THE DAILY CLIPS

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ECU's heart institute receives $500k gift

The Daily Reflector

Two areas of East Carolina University's new heart institute will be named for a prominent Rocky Mount family thanks to a $500,000 pledge.

Boddie-Noell Enterprises of Rocky Mount has pledged the sum to the East Carolina Heart Institute through the ECU Medical and Health Sciences Foundation. As a result, ECU will name the pediatric cardiology and cardiac diagnostics areas of its facility for the company.

"We are happy that we are in a position to contribute to a worthy cause that will mean so much to the people of eastern North Carolina," said Mayo Boddie, chairman of Boddie-Noell.

ECU officials welcomed the pledge.

"We are very grateful for this important gift from the Boddie family," said David Whitchard, foundation chairman. "Their gift will help us improve services to both children and adults with heart problems in our community."

The heart institute comprises two buildings. The ECU building, funded by state appropriations and private contributions, is under construction on ECU's medical campus.

interventional labs and 120 patient beds. University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina, parent company of PCMH, is funding its construction.

Both buildings should be complete in 2008.

Boddie-Noell Enterprises is a family-owned business engaged primarily in restaurants and land development. It is the largest Hardee's franchise operator in the United States with 343 restaurants across four states. The company owns the Texas Steakhouse & Saloon and Cafe Carolina and Bakery brands. It also operates Moe's Southwest Grill franchises and the historic Rose Hill Conference Center in Nashville. Boddie-Noell has major land-development projects completed or in progress along the North Carolina coast and in Virginia. It employs more than 12,750 people and is based in Rocky Mount.

The ECU Medical and Health Sciences Foundation raised more than $5 million in gifts and pledges during fiscal year 2006-2007 to support scholarships, research, faculty development and facilities at the Brody School of Medicine, College of Nursing, College of Allied Health Sciences, School of Dentistry and Laupus Library.

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It will house offices and research labs for cardiologists, cardiothoracic surgeons, vascular surgeons and scientists. The four-story, 206,000-square-foot, $60 million building also will house outpatient treatment facilities and educational facilities for students, physicians and scientists.

The six-story, $150 million, 375,000-square-foot cardiovascular bed tower that Pitt County Memorial Hospital is building on Moye Boulevard will house operating rooms, 13

Something to say?
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Joyner opens exhibit

Joyner Library's Special Collections department opened the final exhibit in a See NOTES, B3
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four-part series designed to honor the university’s centennial last week.

“A Dream Realized: East Carolina University 1967-2007” brings the story of ECU to the present day. The exhibit will be open through March 2008.

The exhibit focuses on the school’s transition from a college to a research university offering several multidisciplinary postgraduate degrees. The seven exhibit cases display photographs, drawings and other artifacts to illuminate this period of growth and expansion on campus. Curated by graduate student Adrienne Rea, the exhibit offers a reflection on the intense growth of the campus during the last several decades and a celebration of the university’s centennial.

The exhibit is the last in a four-part series titled “A Century of Education and Impact: The History of East Carolina University.” Each part in the series highlighted a specific period of university’s development.

Special Collections is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more information about this exhibit, or Special Collections, call 328-6671, or visit http://www.ecu.edu/lib/spcoll/.

Gray joins Harriot College

Lacey Gray has joined the staff of the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences at East Carolina University in the position of director of marketing and communications.

Gray received her bachelor of arts degree in humanities with an emphasis in journalism from St. Gregory’s University in Shawnee, Okla., where she was a staff writer and editor-in-chief for the student newsletter The Chant.

She received a master’s degree in journalism from the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Okla.

Before coming to Greenville she worked for the University of Oklahoma College of Arts and Sciences.

In her current job Gray will manage Cornerstone, the alumni magazine; Magnetic East, the faculty e-newsletter; assist in communication; and marketing of the Voyages of Discovery Lecture Series and other college events; write news releases pertaining to student, faculty and alumni accolades; collaborate with the college’s IT personnel; and increase the overall visibility of the college to students, potential students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends.

“My immediate goal is to learn as much about our faculty and students, and about what is occurring in our departments and interdisciplinary programs as possible,” Gray said. “I want to effectively communicate the activities, events and accomplishments of our faculty and students to others in the college, on the ECU campus and within the community of Greenville and beyond.”

Gray can be reached at 737-1764 or grayl@ecu.edu.

Two named to ECU board

The ECU Board of Trustees appointed Greenville consultant Marvin Garner Jr. and Charlotte journalist Mary Schuklen to the university’s Board of Visitors on Friday.


Schuklen, associate editor of The Charlotte Observer, is a 1979 alumna.

With more than 40 members, the Board of Visitors supports ECU fundraising activities and relays messages between the university administration and the public, according to the ECU Web site.
One-woman show at ECU was a performance for a lifetime

Sheryl Lee Ralph gave a performance for life last week at East Carolina University. The acclaimed veteran of film, television and the Broadway stage performed her one-woman show, “Sometimes I Cry: The Lives, Loves and Losses of women infected and affected by HIV/AIDS,” as part of World AIDS Day events held at the university.

During the show, Ralph said as she was basking in the success of Dreamgirls, which earned her a Tony Award nomination in the 90s, she witnessed friends “getting sick one day and dying the next.” Their deaths were blamed on cancer, heart problems, pneumonia and other diseases, but not on the real cause — AIDS. On that disease there was silence. But through Ralph’s songs, movements and dramatizations based on real-life stories of women infected by AIDS, Wright Auditorium was anything but silent. There was laughter, crying, gasping, clapping and the poignant stillness of collective meditation.

The women she portrayed — a successful businesswoman, a girl raised through foster care and a grandmother — had their own stories about how they contracted HIV/AIDS. But there are some common themes around getting and fighting the disease. The stigma attached to HIV/AIDS, first dismissed as something only infecting gay white men, gives it a stronghold. Ralph shared how, within the last month, her performance had been canceled in one town and the publicity squashed in another because of the disgrace associated with the disease.

Shhh! No one wanted to talk about that. Or, be embarrassed. Ignorance also fuels it. The human immunodeficiency virus, HIV, does not discriminate. It is most commonly transmitted between sexual contact, whether that's heterosexual or homosexual. But it also can be transmitted through shared needles, during childbirth and breast-feeding.

Acquired immune deficiency syndrome, AIDS, is the advanced state of HIV infection, with the onset marked by a significant loss of white blood cells or cancers or infections resulting from immune system damage. There is no known cure for HIV or AIDS.

Then there are often complicated emotional, behavioral, mental and environmental issues that increase the risk of getting HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Sexual promiscuity, incest, rape, low self-esteem and child abuse are some of the tragedies that were endured by the women Ralph portrayed.

And there's the difference between knowing about the disease and how it's transmitted and living like you know about it.

None of the women portrayed ever thought they could get HIV/AIDS, which not only affected them but the lives of their families and beyond. The message here is that it can happen to anyone, young or old, black or white, rich or poor, educated or not. It can. It has.

One way to the attack the disease is to get tested. Some test results can be available in less than an hour.

Another way to be protected from the disease is to ask potential partners about their status — not just job, marital or educational status, but HIV/AIDS status. Just ask, “Are you HIV positive or negative?” Such a question initially may kill the romance, but the disease won't be given an opportunity to kill you.

Cherie Speller is associate editor for readership and community news at The Daily Reflector. Contact her at 339-9512 or cspeller@coxnc.com.

For more information on HIV/AIDS, call the Pitt County AIDS Service Organization at 880-1660.
After a week of waiting to see if something different might happen, the East Carolina Pirates are headed to Hawaii after all.

In the minutes immediately following Saturday's Conference USA football championship game in Orlando, Fla., the idle Pirates accepted an invitation to the Sheraton Hawaii Bowl in Honolulu, the game they were originally projected to play in after finishing the regular season 7-5 on Nov. 24.

ECU was forced to await the outcome of Saturday's remaining Western Athletic Conference games to determine its opponent for the team's second consecutive bowl trip.

Third-year coach Skip Holtz called the bowl "a great opportunity and a great trip" for his players.

"To experience Hawaii – not many of these players are going to have the opportunity in their lifetime to be able to go out there and experience the island and the culture," Holtz said.

The Pirates' postseason assignment was stuck in limbo all week because the GMAC Bowl, normally reserved for the conference championship game's runner-up, opted to wait for the outcome of the clash between UCF and Tulsa, leaving ECU as its other option.

Even in the wake of the Knights' convincing 44-23 win over the Hurricanes, the Mobile, Ala.-based GMAC Bowl remained convinced it wanted Tulsa in its game.

That left the Pirates with what many players were calling a dream trip during their week of waiting, despite the fact the Dec. 23 game likely won't be well attended by ECU fans.

"It changes the culture, it changes the expectation level of these players," Holtz said of his team's two-year bowl streak. "It's an opportunity to develop this program and start to take it where we want to take it."

Last year, the Pirates finished 7-6 after losing to USF in the PapaJohns.com Bowl in Birmingham, Ala.
Not just babies for midwives

By Jimmy Ryals
The Daily Reflector

Midwifery isn't just about birthing babies.
Nurses trained in the practice are also equipped to offer a range of primary-care services to women, pregnant or not, said Beth Bagley, director of the nurse midwifery graduate concentration at East Carolina University's College of Nursing.

Midwives "take care of well women from adolescence through postmenopause," Bagley said. "The women who are done having their babies, just coming in for annual exams, we take care of them and manage their care."

ECU is home to the state's only certified midwifery training program. Launched in 1991 to help lower North Carolina's infant-mortality rate, the ECU program has trained 110 midwives, Bagley said. Half of those are practicing in North Carolina, and roughly a quarter work in rural areas.

There are 28 students in the program today. Six are due to graduate in May 2008.

ECU's midwifery training program, part of its master's in nursing degree program, has come a long way since Bagley was a student in the 1990s. A dearth of local training sites sent her to Kentucky for her clinical work.

Today, students do nearly all of their coursework online, visiting campus once for an orientation session. They train in more than 100 clinical sites around the state and some beyond North Carolina's borders. A current student lives in Alabama, Bagley said.

Students welcome the flexibility ECU's online program offers, Bagley said.

"Most of them are working women who have families," she said. "So that's one of the appeals of our program over some of the other programs in the country."

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Scientists: Genes are switched off before they are passed on

By Lauran Neergaard
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Remember biology class where you learned that children inherit one copy of a gene from mom and a second from dad? There's a twist: Some of those genes arrive switched off, so there is no backup if the other copy goes bad, making you more vulnerable to disorders from obesity to cancer.

Duke University scientists now have identified these "silenced genes," creating the first map of this unique group of about 200 genes believed to play a profound role in people's health.

More intriguing, the work marks an important step in studying how our environment — food, stress, pollution — interacts with genes to help determine why some people get sick and others do not.

"What we have is a bag of gold nuggets," lead researcher Dr. Randy Jirtle said about the collection of "imprinted" genes. The team's findings were published online Friday by the Journal of Genome Research.

Next comes work to prove exactly what role these genes play. "Some will be real gold and some will be fool's gold," Jirtle added.

Usually, people inherit a copy of each gene from each parent and both copies are active, programmed to do their jobs whenever needed. If one copy of a gene becomes mutated and quits working properly, often the other copy can compensate.

Genetic imprinting knocks out that backup. It means that for some genes, people inherit an active copy only from the mother or only from the father. Molecular signals tell, or "imprint," the copy from the other parent to be silent.

Jirtle compared it to flying a two-engine airplane with one engine cut off. If the other engine quits, the plane crashes. In genetic terms, if one tumor-suppressing gene is silenced and the active one breaks down, a person is more susceptible to cancer.

Only animals that have live births have imprinted genes. It was not until 1991 that it was proved that humans had them. Until now, only about 40 human imprinted genes had been identified.

The Duke map verified those 40 and identified 156 more. Researchers fed DNA sequences into a computer program that decoded patterns pointing to the presence of imprinted genes instead of active ones.

Many of the newly found imprinted genes are in regions of chromosomes already linked to the development of obesity, diabetes, cancer and some other major diseases, the researchers reported. One, for example, appears to prevent bladder cancer. A second appears to play a role in causing various cancers and may affect epilepsy and bipolar disorder.

Scientists had thought imprinted genes would account for about 1 percent of the human genome. While scientists must double-check that the newly identified ones are truly silenced, the new map matches that tally.

"It's a fascinating paper," said Dr. Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Volkow praised the new mapping method for speeding the slow discovery of these genes.

She said finding which genes are imprinted is important for a bigger question: How do behavioral or environmental factors tip the balance for someone who is genetically predisposed to a health problem?

Previous work by Jirtle and others shows the environment can reprogram how some genes operate, making them speed up or slow down or work at the wrong time. In a groundbreaking 2003 experiment, Jirtle fed pregnant mice different nutrients to alter the coat color of their babies. The feed affected chemical signals that control how hard a certain gene worked, determining when the babies had yellow coats like mom or brown ones.

Sometimes imprinting goes away before birth, leaving a normally silenced gene "on" or silencing one that should not be. Faulty gene imprinting leads to some devastating developmental disorders, such as Angelman syndrome, which causes mental retardation.

Now a question is how imprinting may be changed to reactivate an imprinted gene after birth.
Board of Trustees considering changes to chancellor's house

By Jimmy Ryals
The Daily Reflector

East Carolina University officials continue looking at ways to upgrade Chancellor Steve Ballard’s housing.

ECU trustees have investigated some options to replace or expand the house during the last year, and they’ve taken financial responsibility for furnishing the Dail House’s living quarters.

Still, Ballard said he expects no major shifts in how he’s housed.

“I don’t anticipate any significant changes in this in the near future,” he said. “The board hasn’t told me this (but) my hunch is the board’s trying to get this geared up for whoever’s next after me. I think that’s probably the concern. And I hope that isn’t too soon, but you never know.”

Since fall 2006, the board has considered and rejected a series of proposals to improve on the chancellor’s 503 E. Fifth St. home. Among them:

- Buying a larger house near campus. No suitable properties were available, according to documents distributed for a Board of Trustees meeting this week.
- Buying an adjacent property, demolishing it and building an expansion onto the current chancellor’s residence. Officials dismissed the proposal because of likely neighborhood resistance.
- Building a new house in the Rock Springs area, a suggestion from Trustee Mark Tipton that drew little other support, according to the trustee documents.
- Giving the chancellor a housing allowance. The University of North Carolina General Administration does not allow such a stipend. Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance Kevin Seitz said.

At then-Trustee Mike Kelly’s suggestion, administrators adopted a plan in May for the university to pay for furnishings in residential areas on the home’s second floor. ECU already pays for furnishings on the first floor, which regularly hosts campus events.

The university also has bought a neighboring house, 501 E. Fifth St., with plans of turning it into a guest house. The Greenville Planning Board and City Council have to approve that plan, Seitz said. ECU officials will appear before the planning board later this month.

The guest house purchase isn’t strictly tied to the concerns about the Dail House, although Seitz did say the chancellor’s house is too small to accommodate guests comfortably.

“The idea is that you have that kind of facility for people to facilitate their stay on the campus,” he said.

Questions about the Dail House, home to ECU chancellors since 1949, emerged last fall. Trustees and a member of the University of North Carolina Board of Governors suggested the house is too small and has too little

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"When a student gets shot three times right behind the residence — and it’s not the first shooting in my time there — there’s a lot of safety concerns raised there."

Chancellor Steve Ballard
By Jimmy Ryals  
The Daily Reflector

East Carolina University students will likely pay 0.9 percent more for school next year.

Whether ECU can keep future tuition and fee increases so low is an open question, Chancellor Steve Ballard told university trustees Friday. ECU's governing board unanimously approved the $36 tuition and fee hike.

Pledging to keep future costs as low as possible, Ballard called for the N.C. General Assembly to increase funding for ECU. University needs include faculty salary increases, campus safety improvements and a $12 million project to install sprinklers in ECU dorms, he said.

"We can't do it, folks, without legislative support, and everybody in this room can help us to ensure that those huge costs next year or the year after do not get placed on the student," he said. "That would be a real catastrophe."

Under the plan approved Friday, ECU tuition would rise next fall by $44, generating $273,000. Of that, $195,000 would go to financial aid and $78,000 to faculty salaries. The other $74 in mandatory fee hikes would fund student service improvements: new personnel for student legal services, facilities for non-revenue sports teams, computer equipment upgrades and state-mandated raises for campus recreation employees.

With trustee approval, the tuition and fee increase moves on to the University of North Carolina Board of Governors. ECU Trustee Robert Brinkley, a retired attorney from Charlotte, noted that ECU's 2008-
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2009 increase is a fraction of the 6.5-percent cost increase the UNC General Administration will allow.

Ballard is also weighing a change in university policy that could add $700 to the annual bill for more than 5,000 students. Campus administrators have proposed a hard-waiver insurance rule, which would require all students who don’t have health insurance to buy it through the university. Ballard said he hopes to decide on the matter by mid-January.

Part of the rationale for raising tuition was providing enough extra financial aid to help poor students buy the insurance policies, Ballard said. For the roughly 3,200 students with the greatest need, Ballard said the university would be able to cover added costs from insurance. He and trustees fretted over how to help the “middle class” of students: those without insurance whose parents do pay for some of their educations.

“We have more students with a demonstrated financial need than any other (UNC) university,” Ballard said. “We must be very careful about what we mandate for them because it could certainly directly affect whether they attend college, and that’s the trade-off that we’re continuing to evaluate.”

The $700 policy would be “much, much cheaper” than what students would find in the open market, Ballard said. Fourteen of 16 UNC schools are considering or have adopted hard-waiver policies.

In other news from two days of trustees meetings:
- The board approved plans for a $35 million renovation of the Mendenhall Student Center. The project also includes a new facility for the Ledonia Wright Cultural Center. Cost estimates on the two-part project, set to begin in spring 2008, is $4 million over budget. Facilities Engineering and Architectural Services Director Bill Bagnell told a trustees committee Thursday.
- Trustees approved a policy for checking the criminal records of all new employees, beginning in January 2008. The board also votes to have administrators draft a plan for regular background checks on all ECU employees.
- The board voted to confer degrees on students graduating Dec. 15, pending approval by the university faculty and Ballard.

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Children are having potentially life-threatening allergic reactions to peanuts at much earlier ages than a decade ago, signaling a need to be even more vigilant about offering toddlers and preschoolers that old childhood staple — peanut butter and jelly.

Even though pediatricians recommend waiting until children are at least 3 to give them foods containing peanuts, Duke University Medical Center researchers found that kids born after 2000 experienced their first adverse reaction to them at a median age of 14 months.

Ten years ago, that median age was 2 years, according to the Duke team, which published its findings today in the journal Pediatrics.

The Duke findings are the latest wrinkle in a world where food allergies among children are so prevalent that some schools across the country have taken to banning peanut products altogether.

While peanut allergy is still relatively rare, affecting about 1.8 million Americans, researchers agree that the numbers are rising — particularly among children. Studies suggest the incidence in children under 5 has doubled since 1997, though the Duke researchers and other scientists don't fully understand why.

It could be that doctors are diagnosing the allergies more than in previous generations. It could also be that food processing and dietary changes play a role, as do environmental pollutants.

One popular theory, according to the senior author of the Pediatrics article, is the "hygiene hypothesis," which, simply put, argues that our children are born into a world so scrubbed of germs and bona fide threats that the immune system begins to attack everyday substances such as peanuts, eggs, wheat or milk.

Dr. Wesley Burks, chief of pediatric allergy and immunology at Duke and senior author of the journal article, has been working on ways to desensitize children to food allergies by exposing them to small doses of the allergens over time.

In collaboration with scientists

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at Arkansas Children's Hospital, Burks' lab reported early this year that they successfully reversed egg allergy in children by feeding them small but increasing amounts of egg protein.

Burks has been using the same approach with peanuts, though it likely will be years before the therapy is widely available.

Until then Burks suggests keeping an antihistamine such as Benadryl on hand in case of emergency. Serious reactions typically require treatment with epinephrine, a hormone that can quickly stop a life-threatening allergic episode.

Jodi Stokes of Charlotte had a huge scare two years ago with her youngest son.

Her older son, Kyle, was crazy about peanut butter, so she had no reason to think Kevin, the youngest, might be allergic to peanuts.

Shortly after Kevin's first birthday in July 2005, with the blessing of her pediatrician, Stokes spread some peanut butter on crackers and offered them as a snack.

Within a minute or two, as Kevin handled the crackers, Stokes noticed a bumpy red rash creeping up his arm. A moment later his eyes were swollen shut, his face had puffed to twice its normal size, and he was gasping for air.

"It was the scariest thing I'd ever seen," said Stokes, who called 911. Kevin, now 3 years old, is a patient at the Duke pediatric allergy clinic. "He was unrecognizable within minutes."

A child's first exposure to peanuts might not come from food, Burks said.

Exposure could come in the womb, if Mom eats peanuts. Or a younger could touch or inhale peanuts present in trace amounts at home or day care. More study is needed to understand that aspect of the phenomenon, Burks said.

A person's immune system must have already encountered an allergen at least once in order for the body to react to it.

Reactions can vary

After the first exposure, the immune system marks the substance as foreign and begins to produce antibodies to the allergen. The next time the immune system encounters the substance it attacks, triggering a powerful reaction that may include itching, swelling, rashes, vomiting, diarrhea, coughing and wheezing. If the reaction is severe enough, a person can go into what's called anaphylactic shock, which can kill.

Up to 200 Americans a year die from anaphylactic shock caused by food allergies each year, according to the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network, a health advocacy organization based in Fairfax, Va. Food allergies result in more than 30,000 emergency room visits each year, according to the group.

After Kevin's frightening reaction, his mother purged their house of all peanut products and began strictly policing what Kevin eats at birthday parties and on play dates. Kevin is also allergic to eggs, which makes eating away from home even more challenging.

"I try to focus on what he can have, not on what he can't have," said Stokes, co-founder of Parents of Allergic Kids, a Charlotte-area support group. "But food is everywhere, and you have to be vigilant. The fact is, [Kevin] has something that can kill him in an instant."

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More young couples turn to in-vitro fertilization

Dr. Sameh Toma, center, watches an ultrasound screen as he places embryos during in-vitro fertilization for Shanelle Best. Christina Miao, an embryologist, helps. Best and her husband are in their 20s; Dr. Toma sees more young couples.

STAFF PHOTOS BY JULI LEONARD

IVF used to be a last resort for older partners; now more 20-somethings try it

BY LEAH FRIEDMAN
STAFF WRITER

Lehman and Shanelle Best listened to soothing classical music as they drove from North Raleigh to the infertility clinic in Cary. But nothing could keep their anxiety at bay.

They sat quietly in a love seat at the N.C. Center for Reproductive Medicine, waiting for a nurse to call their names.

Lehman attempted a few jokes and tapped his sneaker on the carpet. Shanelle put her hand on her forehead.

On this chilly fall day, they were counting on Dr. Sameh Toma to get them pregnant.

They had already been through one cycle of in-vitro fertilization in their former home of Indianapolis. It hadn't worked.

This time, the Bests as well as their doctor, were confident they would be welcoming a baby into their lives in nine months.

After all, they are both young and healthy — he's 27, she's 28.

It used to be that young couples would try for years to conceive naturally before seeking fertility treatments. IVF was typically a last resort for infertile couples.

But more young couples are turning to IVF as one of their first options in treating infertility. Toma, who runs the Cary center, sees 130 new patients a month, he said.

"It has gone up year after year" since he opened the center in 1992, he said.

Of the roughly 62 million American women of reproductive age in 2002, 10 percent had had an infertility-related medical

Lehman Best holds a photo of the healthiest embryos before his wife, Shanelle, receives in-vitro fertilization at the center in Cary.
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visit at some point, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC also reports that in 2005, 134,242 fertility treatments were performed across the county and resulted in 52,041 infants. Many of the treatments produced multiple births.

At UNC-Chapel Hill's Reproductive Endocrinology and Fertility Clinic, more couples under 35 are seeking fertility treatments. In 2002, 37 percent of the patients there were under 35. In 2006, 51.4 percent were under 35, said Marc Fritz, who runs the clinic.

Infertility among younger people is not necessarily on the rise, Toma said. But the stigma of seeking infertility treatments is less than it used to be. And IVF is more readily available to couples at private clinics, not just major medical centers, Meyer said.

Also, Fritz said, the procedure is getting better results.

"The success rates with the technology legitimately make [IVF] an appropriate first line of treatment," he said. IVF has replaced surgery on reproductive organs, he added, because it is more effective.

Toma charges $5,500 for the procedure, plus $3,000 to $5,000 for the drugs the woman must take before and after the procedure. Duke's fertility clinic charges about $10,000 for the procedure and $1,500 to $3,000 for drugs, said Susannah Copland, a doctor in the clinic. Copland, whose clinic has not seen an increase in younger couples, said younger women save money on the drugs because they don't need as much as older women.

Some, like the Bests, have medical insurance that pays for IVF treatments. Toma offers a shared risk plan: After three unsuccessful IVF cycles, the patient gets her money back.

Typical problems

Most infertility issues in younger women tend to be related to problems with the uterus or obstructions in the fallopian tubes, Toma said.

Among the younger couples Toma sees, many cases involve problems with the male partner. Typically, the men have a low sperm count, he said. That means they have sperm but not at the numbers needed to get pregnant naturally. And that makes them excellent candidates for IVF, in which doctors implant the man's sperm directly into the woman's egg in a petri dish. Then the embryo or embryos are implanted into the woman's uterus or fallopian tubes.

As long as the egg is healthy, Toma says, it can overcome most problems with the sperm.

Most couples under 35 are told to try natural fertility for a year. But if the male partner has a low sperm count, the couple can get started on IVF much sooner, Toma said.

In the case of the Bests, Lehman has a low sperm count. He donated a kidney to his sister in 2005, and doctors suspect something happened during the procedure to affect his fertility.

Because of his condition, the Bests turned to IVF after they tried naturally for a year.

Toma said IVF has a 51 percent success rate with his female patients who are under 35. The rate falls to 37 percent for those 35 to 37. For his patients in their early 40s, only three of 14, or 21 percent, get pregnant using their own eggs and give birth.

The Bests, who have been married three years, went through one cycle with a doctor in Indianapolis. Then Lehman's job brought them to the Triangle. Their Indianapolis doctor referred them to Toma.

Fertilizing embryos

A smiling nurse called the Bests from the waiting room and walked them down a long hallway to a small office. There they met with Hugh Hensleigh, the embryologist who directs the center's lab.

He showed them pictures of her fertilized eggs, which were tiny cells. A few days before, Toma had surgically collected 17 eggs from Shanelle. For weeks before the procedure, she had taken shots of a stimulating hormone to increase her ovulation.

Ten of those eggs were successfully fertilized with Lehman's sperm in the lab. Then the embryos were allowed to grow for five days.

The Bests told Hensleigh they wanted to transfer three embryos to give them the best odds, especially because it didn't work last time. Hensleigh tried to persuade them to transfer only two.

"We shouldn't put back three because we don't want you to have triplets," he told them.

Multiple births can have more complications, such as premature delivery and low birth rates. Hensleigh was confident the couple would get pregnant because of the quality of their embryos and their youth.

The Bests agreed to think about it after Shanelle received acupuncture. Toma offers the Chinese medical practice in his office to help patients relax before their embryo transfer.
She lay on a bed while David Peters, an acupuncturist, placed tiny needles all over her body. Lehman sat beside her. Shannelle held the picture of her embryos for good luck.

After about 45 minutes, the Bests headed to the embryo transfer room. First, they looked through a microscope at their embryos and checked the name on the petri dish to ensure they had the correct ones.

"Wow," they said.

Then Toma persuaded them to transfer only two embryos. The rest would be frozen.

Shannelle undressed and lay on a table with a sheet over the lower half of her body. Lehman sat beside her and held her hand.

"Y'all ready?" Toma asked as she sat on a stool near her feet.

"Let's do it," Shannelle said.

Toma washed Shannelle's cervix while a nurse prepared the embryos in a catheter. Then, guided by an ultrasound machine, Toma placed the catheter in Shannelle. He pushed the embryos into her uterus.

"I see his head," Lehman joked as he looked at the embryos on the ultrasound screen. "He's going to be a football player — look at those long arms."

The nurse checked the catheter under the microscope to make sure the embryos made it out. They did.

Shannelle stayed on the table for 15 minutes.

Afterward, she had another round of acupuncture.

Then the couple checked into a nearby hotel for a few days of relaxation rather than drive back to their North Raleigh home.

They wanted to take all the precautions.

**Awaiting the verdict**

Two weeks later, the Bests went back to Toma's clinic for a pregnancy test. Shannelle's blood was sent to a lab. The Bests were sent home to wait by the phone for the next few hours for the results.

For two weeks, Shannelle had experienced chest pains and had not slept much. And she had cried a few times, convinced the procedure had not worked. She searched for any sign of pregnancy.

She had thrown up driving to Toma's office for a blood test. But she didn't know whether it was morning sickness, nerves or the progesterone she was taking to keep her hormone levels up.

It had been an emotional roller coaster, she said.

"Why us?" she said. "We're just a normal couple. Why can't we have a baby like normal people without needles?"

"I know it's going to work," Lehman said. "My only question is how many."

Pamela Richey, a Durham therapist who works with infertile couples, said couples who have a hard time getting pregnant go through increasingly difficult rounds of expectation, disappointment and sadness.

"It's a grieving process with each cycle," she said. "The longer it takes, the more issues couples have to deal with."

Each new phase of treatment brings a high expectation, she said, and it's very disappointing if it's unsuccessful.

"No matter how a couple prepares, if it doesn't work, it's devastating," she said.

Toma has a psychiatrist on his staff to help couples through the ups and downs that come with fertility treatments.

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The Bests tried to stay optimistic, knowing that if this round of treatment did not work, they had eight embryos left. And if that happened, Shannelle said, she definitely wanted three transferred.

"That's my biggest fear is he didn't put in three, and that could have done it," she said.

While they waited for the call in their family room, they watched "Without a Trace." They ordered a pizza, too.

And Shannelle repeatedly checked the time on her cell phone.

"It's only 10:43," she said. The lab wouldn't be done until noon. Her friends sent text messages wishing her luck.

And several people called. Every time the phone rang, she jumped. First it was her godmother. Then a friend.

Finally, the nurse. Shannelle listened in silence.

The pregnancy test was negative.

Shannelle broke down in tears. Lehman sat at her feet with his head in her lap.

"I love you," Lehman said.

"I know," she said.

A few minutes later, Shannelle said she wanted to start another cycle right away.

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Gubernatorial hopefuls want community colleges closed to illegal immigrants.

BY BENJAMIN NOLET AND JACK BETTS
McCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

The five top candidates for governor rushed this week to decry a rule allowing illegal immigrants to enroll in community colleges, but Gov. Mike Easley said Friday that sending them to class is good policy.

Politicians pounced on the issue when they learned that the top lawyer for the state's community college system told all 58 campuses in the system to admit illegal immigrants. Previously, the campuses set their own policies. There are only about 340 such students in the 270,000-student system, but the change has dumped fuel on an explosive debate across the state and nation.

Easley said allowing illegal immigrants to learn lets them be productive members of society and helps the state and nation compete in the world economy.

"The people we are talking about were brought here as babies and young children through no fault of their own," Easley said Friday. "They distinguished them-

JOIN THE DEBATE
Go to this story at newsobserver.com to discuss immigration issues.

selves throughout our K-12 system. Now, I'm not willing to grind my heel in their faces and slam the door on them."

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1982 that states and school districts could not deny education to illegal immigrant children from kindergarten to high school. Nothing guarantees access to higher education for undocumented students.

Critics of the new policy pitched the argument in simple terms: The students aren't here legally and shouldn't be allowed to go to a public community college.

"There's a principle of law," said state Sen. Fred Smith, a Republican and one of five major candidates running to replace Easley. "We're never going to get it fixed if we just wink and nod at it."

The federal Department of Homeland Security estimates that in 2006 there were 11.6 million illegal immigrants in the nation. Immigration issues have become national frenzies, and the debates are felt acutely in

SEE ADMISSIONS, PAGE 18A
North Carolina, where the Hispanic population has grown at one of the fastest rates in the nation this decade. In 2004, there were an estimated 400,000 illegal immigrants in the state, according to the Pew Hispanic Center in Washington.

The fuss over North Carolina’s community college issue involves a small percentage of students. Each of the 340 students paid the higher out-of-state tuition, which the system said more than covers the actual cost of the education.

Bill Graham, a Salisbury lawyer and another Republican candidate for governor, said in a statement Friday that the students are a drain on taxpayers and that they take seats away from American citizens.

Marisol Jimenez McGee, advocacy director for the statewide Latino group El Pueblo, said the focus on community colleges puts the emphasis in the wrong place.

"I think the conversation we should be having is for comprehensive immigration reform," she said.

Facing the issue

Nationally, community college systems have increasingly begun to deal with the issue, said Jim Hermes, senior legislative associate for the American Association of Community Colleges. The group has pushed for legislation that would make it easier for students to earn citizenship and would allow states to decide whether to charge in-state or out-of-state tuition rates for undocumented students.

Virginia requires illegal immigrants to pay out-of-state tuition, said Jeffrey Kraus, assistant vice chancellor for public relations at Virginia’s community college system. Just about every year, a state lawmaker in Virginia files a bill about the policy. One has already been filed for the session beginning in January.

In South Carolina, each campus is left to make its own decision. Easley said he is not surprised the people competing for his job are against the new policy.

"I think both the Democrats and the Republicans, if they are elected governor, will revisit this issue and will view it through a totally different lens," Easley said. "Because if they set a policy that is destined to build a weaker North Carolina, then they will reap the consequences of that."

Not many candidates these days would ever say they were in favor of illegal immigration, said Andy Taylor, a political scientist at N.C. State University.

"It’s easy to say you’re against it," Taylor said. "The real debate now is over what do you do after that?"
Research money-maker

In regard to the Nov. 29 letter "Big buck producer" stating that "[Butch Davis] is producing a product that brings big bucks to the university. What English or history professor can make the same claim?":

I can't speak for my colleagues in English or history, but I've brought about a million dollars in research money to the university in the past five years, and many of my colleagues have brought in far more. Much of that is spent in North Carolina and is used to train students.

Allen Glazner, Professor of Geological Sciences, Chapel Hill
The East Carolina University Marching Pirates emerge from a cloud of smoke during a pregame show in Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium. Music, pyrotechnics and a facade of a pirate ship add to the atmosphere on game days in Greenville. Robin Taylor, director of sports marketing at ECU, pulls all of the elements together to give fans an exciting pregame experience. Taylor writes and times a script that begins two hours before kickoff. Minutes before kickoff, cannons are fired, the alma mater is played, and purple and white smoke fills the air as the team enters the stadium through the facade of the pirate ship. “What we want to do is give the fans a reason to be in their seats for kickoff. It creates a better atmosphere for the players if the stadium is full,” Taylor said.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT WILLETT

HOW I GOT THE SHOT

How I got the shot: I positioned myself on the field to photograph coach Skip Holtz and his team making their entrance, but I could see very little of them because of the thick smoke. When the smoke began to clear, I looked for a composition that would accentuate the atmosphere. I used the band members to frame my composition.

ABOUT THE VIEW

The View is a weekly look at our community through the lenses of staff photojournalists Corey Lowenstein, Chris Seward and Robert Willett. Post your own photographs to share.triangle.com. We’ll publish a few each week on this page and pick a Photo of the Month. To reach us, send e-mail to corey.lowenstein@newsobserver.com, chris.seward@newsobserver.com or robert.willett@newsobserver.com, regular mail to The View, Photography Department, The News & Observer, 216 S. McDowell St., Raleigh, NC 27601, or call 833-2825. Go to newsobserver.com to see a gallery of The View.