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Chris Raynor, 28, a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity while at ECU, died in a car accident just hours before his wedding scheduled for Saturday.

Staff, wire reports

RALEIGH — An East Carolina University graduate killed in a car wreck hours before his wedding was remembered by friends and his wife-to-be as warm and sincere.

Guests who arrived for the wedding of Christopher Raynor, 28, and Karen Taylor of Raleigh on Saturday were shocked to learn it would instead be a memorial service for Raynor, who was killed in a car accident four hours earlier. Raynor was with two groomsmen on their way to breakfast when their car collided with another vehicle that ran a red light. He was thrown from the back seat and was struck by a third car. He was not wearing a seat belt.

Police charged James Howard Early, 52, of Asheville with misdemeanor death by motor vehicle.

Wedding bells remained untouched at Cathedral of the Sacred Heart as guests were handed programs for a brief memorial service celebrating Raynor, who worked for a construction company in Raleigh and had dated Taylor for three years before proposing over a pancake breakfast in November.

Raynor was a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity while at ECU.

“She’s never heard anything like this before, and I’ve been doing this for decades,” said Father Salvatore Buschino of Sacred Heart, who planned to officiate the 11 a.m. service. He said one guest almost fainted when told of Raynor’s death.

Buschino said Taylor had originally not planned to attend the 35-minute memorial service.

“She was going to go home, but I said to her, ‘You must stay. You will regret it if you leave,’” he said. “She was so valiant, and the service was beautiful.”

Friends said Taylor spoke about her fiancee’s strength as the groomsmen who survived the accident sat in wooden pews nearby.

Taylor later told WTVD-TV in Durham how she had received a text message from Raynor earlier that day expressing excitement for their plans.

“He started off my day with a text message just saying, ‘Yay’ and he went on with the text message saying, ‘I’m so ready’ and I, I think he is ready. I think he’s ready for heaven.”

Taylor, a first-grade teacher, said she had no regrets about how she and Raynor had spent their lives together.

“I know everyone who was part of the wedding does not have a single regret, because everyone told him how much they loved him and how much that he meant and how much he enriched and loved and changed people’s lives because he changed mine.”

The couple would have departed for their honeymoon cruise on Monday.
Take the shot: Resisting flu vaccine hurts worse

Monday, September 14, 2009

If you are someone who never gets a flu shot, this would be a good year to break with tradition.

"Nobody actually should be scared about H1N1 (swine flu) or the seasonal flu," Gov. Beverly Perdue said while getting her seasonal flu shot earlier this month. "But we all must be diligent and we all must be prepared."

That's excellent advice as we head into a flu season complicated by the presence of the H1N1 virus. Pitt County Public Health Director John Morrow says it's important to remember that despite the attention to H1N1, seasonal flu causes a lot of illness and death each year.

Flu season runs from December through spring, but H1N1 has remained a constant threat for months. Nearly 600 deaths have been blamed on H1N1 already this year, a number that could swell into the tens of thousands under worst-case predictions by government officials.

But seasonal flu — which causes an average of 36,000 deaths each year in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — could turn out to be just as deadly.

While older adults are less likely to contract the flu, they are the most likely to suffer serious complications and have the highest fatality rates. Health experts agree that getting vaccinated is the best way to stay healthy and also protect those around you from infection.

Vaccines for H1N1 won't be available until late October at the earliest, but seasonal influenza vaccines will be available much sooner.

Public health officials and school administrators in Pitt County will be distributing vaccines in nasal-mist form to students and others between ages 2 and 50. The vaccines, provided through a federal grant, will be offered Oct. 1-15 at each of Pitt County's 36 public schools. Permission slips for the vaccine were due from parents last week.

But while most parents may take advantage of vaccine availability for their children, many traditionally do not get the vaccine for themselves. That's always a gamble with terrible odds, but it's particularly risky this year. The payoff for getting vaccinated is a much better chance of protecting those close to you, as well as the greater community.

If you miss vaccination programs at school or at work, students and others can be vaccinated for seasonal flu by getting a shot from family doctors or from the health department during an Oct. 16 community clinic.

With or without a flu shot, you should avoid close contact with people who are sick, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze, wash your hands often and avoid touching your face or eyes.

But the vaccine is the single most powerful defense against the flu, and it's more important than ever this season to go ahead and take the shot.

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The new N.C. Cancer Hospital is spacious with lots of light, unlike the dark, cramped old hospital.

CHUCK LIDDY, Staff photo by Chuck Liddy

Patients' services include a wig selection for those who lose hair, a small library and Internet access.

CHUCK LIDDY, Staff photo by Chuck Liddy

Kirk Scott, 73, and his wife, Jan, plan a tour of Civil War battle sites as the California man receives infusion treatment at UNC's new N.C. Cancer Hospital. They'll take the trips between the therapy sessions.

CHUCK LIDDY, Staff photos by Chuck Liddy

Cancer hospital opens

BY SARAH AVERY, Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL - Lea Wharton said she chose to have her breast cancer treated at UNC Hospitals because she trusted her care team, but the facilities in the old brick Gravely building, originally a 1950s-era tuberculosis sanitarium, were far from inspiring.
Now that is history with the christening today of a $207 million, C-shape building that houses the new N.C. Cancer Hospital.

"Finally, finally, finally the facility matches the care," said Wharton, 42, of Raleigh.

The building, rising just to the right of the neuro sciences hospital on the sprawling medical campus, includes 315,000 square feet of clinical space -- three times as much as the old center, which will be bulldozed this fall.

Among the features are 50 patients' beds; 72 large, well-appointed stations where patients receive chemotherapy; large windows with views of an atrium or the campus; and numerous rooms for mammography, CT scans and different kinds of radiation therapy.

"It is the most beautiful facility I've ever seen, and unfortunately, I've seen a lot of hospitals," said Wharton, who was diagnosed with cancer last year and now returns regularly for checkups.

Among the most dramatic transformations was the children's ward, which is now in a spacious, bright hall on a separate floor from the adults. Children have a playroom, learning centers, treatment rooms and infusion stations equipped with televisions and recliners.

Dr. Stuart H. Gold, a pediatric oncologist, said the old building had a heart and soul, but both have transferred with the staff.

"I wouldn't change anything," he said.

Dr. H. Shelton Earp III, director of UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center, which is part of UNC-Chapel Hill, said the new hospital will also serve patients and doctors in far-off corners of the state who cannot make the trip to Chapel Hill.

With computers and video-conferencing devices, cancer specialists at UNC-CH will be able to link with doctors throughout the state to discuss difficult cases, new therapies and treatment advances. The hospital is already connected with 15 different practices, and will soon expand to 180.

Dr. Deborah Boyd, a general and vascular surgeon in Wilson, said the video links provide a better access to expertise on complex cases.

"In the past, if I had a situation that wasn’t a straightforward case, I would call up a professor and say, 'Give me your opinion'," Boyd said during a brief teleconference from Wilson Medical Center. "This is going to be a whole team of doctors and other health-care support."

Earp said expanding the cancer center's range is a key goal that the new hospital helps fulfill.

"We take very seriously our job as a public, comprehensive cancer center to affect care across the state," Earp said.

Earp said the need for cancer care will continue to rise in North Carolina. In 2007, the last year state data are available, cancer was the second-leading cause of death, claiming 17,425 lives.

More cancer will be diagnosed as the state's population increases. The old cancer hospital could not accommodate the increasing number of patients, Earp said.

The hospital will soon compete with another large cancer center expansion at nearby Duke University, which announced this summer that it would break ground on a $700 million project that would include cancer care. The cancer center part of the expansion is expected to open in 2012.
Officials at both hospitals have said they plan to collaborate, and did not expect the additional space to over-saturate the market.

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$207 million UNC building replaces a 1950 s TB sanitarium

Cancer Hospital by

Cancer Hospital by the numbers

180 million: Dollars North Carolina taxpayers provided toward the project

101: Rooms for treatment, exams, consultation and procedures

315,000: Square feet of clinical space

105,000: Square feet of office space in an adjoining building

7: Mammography rooms

SOURCE: UNC Hospitals

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Dude, wash your hands!

September 11, 2009  |  6:00 am

Messages to reach college students about the importance of proper hygiene to prevent flu outbreaks probably isn't working, according to a new study. Already this fall, several colleges and universities have been flattened by the H1N1 (swine) flu pandemic. Swine flu has already been reported at 149 of 204 schools. Washington State University has experienced one of the harshest outbreaks, with at last 2,500 students seeking healthcare for flu-like symptoms.

In the new study, published in the September issue of the Journal of Environmental Health, researchers observed student compliance with hand hygiene recommendations at the height of a suspected norovirus outbreak at a university in Ontario, Canada. Only 17.4% students followed proper hand-hygiene protocols -- such as washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. But a whopping 83% of the students said they were complying with proper hand hygiene advice.

"Typically, health officials put up posters and signs and rely on self-reporting to determine whether these methods are effective," said a co-author of the report, Ben Chapman, of North Carolina State University, in a news release. "And people say they are washing their hands more. But, as it turns out, that's not true."

Chapman says the information aimed at students has to be compelling in order to get them to change their behavior. He suggests officials use practical ideas, such as posters that point students to the nearest hand sanitizer unit. Posters and brochures should use language that kids use, he adds. Don't say "gastrointestinal illness" when you could say, "this bug will make you puke your guts out."

"If your audience consists of students," he said. "You should use media that students use."

-- Shari Roan

Photo credit: PR Newswire
Trying to Save for the Kids' College? It's a Bear

By STACEY L. BRADFORD

If the bear market has kept you from setting money aside for your child's college education, you're not alone.

Because of the economic crisis, 47% of parents are saving less or aren't saving at all for their kids' education, according to a Gallup survey released in May by student-loan provider Sallie Mae.

While not saving for that degree may have felt like a smart move while the stock market was crashing, the need to fund your kid's college account has only grown. For the 2008-2009 school year, the average cost of attending a four-year public school for in-state residents -- including tuition and room and board -- rose 5.7% to $14,333, according to the College Board. The cost was up 5.6% to $34,132 for a private university. (These numbers aren't adjusted for inflation.)

Meanwhile, the value of 529 college-savings accounts sank 21% last year, according to Boston consulting firm Financial Research, leaving families with far less tuition money than they had counted on. A 529 plan is a tax-advantaged investment plan offered by individual states.

So, the question for many parents is: How should they save for their children's higher education going forward without taking on too much risk?

The first thing to recognize is that all investments in stock and bond funds, including those in college-savings accounts, are vulnerable to market fluctuations. And they can lose value just when you need the money, says Joseph Hurley, founder of Savingforcollege.com, which provides information on 529 plans.

For parents with young children, if there's another severe market correction, they can leave a portfolio alone and wait for the stock market to recover.

But as children get closer to college age, you won't necessarily have the luxury of waiting out a bear market. By the time a child is a sophomore or junior in high school, parents should move the majority of their education savings out of stocks and into more conservative investments, says Kalman Chany, author of "Paying for College Without Going Broke."
Most importantly, parents need to read the fine print and truly understand what they are investing in. Just because a mutual fund within a college-savings plan is described as "conservative," it doesn't guarantee the holdings are risk-free.

In April, the state of Oregon sued OppenheimerFunds because its Core Bond fund, which was described as conservative, held credit default swaps and other risky investments -- causing the fund to lose nearly 36% in 2008. As a result, participants in the Oregon College Savings Plan, the state's 529 savings plan, had a total of $36 million in losses last year.

Here's a rundown of the most popular saving options and their risks:

**529 College Savings Plans**

Provided the money is used for qualified college expenses, you can withdraw funds from a 529 plan free from federal income taxes. Some states offer additional tax advantages for residents. If the assets aren't used for education expenses, you'll get hit with a 10% penalty.

Each year, one parent can contribute $13,000 or the two together can put in $26,000. You also can invest $65,000, or $130,000 for two parents, at one time, provided you don't make another contribution for five years. Amounts above that are subject to the gift tax. For more information on individual state plans, go to Savingforcollege.com.

The risks: If the stock market tanks, you may not be able to unload your riskier investments. That's because these plans restrict how often account holders can make changes to their portfolios. Thanks to market volatility, plan owners can change their investment mix two times in 2009. But unless Congress makes that change permanent, you'll be restricted to just one adjustment per year starting in 2010.

**529 Prepaid Tuition Plans**

A handful of states, including Florida and Virginia, offer prepaid 529 plans that allow parents to lock in today's tuition prices for participating state schools. These are usually open only to state residents. (In terms of investments and tax advantages, prepaid plans generally work the same as other 529 plans, though individual plan rules can vary.)

If your child doesn't attend a participating school, you can get your money back with certain penalties. The Florida plan, for instance, will pay out the same amount as if your child attended a public in-state school. Massachusetts will return your principal plus interest accrued at the rate of the Consumer Price Index.

The risks: Some states have fallen on hard times and may not be able to stand behind their tuition guarantees. In Alabama, parents can roll over money into the state's Higher Education 529 Plan to avoid tax penalties or they can redeem their original contract payments, minus fees. If Florida terminates its plan, it will provide tuition for participants who are within five years of college.

There's also a prepaid plan for private colleges called the Independent 529 plan. Currently, more than 270 institutions participate. For more information on this program, go to Independent529Plan.org.

The risks: Participating schools claim they will stand behind their promise to lock in current tuition rates. But if your child doesn't attend a participating school, you'll get back only your principal plus a maximum 2% investment gain.

**UGMA and UTMA Accounts**

Through the Uniform Gift to Minors Act (UGMA) and the Uniform Transfer to Minors Act (UTMA), a child can own securities and other investments in his or her own name, provided a parent or another adult acts as a custodian on the account.

The risks: These accounts no longer are the tax haven they once were. Investment income used to get taxed at a child's low rate, under the so-called kiddie tax. Now, a child's unearned investment income above $1,900 is taxed at the parents' higher income bracket until the child reaches age 19 (or 24 if the child is a full-time student).