomas Sauer (piano), Ara Gregorian (violin) and Colin Carr (cello)


Residency IV: 7 p.m. April 29 and 8 p.m. April 30, 2010
Elina Vähätlä, (violin), Ara Gregorian (violin), Hsin-Yun Huang (viola), Maria Lambros (viola), Ani Aznavoorian (cello) and Nina Lee (cello)


Tickets: $25 for adults and $10 for students per concert or $90 for adults and $35 for students for the season

Call: 328-4788
Studies: 1 dose of swine flu vaccine works

BY LAURAN NEERGAARD, AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON - Good news in the world's flu fight: One dose of the new swine flu vaccine looks strong enough to protect adults - and can spark protection within 10 days of the shot, Australian and U.S. researchers said Thursday.

Australian shot maker CSL Ltd. published results of a study that found between 75 percent and 96 percent of vaccinated people should be protected with one dose - the same degree of effectiveness as the regular winter flu shot. That's remarkable considering scientists thought it would take two doses.

U.S. data to be released Friday confirm those findings, and show the protection starts rapidly, Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institutes of Health told The Associated Press.

"This is quite good news," Fauci said.

The dose question has an important ramification: It means people will have to line up for influenza vaccinations twice this year instead of three times - once for the regular winter flu shot and a second time to be inoculated against swine flu, what doctors call the 2009 H1N1 strain.

Thursday's swine flu vaccine reports center on adults; studies in children aren't finished yet.

But scientists had feared that people of all ages would need two shots about a month apart because the new H1N1 strain is so genetically different from normally circulating flu strains that
most of the population has little if any immunity.

Chinese manufacturers gave the first hint a week ago that one dose could be enough. But different manufacturers make different formulations of the vaccine, so more evidence was needed.

Thus the CSL study, rushed out by the New England Journal of Medicine late Thursday, is welcome news. In a study of 240 adults, half younger than 50 and half over, one shot prompted the same kind of immune response indicating protection that is seen with regular flu vaccine. And a standard 15-microgram dose - not the double dose that also was tested - was enough.

"It's really striking how incredibly similar this is to every other study of a seasonal flu vaccine I've ever seen," said Dr. John Treanor, a flu specialist at the University of Rochester who examined the data.

CSL, which is one U.S. vaccine supplier, found the same side effects in its study that people experience with regular flu vaccine, which is no surprise since this shot is merely a recipe change from the annual standby. About 45 percent of recipients had mild reactions such as a headache, sore arm or redness at the shot site.

On Friday, the NIH is set to release results of its own studies of hundreds of adults that confirm that one shot works, Fauci said. Plus, the U.S. work shows that people are protected between eight days and 10 days after that inoculation, he said.

One dose means tight supplies of H1N1 vaccine won't be stretched so badly after all. The U.S. has ordered 195 million doses, based on the hope that 15 micrograms was indeed the right dose. Had it taken twice that dose, or two shots apiece, half as many people could have received the vaccine.

The winter flu vaccine is widely available now, and U.S. health authorities urged people Thursday to get it out of the way now before swine flu shots start arriving in mid-October.

Despite all the headlines about swine flu, which has become the main influenza strain circulating in the world, doctors do expect some garden-variety flu to hit this fall too - the kind that every year kills 36,000 Americans and hospitalizes 200,000.

"Take some individual responsibility to stay healthy during the flu season," said Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, who scheduled her own seasonal shot for Friday.

Waiting to get the first inoculation out of the way "is not in anybody's best interest," added Dr. Nancy Nielsen, past president of the American Medical Association. She said busy doctors need to have completed regular vaccinations by the time they have to deal with H1N1 shots.

There's no way to predict how much of either flu strain will circulate.

"This year, we are in uncharted territory," warned Dr. Thomas Frieden, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

He said some parts of the Southeast in the past few weeks have experienced as much flu as is usually seen in the middle of winter. So far, it's all the H1N1 variety, with schools and colleges experiencing outbreaks almost as soon as classes began.

Indeed, a typical school student who catches swine flu will spread it to two to three classmates, says a stark new estimate published Thursday in the journal Science. Flu specialist Ira Longini of the University of Washington in Seattle based the estimate on how swine flu spread through a New York City school in April, and some other schools since.
A separate report in Thursday's New England Journal suggested European manufacturers might get away with an even smaller dose. Novartis Vaccines added what's called an adjuvant, or immune-boosting chemical, to its version of the swine flu shot and found a 7.5-microgram dose was effective. It did, however, spark more of those reactions like injection-site pain.

Numerous countries allow flu vaccines with adjuvants to sell every year, but the U.S. has never approved an adjuvant-containing flu shot.

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ECONOMIC SCENE

Colleges Are Failing in Graduation Rates

By DAVID LEONHARDT

If you were going to come up with a list of organizations whose failures had done the most damage to the American economy in recent years, you’d probably have to start with the Wall Street firms and regulatory agencies that brought us the financial crisis. From there, you might move on to Wall Street’s fellow bailout recipients in Detroit, the once-Big Three.

But I would suggest that the list should also include a less obvious nominee: public universities.

At its top levels, the American system of higher education may be the best in the world. Yet in terms of its core mission — turning teenagers into educated college graduates — much of the system is simply failing.

Only 33 percent of the freshmen who enter the University of Massachusetts, Boston, graduate within six years. Less than 41 percent graduate from the University of Montana, and 44 percent from the University of New Mexico. The economist Mark Schneider refers to colleges with such dropout rates as “failure factories,” and they are the norm.

The United States does a good job enrolling teenagers in college, but only half of students who enroll end up with a bachelor’s degree. Among rich countries, only Italy is worse. That’s a big reason inequality has soared, and productivity growth has slowed. Economic growth in this decade was on pace to be slower than in any decade since World War II — even before the financial crisis started.

So identifying the causes of the college dropout crisis matters enormously, and a new book tries to do precisely that.

It is called “Crossing the Finish Line,” and its findings are based on the records of about 200,000 students at 68 colleges. The authors were able to get their hands on that data because two of them are pillars of the education establishment: William Bowen (an economist and former Princeton president) and Michael Mepherson (an economist and former Macalester College president).

For all the book’s alarming statistics, its message is ultimately uplifting — or at least invigorating.

Yes, inadequate precollege education is a problem. But high schools still produce many students who have the skills to complete college and yet fail to do so. Turning them into college graduates should be a lot less difficult than fixing all of American education.

“We could be doing a lot better with college completion just by working on our colleges,” as Robert Shireman, an Education Department official who has read an early version of the book, says.
Congress and the Obama administration are now putting together an education bill that tries to deal with the problem. It would cancel about $9 billion in annual government subsidies for banks that lend to college students and use much of the money to increase financial aid. A small portion of the money would be set aside for promising pilot programs aimed at lifting the number of college graduates. All in all, the bill would help.

But it won’t solve the system’s biggest problems — the focus on enrollment rather than completion, the fact that colleges are not held to account for their failures. “Crossing the Finish Line” makes it clear that we can do better.

The first problem that Mr. Bowen, Mr. McPherson and the book’s third author, Matthew Chingos, a doctoral candidate, diagnose is something they call under-matching. It refers to students who choose not to attend the best college they can get into. They instead go to a less selective one, perhaps one that’s closer to home or, given the torturous financial aid process, less expensive.

About half of low-income students with a high school grade-point average of at least 3.5 and an SAT score of at least 1,200 do not attend the best college they could have. Many don’t even apply. Some apply but don’t enroll. “I was really astonished by the degree to which presumptively well-qualified students from poor families under-matched,” Mr. Bowen told me.

They could have been admitted to Michigan’s Ann Arbor campus (graduation rate: 88 percent, according to College Results Online) or Michigan State (74 percent), but they went, say, to Eastern Michigan (39 percent) or Western Michigan (54 percent). If they graduate, it would be hard to get upset about their choice. But large numbers do not. You can see that in the chart with this column.

In effect, well-off students — many of whom will graduate no matter where they go — attend the colleges that do the best job of producing graduates. These are the places where many students live on campus (which raises graduation rates) and graduation is the norm. Meanwhile, lower-income students — even when they are better qualified — often go to colleges that excel in producing dropouts.

“It’s really a waste,” Mr. Bowen says, “and a big problem for the country.” As the authors point out, the only way to lift the college graduation rate significantly is to lift it among poor and working-class students. Instead, it appears to have fallen somewhat since the 1970s.

What can be done?

Money is clearly part of the answer. Tellingly, net tuition has no impact on the graduation rates of high-income students. Yet it does affect low-income students. All else equal, they are less likely to make it through a more expensive state college than a less expensive one, the book shows. Conservatives are wrong to suggest affordability doesn’t matter.

But they are right that more money isn’t the whole answer. Higher education today also suffers from a deep cultural problem. Failure has become acceptable.

Students see no need to graduate in four years. Doing so, as one told the book’s authors, is “like leaving the
party at 10:30 p.m.” Graduation delayed often becomes graduation denied. Administrators then make excuses for their graduation rates. And policy makers hand out money based on how many students a college enrolls rather than on what it does with those students.

There is a real parallel here to health care. We pay doctors and hospitals for more care instead of better care, and what do we get? More care, even if in many cases it doesn’t make us healthier.

In education, the incentives can be truly perverse. Because large lecture classes are cheaper for a college than seminars, freshmen are cheaper than upperclassmen. So a college that allows many of its underclassmen to drop out may be helping its bottom line.

If you look closely, you can still find reasons for optimism. A few colleges, like the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, have intensive programs that have raised graduation rates. The State of West Virginia has begun tying student aid to academic progress, and graduation rates there have risen. Washington Monthly magazine has published a new college ranking based in part on graduation rates. (Kudos to Penn State, among others.) When students fill out an online form for federal financial aid, the Obama Education Department now informs them of the graduation rate at any college in which they express interest.

But an enormous amount of work remains, and it’s hard to think of any work that’s more important to the American economy.

Last year, even in the grip of a recession that has spared no group of workers, the gap between what a college graduate earned and what everyone else earned reached a record. Workers with bachelor’s degrees made 54 percent more on average than those who attended college but didn’t finish, according to the Labor Department. Fifty-four percent — just think about how that adds up over a lifetime. And then think about how many students never cross the college finish line.

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