ECU recruits Hunt

BY ROB CHRISTENSEN - rchristensen@newsobserver.com

Former Gov. Jim Hunt soon might be representing East Carolina University in its bid to become a member of the Big East Conference.

ECU has been talking to Hunt and his firm, Womble, Carlyle, Sandridge & Rice about representing them, Hunt confirmed Monday.

"They have asked our law firm and me to help them," Hunt said. "We haven't firmed up anything. We want to help them. I love that university. We hope it will all get worked out and I am confident it will."

Womble Carlyle is the state's largest law firm.

Hunt, a former four-term governor with broad contacts in national political and educational circles, still lives on his farm in Wilson County in a part of the state where there is broad support for ECU.

He is a long-time backer of ECU, having supported the creation of a medical school at the Greenville campus at a time when that was a major political fight.

Hunt's involvement would not be the first political gun that ECU has turned to. Last week in a meeting with ECU Chancellor Steve Ballard and athletics
director Terry Holland, North Carolina Gov. Bev Perdue pledged that at the appropriate time she would lobby her fellow governors and top educational leaders.

ECU, a member of Conference USA, has been looking to move to a more prestigious conference. With two Big East members, Syracuse University and the University of Pittsburgh, set to join the ACC, conference alignments are now in flux.

"It would be a great thing for East Carolina University," Hunt said. "But it would be a great thing for the Big East if they could get that university with 27,000 students and growing, with great excellence in so many ways including the med school."

Hunt called ECU "the hole in the donut" because the Big East already has West Virginia University but then there's a geographic gap until the University of South Florida. He said that it would help the Big East to have a school in the 10th largest state in the country - and expected to grow to the 7th largest state by 2030.

"East Carolina has a huge fan base and they are the most passionate fans anywhere," Hunt said. "So it makes sense for all concerned."

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The medical programs at East Carolina University are looking for ways to hold on to talented professors and staff in an era of state budget cuts that has frozen salaries.

Toward that end, the ECU Board of Trustees’ Health Science Committee voted unanimously Thursday to recommend a performance-based incentive model using existing grant funding that will need the approval of the full board.

Dr. Paul Cunningham, dean of ECU’s Brody School of Medicine, colorfully described the current situation.

He compared the loss of the ability to offer pay increases as trying to recruit talent with a small slice of apple pie when ECU could once offer a tempting larger slice served a la mode.

He cautioned that any enticement must be within budget.

“We cannot outstrip our resources,” he said.

Officials said that nationally other medical schools haven’t had to deal with this money crunch. And greener financial pastures elsewhere have caused the loss of key employees.

“Pay differentials come up and opportunities arise,” Cunningham said.

Dr. Nick Benson, Brody’s vice dean and medical director for ECU Physicians, said the compensation plan proposed would reward extraordinary services with a variable supplement of up to 5 percent of the salary.
This service can be shown through academic and professional successes or by bringing in more research dollars.

“We want to make sure we’re recognizing the key producers in our basic sciences,” he said, adding this will help to retain employees so they don’t get “poached” by other medical schools.

Research grants from the National Institutes of Health are especially prized, not just because of their prestige in the field of worldwide research, but because they include funding for infrastructure to put the grant into action, Benson said.

Those grant recipients also bring to their universities top-notch credentials that improve instruction.

In other business, the committee heard a report on the School of Dental Medicine from Phyllis Horns, ECU’s Chancellor of Health Services.

She said the first class of 52 students is performing well in tests.

These results come despite experiencing a hurricane and the surprising resignation of former dean James Hupp following a state audit.

Ross Hall, the school’s administration building now under construction, sustained about $25,000 in damage from Hurricane Irene, she said, mostly due to wind, but some due to the heavy rains.

It’s still expected to be ready for the second class of students in 2012. Students are meeting temporarily at Brody.

The committee also heard a report on the financial picture for Brody’s clinical practices.

The clinical practice of Brody School of Medicine isn’t breaking even yet, but the deficit gap closed significantly with the fiscal year that ended on June 30, said Brian Jowers, ECU Physicians executive director.

“We’ve got to do some more tweaking to make sure it runs like a business,” he said. “In essence, we’re close to breaking even.”
To help close the gap, Brody has stepped up its collections even as it has increased its patient load and the number of procedures performed.

One factor that helped slow the flow of red ink came from the June agreement where University Health Systems will join ECU in providing outpatient services at the Leo W. Jenkins Cancer Center.

The system’s related $17.5 million payment for assets helped offset the financial losses ECU has incurred when it was its sole operator.

ECU Physicians and other of ECU’s clinical practices see a large number of patients either with government-funded care or those without any type of insurance, which has caused deficits for years.

Another infusion of money is expected to arrive within weeks with the implementation of the federally approved Upper Payment limits for serving Medicaid patients.

“That will be a big help to us,” Jowers said, adding that Medicaid patients comprise about 25 percent of ECU Physicians’ practice.

Contact K.J. Williams at kwilliams@reflector.com.
Ruffin McNeill isn’t kidding when he talks about the overwhelming support he sees at East Carolina football games.

After the second-year ECU coach watched his team hold on for its much-needed first win of the season last Saturday against UAB, he knew who he wanted to give the ceremonial game ball to afterward. The only trouble was, he couldn’t hand out 50,000 footballs.

Instead, he signed one ball in honor of the fans who he said made the difference on a decidedly sloppy day in which the Pirates won despite seven turnovers and a handful of costly penalties.

“Our fans willed us to win the football game,” McNeill said at Monday’s weekly press conference, where he unveiled the ball that will be kept along with the team’s other game balls usually awarded to the top player on a given day. “There may have been some grumbling but that’s out of passion for our team, the passion for East Carolina University. In the end, they were there, the energy was there and the enthusiasm was there.”
Great crowds are a tradition at ECU. McNeill, a former Pirates player, said he’s still overwhelmed by the noise inside Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium, and said he’d like to be able to give the fans a second-straight game ball following this Saturday’s in-state clash with North Carolina.

“During the game, for that three- or four-hour stretch, you can’t hardly hear yourself, and it’s fun,” McNeill said. “When we get ready to come out (for the start of the game), I peek through the window at the Murphy Center, and it is jam packed every time.

“Even the Pirate guy (ECU’s secondary mascot, who wears a costume reminiscent of those in the “Pirates of the Caribbean” movies) gets real fired up. I’m like, ‘Whoa, dog, we’ve got a little time.’ As a coach, I’ve been in stadiums where we didn’t have that kind of support, but here we have it every week.”

**Penalties/turnovers**

McNeill stressed on Monday that the Pirates (1-2) had already spent an appreciable amount of time addressing their inconsistent performance on Saturday.

In addition to four fumbles by four different players and three interceptions by senior quarterback Dominique Davis, ECU also committed costly penalties, including two on defense which extended UAB drives.

“I handled it during and after the game, I handled it (Sunday) night and I’ll handle it (Monday),” McNeill said of the four Pirate infractions, all of which were 15-yard flags. “That won’t happen. That’s not what we’re talking about in playing smart. The first two were what I call selfish penalties and that’s not what we’re about. It’s not going to be tolerated by me.”

As for the turnovers (ECU has 13 in three games), McNeill said he can live with three of the fumbles that were the result of players trying to get extra yards, and one of Davis’ interceptions that was deflected right into the hands of UAB safety Jamie Bender for a 35-yard touchdown.

The others McNeill said were more troubling.

“A few of them were due to technique, not making sure we keep the ball high and tight and taking it low,” he said.
**Injuries**
McNeill promised he would not rush the return of injured sophomore receiver Justin Jones (left knee) for this weekend’s game against the Tar Heels, though he did confirm Jones has been able to participate in limited drills in practice.

New to the injured list and listed as out indefinitely is senior center Doug Polochak. That means fellow senior Hugh Parker, the favorite for the starting job for most of the offseason, will start against UNC.

Probable to return are offensive lineman Drew Gentry (left knee) and inside linebacker Kyle Tudor (left knee). Still out are linebacker James Craig (right knee) and center Mack Helms (concussion).

**Bullock lauded**
Junior college transfer running back Reggie Bullock was named Conference USA Offensive Player of the Week after his breakout performance against the Blazers, which included 169 rush yards and a touchdown.

Bullock leads the Pirates with 246 ground yards and an average carry of 5.2 yards.

“Our communication was great, and Reggie did a good job of trusting his blocks and being his own blocker, running behind his pads to gain yardage,” McNeill said.

Contact Nathan Summers at nsummers@reflector.com or 252-329-9595.
Be honest. How excited are you about watching the Syracuse versus Boston College football or basketball game? Guess what, it doesn’t matter. The ACC is not even pretending that adding Pittsburgh and Syracuse is about anything but money, driven by ESPN and television. If the conference truly cared about doing the right thing they would add East Carolina University.

ECU has just thrown a Hail Mary pass by requesting to join the Big East Conference. There is no geographic affinity, unless you count Louisville or Georgetown, no fan loyalties and one would be hard pressed to envision academic liaisons. Few think it a good idea; fewer still believe they will be accepted.

There are at least three good reasons for admitting ECU to the ACC. First is economic development. ECU has the third largest enrollment of public universities in the state, a large base of graduates throughout the Atlantic coastal region this conference claims and the Pirate Nation supports its team, with an average at-home attendance of 49,600 in 2010, and huge turnouts for away games in Chapel Hill, Raleigh, Charlotte, even Blacksburg, Va. This translates into paid motel rooms, restaurant tabs, gasoline purchases, sports paraphernalia and stadium concessions. That’s economic development in its purest form.

When unable to attend games, ECU fans follow their team on TV. Statewide television viewership of ECU football equals the top five DMA areas in the nation. Viewership translates into ad revenues for broadcasters and networks.

Next are regional relationships. Gone are the days when we couldn’t wait for the ACC Game of the Day or televised basketball games. The Big Four, with Virginia, Clemson, South Carolina and Maryland, were teams we felt some affinity toward, but the addition of Boston College, Florida State, Miami and, to a lesser extent, Virginia Tech stir little interest among original ACC fans, who understand those additions were all about TV money. Regional pride is diminishing as evidenced by declining attendance in regular season
and tournament games when some of these new additions are playing. Adding ECU would rekindle regional fan interest. There is also a compatibility factor. At least four current ACC members have academic, economic and other relationships with ECU and that number would likely increase.

The biggest reason is support for eastern Carolina. East Carolina University and its medical school is the economic engine for the eastern region of our state. Most indicators demonstrate this region is declining in population, income, education achievement, health and economic development. Without change, count on more tax dollars spent to shore up the east. Anything done to strengthen the ECU hub can only help outlying communities and might lessen future tax burdens.

Conference officials and college administrators need to stop letting ESPN run their conference and start doing what is best for their schools and region. The addition of ECU has been discussed for more than two decades but too many remember the ECTC of old, treat it like a step-child and dislike losing to the Pirates. Today’s East Carolina is a grown up, prestigious and significant university and admission to the ACC would be good for the conference and good for the region. Pirates need to support this move by contacting legislators, conference officials and ESPN, asking them to do the right thing. Aargh!

Tom Campbell is a former assistant North Carolina treasurer and the creator/host of N.C. SPIN. Contact him at ncspin.com.
Mr. Lawrence Ed Tipton, 91 passed away peacefully on Sunday Sept. 25, 2011. A graveside service will be held on Wednesday at 11 a.m. in the mausoleum at Pinewood Memorial Park with the Rev. Dr. Greg Rogers officiating.

Mr. Tipton and his wife of 65 years, Rosemond Murad Tipton and his family, have made Greenville their home since 1952.

"Big Ed," as he was affectionately known, was born in Spartanburg County, S.C. He grew up in Gaffney S.C. with his two brothers and two sisters. "Big Ed" became a professional boxer at a very young age to help the family until World War II began and he joined the U.S. Army. He continued his boxing career during the war fighting the likes of Joe Louis and Ezzard Charles.

After the war Tipton continued his boxing career which eventually led to a position with Wilson Sporting Goods. This brought him to Wilson, where he met his soul mate married and began raising his family. He later left the sports world and moved to Greenville in 1952 where he became a pillar in the community. In 1962 his entrepreneurial spirit led him to an insurance, real estate and Home Building career. Mr. Tipton went to work every day until his death.

Ed loved eastern North Carolina and Greenville helping his community in every way that he could. He participated in the growth of Greenville from building homes to supporting his beloved Pirates of East Carolina University. He was a member of the Greenville Chamber of Commerce, the Pirates Club, The Greenville Golf and Country Club and was instrumental in founding the Greenville Washington Home Builders Association which he served as the first President. He served on the Advisory board of North Carolina National Bank. He was a member of many organizations and associations during his life time following his philosophy of giving back to the community.

Big Ed was an avid golfer and played until he was in his late 80's shooting his age every year. He ended his golf career logging at least 6 hole in ones. He loved watching the ECU Pirates and the Atlanta Braves. Big Ed loved life and it was impossible to be around him and not be affected by his warm
demeanor and fantastic sense of humor. Quick witted, he was never at a lost for a good joke or making someone laugh.

Mr. Tipton leaves behind his wife of 65 years Rosemond Murad Tipton; two sons, L. Ed Tipton II and his wife, Sherryl, and Mark Ellis Tipton and his wife, Diane, of Raleigh; six grandchildren, Sara Elizabeth Manning and her husband, Dr. Norman Manning, of Raleigh, John Elliott Tipton and his wife, Grey, of Greenville, Catherine Elaine Tipton of Raleigh, Kelsey Elizabeth Tipton of Los Angeles, Lindsey Koury and her husband, Hoss Esmaeili, of Raleigh, and Michael K. Koury of Greenville; two great grandchildren, Scott Manning of Raleigh and Craig Manning of Raleigh.

The family will receive friends tonight from 6 to 8 at Wilkerson Funeral Home and at other times at the home.

Memorials may be made to: East Carolina Heart Institute at East Carolina University, 115 Heart Drive, Greenville, NC 27834.


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In the alliance
The N.C. Advanced Manufacturing Alliance is made up of 10 state community colleges:
Robeson (the lead college)
Asheville-Buncombe Technical
Beaufort
Craven
Davidson
Edgecombe
Fayetteville Technical
Haywood
Nash
Surry

Community colleges win jobs grant
BY JANE STANCILL - jstancill@newsobserver.com

Ten community colleges in North Carolina will share an $18.8 million federal grant for job training and workforce development.

Grants worth nearly $500 million were announced Monday by U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis, Undersecretary of Education Martha Kanter and Jill Biden, a community college professor and wife of Vice President Joe Biden.

Across the nation, about 200 community colleges or college partnerships submitted applications in the competitive process. There were 32 winners, the labor department said.

The North Carolina effort is led by Robeson Community College in Lumberton. Others in the partnership include Beaufort, Craven, Fayetteville Technical and Nash community colleges.

The colleges will join to create the N.C. Advanced Manufacturing Alliance, which includes area industries, workforce investment boards, local schools, nonprofits and Apple Inc. The alliance aims to quickly assess, train and certify displaced manufacturing workers in 17 counties across North Carolina.
"We are extremely excited about the opportunity," said Charles Chrestman, president of Robeson Community College, which has an advanced manufacturing training lab on campus.

"There are some very good businesses out there that are creating jobs - provided people have got the right skills and the right education to assume them," he added.

The alliance will serve areas of the state that suffered heavy manufacturing job losses to China in the past decade. The colleges want to raise the technical competency of workers who have some previous manufacturing experience but have been displaced as factories shut down.

Besides accelerating job training for low-skilled workers, the colleges hope to improve graduation rates, build new programs that meet industry needs and bolster online learning. Lectures, training simulations and course information will be available free on Apple's iTunesU, Chrestman said.

Some 2,300 students will be initially targeted. They will receive an Apple iPad to use during the instruction. They will be matched with employers for internships and future jobs once they receive a degree or certificate.

In a conference call with reporters, Solis, the labor secretary, said the goal is to provide tailored training to workers for industries that are ready to hire. Community colleges do that most efficiently, she said.

"Community colleges are community assets," she said. "They understand the needs of local employers."

During the next decade, half of all new jobs will require middle-range skills, she said - that is, training beyond a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree.

The North Carolina partnership has lined up 35 employers to participate in the program.

The announcement of the grant comes at a time when the state unemployment rate rose in August to 10.4 percent, according to the N.C. Employment Security Commission.

"We're hopeful that we can accelerate some of the strategies that are currently being used to educate individuals for the jobs that are needed," Chrestman said, "and help North Carolina move a little further along this continuum as the economy, hopefully, picks back up."

Stancill: 919-829-4559
Bloomberg to speak at UNC graduation

From staff reports

CHAPEL HILL New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg will be the speaker at UNC-Chapel Hill's commencement in May, the university announced Monday.

Bloomberg will receive an honorary doctor of laws degree at the UNC-CH ceremony, set for May 13 at Kenan Stadium.

He was chosen as the speaker by UNC-CH Chancellor Holden Thorp in consultation with a committee of students and faculty.

An entrepreneur and philanthropist, Bloomberg was first elected mayor of New York in 2001, two months after the 9/11 attacks.

He is the founder of Bloomberg LP, which has 13,000 employees and 300,000 subscribers to its financial news and information service.

He attended Johns Hopkins University, where he later served as chairman of the board of trustees and where the school of public health bears his name.

He earned a master's degree from Harvard Business School.
College Graduation Rates Are Stagnant Even as Enrollment Rises, a Study Finds

By TAMAR LEWIN

A report to be released on Tuesday by a group seeking to raise college graduation rates shows that despite decades of steadily climbing enrollment rates, the percentage of students making it to the finish line is barely budging.

The group, Complete College America, is a nonprofit founded two years ago with financing from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Lumina Foundation and others. Its report, which had the cooperation of 33 governors, showed how many of the students in states completed their degrees, broken down into different categories, including whether enrollment is full- or part-time, or at a two- or four-year institution.

The numbers are stark: In Texas, for example, of every 100 students who enrolled in a public college, 79 started at a community college, and only 2 of them earned a two-year degree on time; even after four years, only 7 of them graduated. Of the 21 of those 100 who enrolled at a four-year college, 5 graduated on time; after eight years, only 13 had earned a degree.

Similarly, in Utah, for 100 students who enrolled in a public college, 71 chose a community college, 45 enrolling full time and 26 part time; after four years, only 14 of the full-time students and one of the part-time students graduated. Of the 29 who started at a four-year college, only 13 got their degree within eight years.

Because of gaps in federal statistics, students who enroll part time, or transfer have been nearly invisible, said Stan Jones, the president of Complete College America.

“We know they enroll, but we don’t know what happens to them,” he said. “We shouldn’t make policy based on the image of students going straight from high school to college, living on campus, and graduating four years later, when the majority of college students don’t do that.”

Currently, federal education statistics generally focus on first-time full-time students. But according to the report, about 4 of every 10 public college
students attend part time — and no more than a quarter of part-time students ever graduate.

“It’s really, really hard to get your hands on completion rates for nontraditional students,” said Judith Scott-Clayton, of the Community College Research Center at Teachers College. “If somebody pops in and takes a community college class and they don’t finish, you don’t know whether they were ever planning to get a degree.”

Among older students, as well as those who are awarded Pell grants, and black and Hispanic students, the report said, fewer than one in five of those attending college part time will earn a degree in six years.

“Time is the enemy of college completion,” the report said. “The longer it takes, the more life gets in the way of success.”

One factor, Mr. Jones said, is the increasing practice of amassing more credits than are required for a degree.

Another factor is the large number of students mired in noncredit remedial classes that the report calls the “Bermuda Triangle” of higher education. Half of all students studying for an associate degree, and one in five of those seeking a bachelor's degree — including many who graduated from high school with a grade point average of 3.0 or higher, previous research has shown — are required to take remedial, or “developmental” courses, and many of them never move on to credit-bearing courses, much less graduation.

The report recommends that states adopt financing incentives to push colleges to pay more attention to completion rates.

And it highlights strategies that have helped to increase graduation rates. Among those strategies are embedding remedial instruction in the curriculum, rather than requiring separate courses, and offering programs that students attend in a block, with a predictable schedule and a cohort of other students seeking the same credential.

The report praises Tennessee’s 27 Technology Centers, where the degree completion rate is 75 percent. Tech students, with an average age of 32, sign up for a program, not individual courses, and they come for seven hours a day, Monday through Friday, with classes ending by 3 p.m., allowing them to hold an evening job or care for their children after school. Instead of separate remedial courses, the centers have a required foundation course, in which each student learns skills needed for a program.
“A student might come in not knowing why they need to learn trigonometry, but when they’re studying machine technology or drafting technology, they’ll see why, and I think that helps,” said Carol Puryear, director of the Tennessee Technology Center at Murfreesboro. “Our mission is really workforce development,” she said, “and about 85 percent of them get a job when they graduate.”

Mary Spilde, the president of Lane Community College in Oregon, said that while her state has dozens of new initiatives on the issue of remedial, or “developmental” education, there is not yet good evidence showing which approach works best.

The report also cites as another example of good practice the City University of New York’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, which help students complete associate degrees more quickly with block scheduling, student cohorts and other support. The graduation rate is three times that of students who do not participate in the programs.