Our Views

A tragic loss

Sprinklers can save lives, property

The charred remains of a house at Ocean Isle Beach tell a horrific story, one of tragedy and sorrow. Seven college students — friends from high school — perished there eight days ago when a fire raced through the structure at a merciless pace.

Words will provide little comfort to the family and friends of those who were lost in the blaze. But when the grief passes, North Carolina should view this episode as further evidence that stricter fire prevention regulations are needed, and that efforts to promote the installation of sprinkler systems warrant greater support.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, investigators have proposed that lives may have been saved if a sprinkler system had been installed in the house.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, investigators have proposed that lives may have been saved if a sprinkler system had been installed in the house. The dwelling had working smoke detectors, but officials have speculated that the speed of the blaze may not have provided those in the house sufficient warning before they were trapped.

North Carolina has seen such tragedy before. Eleven years ago, a fire at a Chapel Hill fraternity house claimed the lives of five University of North Carolina students. In response, Chapel Hill officials tightened the fire code to mandate the installation of sprinkler systems in fraternity and sorority homes.

However, many places where young people live on and off campus do not have those lifesaving devices. Some 35 percent of the 317 residence halls on the 16 UNC campuses do not have adequate fire prevention, and half the dorms at East Carolina University do not have sprinklers. The UNC Board of Governors voted this year to install sprinklers in every dorm by 2012, a welcome move but one long overdue.

However, many students who do not live on campus lack an equal level of protection from fire. Many communities do not require the inclusion of sprinkler systems in residential homes despite the certain knowledge they save lives and limit property loss. And while protecting college students should be a priority, any loss of life due to fire is a tragedy — especially when it could have been prevented at the price of $2-$4 per square foot for the installation of a sprinkler system.

A change in the law will not bring back those lost at Ocean Isle Beach last month. But preventing the further loss of life to another tragic fire would be a fitting and lasting memorial to their memory.

student from Clemson University. The group of 13 college students were spending the weekend at a beach house on the North Carolina coast when a furious fire swept through the home. Survivors leapt from open windows and were fortunate to escape given the speed with which the flames devoured the structure.
If 'flagship' means most, UNC sinks

In response to David Clark's Oct. 25 letter about The Daily Reflector's use of "flagship," I offer my own correction. Understand that I bleed purple and to support either the light blue or red hurts me deeply, but let's get the facts straight.

According to Clark, the flagship is defined as, "the finest, largest or most important." Finest and most important are subjective and cannot be argued. Largest, however, is pretty easy to determine. According to the UNC General Administration Web site's most-current reported data: UNC-Chapel Hill had 17,124 fall 2006 undergraduate students, ECU had 18,587 and NCSU had 23,730. For the same semester, ECU had 24,351 total enrolled students, UNC had 27,717 and NCSU had 31,130.

Which one of these defines UNC Chapel Hill as the flagship? Maybe it's time to get down off the horse and check the data.

SCOTT ALFORD
Greenville
Pirate Battalion wins Ranger Challenge

- ROTC competition tested cadets from 19 schools.

The Daily Reflector

East Carolina University Army cadets won first place in the recent Eastern Region (ROTC) 4th Brigade's Ranger Challenge held at Fort Pickett, Va.

It's the first time an ECU team has won the overall competition, according to a news release.

The 13-member Pirate Battalion competed against 19 other schools in eight events — the Army physical fitness test, basic rifle marksmanship, patrolling, weapons assembly, orienteering, hand grenade assault course and a 10K road march.

The ECU team placed first in the categories of physical fitness, basic rifle marksmanship and day land navigation. The team finished second in the written land navigation and the commander's event.

Cadet Theodore Brennis also was awarded a coin from Cadet Command Sergeant Major for having the highest Army Physical Fitness Test score among the 200 cadets in the competition.

Bush appointee to visit campus

The head of President Bush's community service initiative is scheduled to visit the College of Education Friday.

David Eisner, chief executive officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service, will attend the tri-state Student Service Learning Conference sponsored by Campus Compact.

The compact places volunteers on college campuses to engage students in community services. The College of Education sponsors an Americorps program, Project HEART: High Expectations for At Risk Students.

Eisner will visit an elementary and middle school to see Project HEART tutors in action. He will talk with host teachers and principals about the impact of the program.

Researcher scheduled to speak

B. Lee Green, a researcher on health promotion and disease prevention in the black community is scheduled to speak Nov. 12 about developing research programs investigating health disparities.

Green will speak at 4 p.m. in 265 Planagan building on the main campus.

He is a professor and vice presi-

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President of the office of institutional diversity at the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute located in Tampa, Fla.

Scholarship partners honored

The 30 recipients of the first Access Scholarships recently were honored along with the groups and individuals sponsoring the scholarships.

The East Carolina University Foundation launched the new scholarship to help students who have both demonstrated financial aid and proven academic potential.

The scholarships are in the amount of $5,000 per year and are renewable for up to four years of undergraduate studies.

Ten students received the scholarships provided by RBC Centura Banks, six by the West Memorial Fund, three by the Harold H. Bate Foundation of New Bern, and 11 were supported by ECU Foundation board members.

Middle schoolers coming

Approximately 150 middle school students are scheduled to participate Thursday in an event to encourage them to attend called

Called GEAR UP NC, Day — Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs North Carolina — the event is designed to encourage young people to consider and begin preparing for college.

Johnston, Hyde, Columbus, Martin and Washington school system are scheduled to participate.

ECU Notes is a compilation of news releases from East Carolina University.
NaNo means anyone can be a novelist

The National Novel Writing Month project believes you can turn a writer into a full-fledged novelist in one month's time.

By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector

The six writers who gathered this week at the Tipsy Teapot in downtown Greenville live very different lives.

Their day jobs range from retired preacher to student to computer programmer; they came from as far as Kinston and Wilson or Rocky Mount to meet their peers.

They share a belief that a Seussian word will make them full-fledged novelists within one month’s time: NaNoWriMo.

NaNoWriMo stands for National Novel Writing Month, a project pioneered by a small group of San Francisco Bay area writers in 1999. The organization didn’t start small long.

This year, there will be around 100,000 participants worldwide, each planning to produce a 50,000-word novel before midnight Nov. 30.

The time frame, organizers state on their Web site, “forces you to lower your expectations, take risks and write on the fly.”

Experienced writer and Grimesland resident Erin Brescia finds truth in that.

“That’s kind of the idea of NaNo — to step out of your comfort zone and write something you wouldn’t normally try,” the 25-year-old mother explained. “For people who have never written a book before, NaNo is about getting past that fear of filling the page, or screen, with words.”

One attendee at Tuesday’s meeting was slightly more stressed by the timetable.

“That’s 1,600 [words] and change a day,” said Eric Braswell, eyes widening as he shook his head in disbelief.

Braswell is another NaNoWriMo first.

“I’d like to actually complete something, go ahead and know it’s kind of a throw away,” the 38-year-old explained.

He’s starting the story from scratch, and said Friday he’s off to the right start. Braswell sat down to write those first pages just after midnight, Nov. 1.

“I got nearly 600 words down before I went to bed,” he said. “I’m a little behind the pace but am looking to make up time over the weekend.”

That may become a pattern. The self-proclaimed night owl said it’s the only time he finds to write. His day job in video production and web design keeps him plenty busy.

He’s not alone. Most of the authors are balancing their NaNoWriMo efforts with full-time jobs or school.

Dominique Marshall, 23, is an English major at East Carolina University. She’ll be writing her semi-autobiographical novel around the splotch of essays and creative writing projects due as the semester draws to a close.

“Writing is such a solitary activity,” Brescia said. “Less you’re friends with serious writers, it’s hard for people to understand the ins and outs and frustrations of it all. It’s comforting to know if there are thousands of like-minded people across the nation struggling with you for the next few days.”

Kathryn Kennedy can reached at k kennedy@cox.com or 329-9566.
Heart attacks treated faster

Project speeds care and saves lives

By Jean P. Fisher
Staff Writer

More North Carolinians suffering the deadliest type of heart attack are receiving life-saving treatment faster through a unique statewide collaboration among paramedics, doctors, and hospitals.

Twenty years of medical studies have shown that when a heart attack is caused by a blood clot blocking the patient's artery, clearing the vessel within 90 minutes saves lives. But too often, that didn't happen. Poor coordination of care caused delays.

Two Duke University cardiologists launched an ambitious effort to streamline care about two years ago. Sunday morning, at the annual meeting of the American Heart Association in Orlando, Fla., they reported that the effort has significantly sped up time to treatment. The results were also published in the online edition of the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Hospitals that provide emergency balloon angioplasty — the preferred treatment to unblock arteries — saw the percentage of patients receiving such care rise to 72 percent, up from just 57 percent, according to the study. The median "door-to-balloon" time fell to 74 minutes, down from 85 minutes.

Smaller hospitals that can't do emergency angioplasty improved the time to treatment with clot-busting medications. The median door-to-infusion time was 29 minutes, down from 35 minutes.

Treat patients with either balloon angioplasty or clot-busting drugs within 90 minutes cuts the risk of death from heart attack by 40 percent, said Dr. Christopher Granger, director of Duke Hospital's cardiac care unit and co-director of the improvement project.

Putting more responsibility for treatment decisions in the hands of first responders — for example, by empowering even mid-level paramedics to diagnose heart attacks in the field — and other changes helped eliminate needless delays.

"In some cases, paramedics called to mobilize the [heart catheterization] lab from the patient's living room," Granger said in an interview.

Before the project, patients' heart attacks often weren't officially diagnosed until they reached a hospital emergency room. Then it typically took even more time for a cardiologist to be called-in to order treatment and several minutes more for the angioplasty team to assemble.

At UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill, which participated in the improvement project, ambulances carrying heart attack patients now go directly to the heart catheterization lab, bypassing the lengthy process of bringing patients through the emergency room. Dr. George Stouffer III, chief of clinical cardiology at UNC Hospitals, said that one change saves at least 15 minutes. Other changes are mundane: Emergency room nurses may now get patients ready for transport to the heart catheterization lab when the cardiologist is paging, rather than waiting until the specialist arrives.

It's the little things

"There were a lot of little things that, when you add them all up, created a big delay," said Dr. James Jollis, a Duke cardiologist and co-director of the improvement project.

Three-tenths of the state's hospitals, also including Duke University Hospital in Durham, and their county emergency medical services participated in the project. The effort was supported by a $1 million grant from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina.

Wake County already uses some of the strategies the project advocates to streamline heart attack care, such as having ambulances carry patients only to the county's two 24-hour cardiac care hospitals: WakeMed Raleigh and Rex Hospital. Paramedics in Wake County also transmit electrocardiogram readings directly to hospitals from the field, speeding diagnosis.

Wake will be part of the next phase of the effort, which is expanding: Prelude all 100 of North Carolina's acute care hospitals and the emergency medical services that cover them.

Collaboration was critical in setting up care that required multiple organizations to work together, as transferring patients from centers to larger hospitals that form emergency catheterization teams. The project saw the biggest improvements in transfer times.

Before the collaboration, the median time it took for a patient to reach a smaller hospital to be transferred to a larger facility was two hours.

After weeding out unnecessary delays, the median transfer time fell to 70 minutes.

In most cases, heart attack patients thought to be likely candidates for transfer are now kept on the ambulance stretcher with heart monitors instead of being admitted to local hospitals. The local emergency room doctors confirm the diagnosis and start heart-protective medicines.

Once the receiving hospital gives OK, the patient is whisked right into the same ambulance and carried to the larger facility.

"We've had patients in and out in minutes," said Dr. Kimberly Young, medical director of emergency medicine at Person Memorial Hospital in Roxboro, about 30 miles of Durham. She is also medical director of Person County EMS.

Yarbrough said that in the past, there were "door-to-balloon" times of 60 minutes. Not all feeder hospitals are so lucky, however. The median door-to-balloon time for transfers is still outside the 90-minute target. It fell to 10 minutes, down from 149 minutes.

Patients can help ensure that the fastest treatment by calling 911 immediately if they experience symptoms such as chest pain or shortness of breath. Jollis said about half of patients suffering heart attacks in North Carolina drive themselves to the emergency room brought in by someone else, burns up precious minutes.
Tuition: Hold it

An education at one of North Carolina’s 16 public campuses remains, relatively speaking, a pretty good buy for students and parents in the state. But in the last decade, boards of trustees and the University of North Carolina system Board of Governors, facing what they saw as the need for more revenue, have boosted tuition and fees at a tremendous rate. This would be a good year to hold the line.

The General Assembly gave the system an astonishing increase in appropriations — 10.6 percent. And, lawmakers took $35 million from the state’s escheats fund (basically, unclaimed money from a variety of places) and put it into financial aid.

The system’s president, Erskine Bowles, says he expects any tuition increases to be low. But Bowles should be proactive on this issue, working with chancellors to ensure that there are no increases for in-state students. Most parents understand that a university education is indeed an investment, but North Carolina is not a high-income state, and many families even in the middle class are struggling these days.

More questions are being raised of late about college expenses in general. Congress, for example, is looking at why costs have continued to rise at elite private schools with large endowments.

A good year for the UNC system such as this one is a chance for the system’s schools to make a gesture of appreciation to in-state families, by holding tuition and fees where they are to give those families just a little breathing room.
‘Helicopter parents’ hover over college students’ lives

Survey: Meddling is common

BY JUSTIN POPE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

College administrators grumble about the rise of “helicopter parents,” moms and dads who keep hovering over the lives of their children even after they leave for college.

But helicopter parents aren’t just hovering. They’re swooping down in attack mode.

Nearly 40 percent of first-year college students have a parent or guardian intervene on their behalf to solve a problem at college, according to a 2007 survey released today. About 13 percent of first-year students said such interventions were frequent.

“Forty years ago, going to college was a ‘breaking away’ experience,” said George Kuh, who directs the National Survey of Student Engagement, a massive annual study of college students that contains the new data.

“Many students have said that cell phones have long since replaced the pay phone down the hall in the dorm,” Kuh said. A big part of the reason is that cell phones have long since replaced the pay phone down the hall in the dorm.

Educators insist there’s nothing wrong with parents taking an interest in college life. At Ohio State this year, a record 85 percent of the 6,100 freshmen brought a parent or guardian to orientation. Ten thousand parents subscribed to an e-mail list for updates from the school.

But the term “helicopter parents” has emerged to describe those who go overboard, getting too involved in solving their children’s problems, preventing them from learning self-reliance.

Confirmed by hard data

Largely, the trend has been tracked anecdotally — in news stories about parents doing students’ laundry, editing their papers and even calling the school to complain about roommates or grades. But there’s been little hard research.

This year’s NSSE, however, asked an experimental set of questions on the topic. The questions went out only to about 9,000 students on 24 campuses, out of 320,000 students who participated in the full survey, which tracks all aspects of the college experience. The results offer the most comprehensive snapshot yet.

Among the findings:

■ About seven in 10 students said they communicated “very often” with a parent or guardian, with electronic means being the most common. The proportion was about the same for seniors and freshmen. “Very often” was not defined in terms of a specific number of contacts.

■ Well-educated parents aren’t more likely to be helicopter parents. Poorly educated ones also intervene at about the same rate as others.

■ There’s an upside to intervening parents. Their children are more engaged in college life, happier and reporting getting more from the experience.

“We speculate maybe these students are better because they are persisting and taking advantage of a lot of opportunities in college, when they might not have done that if their parents weren’t prodding,” Kuh said.

However, those students also get lower grades.

Any parent susceptible

Barbara Hofer, a psychologist at Middlebury College in Vermont, said the results are similar to data she has gathered but not yet published on students at Middlebury and the University of Michigan.

She also found helicopter parenting transcends race, class and education (though she prefers the term “electronic tether” to “helicopter parents”).

Grade impact unclear

Like the NSSE survey, Hofer has also discovered communication stays constant through college (about 13 times per week, by phone and electronically, for both freshmen and seniors), and that students who are more independent about academics had higher GPAs.

However, it’s unclear whether that’s cause or effect: Does laissez-faire parenting produce smarter students, or do students who struggle academically draw in their parents for help?