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ECU senior creates art project based on her brother, his injuries

By Rebecca Bunch
Chowan Herald

Wednesday, December 02, 2009

EDENTON — On a sunny, winter day in February 1994, an Edenton family’s world was shattered and their lives changed forever.

That was the day their son and brother, Daniel Surratt, was struck by a car while riding his bicycle. Surratt, who was 10 at the time, was not wearing a helmet. He suffered a traumatic brain injury that left him a quadriplegic. As a result, Surratt is unable to perform the most basic of skills, such as brushing his teeth or getting dressed.

Now, through a series of 23 paintings that make up her senior art project at East Carolina University, his sister, Heather Bond DeShields, offers a glimpse of Surratt’s world.

The exhibit’s theme is “Invictus,” the Latin word for unconquerable.

"I like to think that through my work I have given my brother a voice and I have told his story when he could not," DeShields said.

About the exhibit

DeShields said the idea of using Surratt as a subject came to her years ago as she watched him try to put together a knobbled-wooden puzzle "with hands that appeared to be painfully crippled due to loss of muscle tone and spasticity."

She said she sat and watched him struggle with the puzzle and felt at war with herself.

"I wanted to help him pick up the piece, place it in its slot, and just make life easier for him," DeShields said.

She said that as she sat watching his erratic movements she began studying the form of his hands and the rainbow of colors in his rigid fingers as a result of poor blood circulation.

"After at least 30 minutes of working on this five-piece puzzle," DeShields said, "he successfully placed the last piece, looked at me with a huge smile and laughed at himself with satisfaction."

The focus of DeShields’ artwork in the exhibit is her brother’s physicality years after this devastating accident.

"I have attempted to capture the fragility of his body form through his most noticeable malformed feature, his hands," she said.

"I want the viewer to be pulled into the images and become emotionally connected to the point where observation becomes not just empathy, but a realization of my brother’s brutal reality."

Bringing it back

Her mother, Earline Surratt, who wrote a book, “The Hidden Silence,” about the family’s experiences in the aftermath of the accident, said she was proud that DeShields focused her exhibit on family.

The exhibit, Earline Surratt said, “is another way to heal the hurt that our family has endured."
“Living a life caring for Daniel has been the biggest challenge I have ever faced,” she said.

“No mother wants to see her child struggle daily with seizures and other issues associated with TBI (traumatic brain injury). It’s like this, you either choose to grow bitter or better. I chose to grow better and walk closer with God. There is just no way you can carry this load alone.”

Among her challenges, is being in charge of all his daily and nightly care.

“The stress of this type of life has severely impacted our family,” Earline Surratt said. “His father and I are separated.”

“It has been a lonely life, especially for Daniel,” she said. “I admit it is hard for young people to communicate with him, (but) it is hurtful to see him alone without friends. However, he does have a large family that adores him.”

She said that she is grateful Daniel Surratt is able to show emotions that many TBI patients cannot.

“One emotion is his beautiful smile and laughter that fills the house,” Earline Surratt said. “That is worth all the hard work and total commitment I have made to make sure he lives a very happy life.”

Siblings’ voices

DeShields said she learned of Daniel Surratt’s accident through a phone call from her younger sister, Jennifer, but did not find out the severity of his injuries until she arrived at the hospital three hours later.

She said that she remembers walking in and seeing her mother's eyes red and swollen from crying.

“She looked up at me and said, ‘Heather, he’s in a coma.’ It was at that moment that I felt the panic of fear and a gut-wrenching sadness rush over me like a wave,” DeShields said.

DeShields recalled the constant emotional war of wrestling with whether to continue or terminate life support.

“We all prayed and hoped for a miracle because at that point that is exactly what he needed to pull through,” DeShields said.

Today she teases sister Jennifer and their younger brother, Nathan, that she is Daniel Surratt’s favorite sibling.

“If you ask Daniel, he will in fact nod his head in agreement,” she said.

A mom now herself, in addition to being a student, DeShields said she doesn’t get home as much as she would like and Daniel Surratt’s injuries make it hard for their mom to travel any great distances with him.

“So, when I do come home I am greeted with a big smile and lots of kisses from Daniel,” she said. “He knows who I am as soon as I walk in the door.”

About her artwork

DeShields said she taught herself how to draw at a young age, but prior to attending college she had never received any formal training as an artist.

“Painting and drawing were and still are very therapeutic for me,” she said. “When I am creating I am at my happiest and most at peace.”

The show is open through Saturday at the Burroughs Wellcome Senior Gallery at the Leo Jenkins Fine Art Building on the ECU campus.

If you notice an error, give me a call at 329-9560 or send an e-mail to aclark@reflector.com. If I am not available, and you need to speak to someone right away, please call 329-9573.

Al Clark, executive editor

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Pirate booty: C-USA game boosts local economy

By Brock Letchworth
The Daily Reflector

Wednesday, December 02, 2009

Greenville businesses are getting an early Christmas gift this year as the East Carolina football team gets to host one more game.

Saturday’s Conference USA championship game between No. 18 Houston and the Pirates looks to boost the local economy on what already figured to be a busy weekend, officials say.

It will be the first time ECU has hosted a C-USA title game and the second straight appearance for the defending champion Pirates.

Debbie Vargas, CEO and executive director of the Greenville-Pitt County Convention & Visitors Bureau, says she expects the game to bring in about $300,000 to the local economy. Hotels and restaurants will see the majority of that money, but Vargas says retailers also might see a spike in sales if people decide to shop after the noon game.

“That is a conservative estimate because we have seen hotel reservations coming in a little slower than anticipated,” Vargas said. “But it is still early. We think it is going to be a really big weekend because the season has been so positive and when the Pirates are doing well people don’t mind coming out, spending money and participating in activities.”

Vargas said she believes that fans having such little time to make preparations for the game might be a factor in the slower hotel reservations. ECU secured the opportunity to host the game with last Saturday’s 25-20 victory over Southern Miss.

The game comes on an already hectic weekend for Greenville.

City officials are holding a lighting ceremony in downtown Greenville on Friday night along with an art walk. The Greenville Jaycees also are holding the city’s annual Christmas parade Saturday morning. Vargas said there also is a United States Marine Corps ball scheduled for Saturday night at the convention center.

“This game is most definitely a bonus for the city,” Vargas said. “Most of the events that were already taking place are primarily local events for local people. This game obviously will get local people out as well as alumni and traveling fans from Houston. It puts the whole weekend in a different perspective.

“It will definitely be a big pre-holiday season boon for the local economy.”

Ticket update

Ticket sales for Saturday’s game surpassed the 30,000 mark Wednesday, according to university officials.

Scott Wetherbee, assistant director of athletics for marketing and ticket operations, says the sales are on target for what officials are expecting. Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium holds about 43,000 fans.

Wetherbee said Houston fans are expected to account for about 1,000 of the tickets sold.

Tickets can be ordered online at www.ecupirates.com, in person at the ticket office or by phone at (800) 342-5328 (DIAL-ECU).

Contact Brock Letchworth at bletchworth@reflector.com or (252) 329-9574.

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Clocknapper caught in 'Net

RALEIGH -- Caught on security camera: a tall, dark-haired N.C. State University student carrying a giant, neon wall clock out the front door of the main campus library.

He strolls past the front desk without even a raised eyebrow, toting loot bigger than a manhole cover.

But all it took to catch him was a pair of posts on Facebook and Twitter. Once footage of the crime made the Internet rounds, getting laughs on hundreds of personal computer screens, the outlaw was identified and the beloved clock returned.

Revenge is tweet.

"This was a very good experiment in social media," said David Hiscoe, director of outreach for N.C. State libraries. "It's a very huge clock, and it was kind of sickening for it to disappear."

The clock was one of a pair given by private donors in the newly renovated Learning Commons in the D.H. Hill Library. Hiscoe guesses it cost about $700. Some students witnessed it getting pulled off the wall about 10 p.m. Nov. 15, but they apparently thought it was being taken down for repair or some other NCSU-sanctioned reason.

After the clock was gone more than three weeks, desperate library staff members sent out the video on Tuesday afternoon. Within a few hours, more than 200 people saw it on Twitter. The video was passed along to The Wolf Web, a student-run site.

By 4 p.m., the clock was dropped off anonymously against the side of the library. About the same time, another N.C. State student recognized the perpetrator, campus police Chief Tom Younce said.

He would not identify the suspect, who will not be charged criminally. The student faces possible punishment from the Student Conduct Board.

"It was basically an alcohol event," Younce said.
H1N1 'registry' is called a fraud

People should disregard e-mail urging them to register personal information on an H1N1 flu vaccine registry with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, health officials warned Wednesday.

The registry is bogus, and people who try to send the information to the CDC may instead get a virus installed on their computers.

CDC officials have posted a warning about the e-mail scam on the CDC Web page, and state officials planned to do the same.

"We have no [registration] requirement for anybody, and neither does the federal government, in any way, shape or form," said Dr. Megan Davies, state epidemiologist. "People can just show up if they want a vaccination."

Officials urged people to beware of e-mail solicitations that ask for personal or medical information.

Jennifer Canada, a spokeswoman for the state Attorney General's Office, said no one has yet filed a complaint with them about the e-mail scam, but said problems should be directed to the Consumer Protection Division at 877-566-7226 or online at www.ncdoi.gov.

Canada said other scams involving the flu have been reported. Earlier this fall, Roy Cooper, state attorney general, warned people to be leery of fraudulent cures or treatments for flu and other conditions.

"Scammers often use concerns about illnesses and health problems to try to make an unfair buck off of consumers," Cooper wrote.

Rumors plague program

It's unclear how widespread the phony registration messages are, but Davies said it is similar to false rumors that the federal government was going to mandate H1N1 vaccinations for everyone.

"That's not correct, but it plays into those perceptions," she said.

The vaccination program for the H1N1 virus has been a target of rumor, misinformation and hyperbole from the start.

Some questioned the safety of the vaccine, although it was formulated and manufactured identically to seasonal flu vaccines, and studies showed no unusual problems. Then production difficulties at vaccine plants caused deliveries to arrive slower than promised, fueling criticism about the government's ability to respond in the face of a health threat.

Davies said vaccine deliveries in North Carolina are expected to pick up this month. More than 1.7 million doses of H1N1 vaccine have been delivered to the state since early October, and supplies are now also making their way to retail pharmacies.
Breland 'grateful to be healthy'

CHAPEL HILL -- Overlooking the downpours that made Wednesday afternoon gloomy, North Carolina senior Jessica Breland smiled as if she could never let an overcast sky discourage her spirit.

Over the past seven months, as the Tar Heels' women's basketball standout battled and recovered from Hodgkin's lymphoma - a form of cancer that attacks the immune system - she has triumphed over many gloomy days. There were times as she underwent chemotherapy where the nausea, chills and fatigue drained her energy and confined her to bed.

"I've learned how to turn bad days like this into great days," Breland said on Wednesday in an interview. "As you see, I'm smiling. ... I'm just grateful to be healthy right now."

Back in May, the Tar Heels announced that their top returning scorer from a season ago had been diagnosed with cancer and was undergoing treatment at UNC Hospitals. For the first time on Wednesday, Breland spoke about her health, saying that her cancer is in "complete remission," that she has completed chemotherapy and is looking forward to returning to the basketball court.

Her return, however, will likely come next season. Breland said she is taking her health into consideration and will not rush back - no matter how much she misses the game.

"I am a very tough girl," she said. "How I am now, just sitting out there watching them play, I want to get on the court. I'm ready. But I know what's best for me will probably be sitting out this year."

North Carolina coach Sylvia Hatchell, who has said the team will do what's in the best interest of Breland, said she will consult the player's doctor next week before making a final decision. For now, Breland sits on the bench and travels with the team. She will make the trip with the Tar Heels for today's game at Michigan State as part of the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

Breland, who was added to the preseason Wade Trophy list for the nation's best player, said, "I think the best thing for me would be to redshirt. It's the best thing. I don't want to go out there and hurt my teammates."

Breland, who has started light basic workouts, added that she does not want to injure herself, considering two weeks ago doctors surgically removed the port inserted near her left shoulder where chemotherapy medicines were injected.

The 6-foot-3 forward from Kelford has always been thin, but she looks as if she's near her playing weight of 165 pounds, though she has lost 10 pounds of muscle and hasn't run a wind sprint since May.

At that time, she was coming off a career-best season and preparing for USA women's basketball tryouts. She told UNC coaches she wasn't feeling well and didn't think she could attend.

She explained that she was having night sweats and chest pains, but her throat was also bothering her. They took her to see an ear, nose and throat specialist, who ran a battery of tests and took X-rays of her
chest. She spent hours in the hospital that Thursday, ending the day listening to a doctor explain what he thought might be wrong.

"The last thing he said was cancer," Breland said. "I was like, 'What?' I can't take it all in. I'm healthy. Cancer. What?"

The next day, a Friday, she had a biopsy, where cells were removed from her chest for examination. That following Monday, she was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. That Tuesday doctors inserted a port in her chest and completed a bone marrow procedure. On that Wednesday, she underwent her first chemotherapy session.

"Everything was like that," said Breland, snapping her fingers twice.

After a few weeks of treatment, she dropped to 140 pounds. The chemotherapy sessions exhausted her and left a bad taste in her mouth. There were times where she felt as she was going to vomit all day but did not.

"She just hated it," Breland's sister, Arneice, said.

But Breland, surrounded by family, teammates and coaches, pulled through with a smile. Her father, Charles, made a two-hour drive every week she went through chemotherapy to go out to dinner with her the night before. (Her mother, Jean, could not make it because of a health condition.)

Fans sent letters of encouragement. One of her teammates brought her breakfast many mornings.

Breland's experience has been made her aware of the tribulations that others endure. She considers her cancer a blessing, something that showed her what she could do in the face of adversity.

So, yeah, even on cloudy days, she's wearing a smile.

"It's all about your spirit," Breland said. "Even if you're having a bad day, a common cold, you put a smile on, you trick your body it'll go. I managed to learn how to trick myself."
December 3, 2009

Harvard Law School Suspends Program Giving Students Free Tuition

By TAMAR LEWIN

Less than two years after announcing that it would waive tuition for third-year students who pledge to spend five years working for nonprofit organizations or for the government, Harvard Law School is suspending the program — in part because almost twice as many students as expected signed up.

“This was always an experiment and just one of many ways we were trying to encourage students to explore public interest careers,” said Martha Minow, the dean of the law school, adding, “What we found is that we had less trouble than we thought encouraging that.”

But the recession was also a factor. “It’s really a function of the endowment going down drastically,” said Robb London, the law school’s assistant dean for communications.

Harvard’s endowment declined 27 percent between June 2008 and June 2009, falling to $26 billion, and the university has adopted a number of cost-cutting moves. In fact, on Tuesday, Harvard’s largest division, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, announced a voluntary retirement plan for professors. Other schools will offer similar packages in the near future.

Despite the budget problems, Dean Minow said the school was allocating an additional $2.7 million to financial aid, and expanding its loan-repayment program for graduates who take low-paying jobs, as well as introducing 12 new public service fellowships that pay students’ salary and health care insurance for a year after graduation.

The Public Service Initiative, as the tuition waiver program is called, will still be available for current students, according to an e-mail message Dean Minow sent to students on Tuesday — but probably not to those enrolling in the future.

In the years before the program began, about 10 percent of Harvard’s 550 annual law graduates went into nonprofit or government work. So initially only 50 to 60 students a year were expected to sign up for the program, and the initial cost estimate was about $3 million a year.

“It’s not that we budgeted around a particular expectation,” Mr. London said. “We honestly didn’t know how many people were going to sign up.”

But with the faltering economy, the program was highly popular. This year, Mr. London said, 73 third-year students are getting $10,000 off their tuition. (Free tuition takes effect with next year’s third-year class.) And with law-firm jobs drying up, when it came time to sign up last year, 110 first-year students said they were interested.
With three years at a top law school costing more than $120,000, many law students graduate with six-figure debt, making it difficult for them to take a low-paying public service job when the starting salary at some Wall Street law firms is about $160,000 a year.

Like other top law schools, Harvard has several programs to support public interest work, including a loan-repayment program, and pay for students who take public interest summer jobs, both of which will continue — although because of soaring student demand, Harvard will support only eight weeks of summer work this year, instead of the 10 weeks it paid for in the past.

Many law schools offer at least a few free-tuition fellowships, for all three years of law school, to a small number of students who commit to public service careers after graduation. For example, the Root-Tilden-Kern program at New York University, one of the largest, pays for the legal education of 20 students a year who agree to do public service for 10 years.

“What made Harvard’s Public Service Initiative unusual was that it was available to any student, and covered only the third-year tuition,” said Deb Ellis, assistant dean of public interest law at New York University.

While the recession, and falling endowment values, have led many law schools to give their aid programs new scrutiny, most seem to be intact, at least so far.

“Nothing in our assistance program has changed,” said Jan Conroy, director of public interest affairs at Yale Law School, which offers loan repayment assistance, fellowships and grants for graduates who enter public service and low-paying jobs.

Katie Zezima contributed reporting.
Supreme Court to decide on student loans and bankruptcy

By Joan Biskupic, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Four years after Francisco Espinosa took out student loans to attend an Arizona trade school, he had not advanced beyond his job as an airline ramp agent in Phoenix and faced $13,250 in student debt. He declared bankruptcy, and a judge allowed him to pay off part of the loan and wipe out the remaining debt.

Tuesday, Supreme Court justices considered Espinosa's case in a closely watched dispute that could affect debtors and creditors nationwide when student loans cannot be repaid.

CASE LOG: Take a look at the major cases facing the court this term

Federal law says no student loan may be wiped out through bankruptcy unless the student proves an "undue hardship" in a court hearing with the institution that loaned the money. Notifying the creditor through a bankruptcy petition is usually not enough.

The idea, Justice Department lawyers say, is that the elimination of student debt should not be a matter of routine bankruptcy. Siding with Espinosa's creditor, they note the Department of Education reinsures student loans to guarantee they get repaid. Congress feared that without such guarantees and a difficult process for unloading debt, most lenders would refuse to fund higher education.

The justices struggled with the obligations of each side of a loan. Many, including Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Anthony Kennedy, suggested they sought a balance between allowing debtors to readily discharge loans and requiring formal hardship hearings even when a creditor accepts a debtor's bankruptcy plan.

A lower U.S. appeals court ruled last year that in Espinosa's case it was enough that the creditor, United Student Aid Funds, was alerted to his bankruptcy petition in 1992 and did not object at the time to the bankruptcy plan. The decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit, based in San Francisco, would open the door to easier elimination of student debt.

Appealing the ruling, lawyer Madeleine Wanslee for United Student Aid Funds, a large non-profit corporation, said student loans — like several other categories, including child support — cannot be eliminated without a hardship hearing. Congress, not individual judges, should set the rules, she said.

Toby Heytens, assistant U.S. solicitor general, agreed. "Congress has an overriding policy that student loans should not be discharged unless there is a determination that this is the extraordinary case" because there were 374,000 bankruptcy filings from individuals last year alone.

Representing Espinosa, lawyer Michael Meehan argued that once a bankruptcy judgment has become final, it cannot be challenged based on any error a judge may have made.

Some justices, including Antonin Scalia and Sonia Sotomayor, expressed the view that the bankruptcy judge erred, yet there appeared no consensus on the creditor's recourse years later.

Scalia questioned whether judges might ignore the usual rule of a hardship hearing out of sympathy for a student debtor. He referred to a judge who might have "a soft heart for student loan debts" and say, "Let's give this kid a break."

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