THE DAILY CLIPS

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These days, having a practice facility is almost as important to college basketball teams as having basketballs.

Through a “Step Up To The Highest Level Campaign,” East Carolina Athletics will soon be one of the haves and not the have-nots in that department.

The ECU Educational Foundation publicly announced the launch of a $15-million campaign initiative in early November that will provide private funding for a practice facility for the Pirate men’s and women’s basketball teams. The silent phase of the campaign began in March and a total of $8.4 million has been committed as of Nov. 6.

“The tremendous leadership of the steering committee of the ‘Step Up To The Highest Level Campaign’ is turning a dream for a much-needed basketball practice facility into a reality,” ECU athletics director Terry Holland said.

As approved by East Carolina’s Board of Trustees, the facility will be built on the northeast side of Minges Coliseum to provide identities for both basketball teams. In addition to practice courts, coaches’ office suites, locker rooms and team meeting rooms, the new facility will also house and showcase the ECU Athletics Hall of Fame and athletics memorabilia for Pirate fans to enjoy.

The early success of the campaign has been credited to the leadership of a steering committee co-chaired by Henry G. Williamson of Advance and Walter L. Williams of Greenville. Williams, his son David and son-in-law Edwin Clark started Trade Oil Company with two Trade Mart convenience store locations in 1984. In 2005, the
company merged with Wilco Hess, a company whose forerunner, Wilco, was started by Walter's brother, Tab, and today the combined companies operate 379 stores in seven states under the Trade Wilco and Wilco Hess names.

Of the $8.4 million the campaign has received to date, $7.5 million has come from 32 Leadership commitments and $2.3 million of that has been committed by the Trade Wilco and Wilco Hess convenience store chain. Walter and Marie Williams have pledged $1 million.

“I am personally convinced that if we are going to have the success we desire for our men and women's basketball programs and, in turn, provide a balanced athletics program, then Pirate athletics must have a basketball practice facility for (coaches) Jeff Lebo and Heather Macy to recruit potential athletes and to use to enhance the skill sets of their players,” Walter Williams said.

Williams has already made an impression on Lebo who, like Macy, is in his first year with the Pirates.

“I've had a chance to meet (Williams) and spend a lot of time with him and his wife Marie,” Lebo said at a Friends of ECU Basketball gathering last month. “He may be short in stature, but his heart is as big as any person I've run across. There's nobody that loves (ECU) more.”

— ECU Media Relations
More than 100 years ago, the N.C. General Assembly established a college in eastern North Carolina to address the woeful shortage of educators serving residents of the region. Its motto — Servire, or service — made clear that the state's newest institution would work to the public's benefit, identifying areas of need and striving to meet them.

The opening of the new School of Dental Medicine promises to write the latest chapter in East Carolina's distinguished history and the first class, members of which received admission offers this week, is the vanguard of this new era. This program promises to be an invaluable resource for the state as it addresses a shortage of dental professions and continues East Carolina's tradition of service to the state.

The hopes of more than 20 aspiring dentists were fulfilled on Wednesday when they received letters of admission from East Carolina's dental school. Culled from more than 300 applicants, these fortunate few are more than motivated, diverse and highly qualified. They also hold the distinction of being the inaugural class that will ultimately number 50 students at one of the University of North Carolina system's most important new investments.

The lack of practicing dental professionals in North Carolina, and particularly in the East, compromises the general health and well being of thousands. The state ranks 47th nationally in the number of dentists per capita, though the problem is more acute in rural communities like those in eastern North Carolina, where four counties lack even one practicing dental professional. Since the school will feature 10 service learning centers, students will have the opportunity to learn in areas where residents have a pressing need for care. It is a unique system, but one likely to have an immediate benefit.

Recent budget years have been tight for the state and the UNC system has many projects jockeying for some of the finite resources devoted to state universities. It is to the credit...
of university officials that funding for the dental school remained a top priory and the local legislative delegation earned the community's gratitude for never waveri
Black metal framework standing at the corner of Greenville and Charles boulevards won't obscure the brick electronic sign at that intersection. It will replace it.

East Carolina University project manager and architect Robert Brown is unsure how long the existing ECU sign has stood in that location, but he said it will be removed in the next few months. The sign flashes colorful ads from athletics sponsors, Pirate cheers and information about upcoming games on a rotating basis.

The electronic screen was purchased new before this football season as part of the Olympic sports complex project. It will be inserted into the new sign structure, which Brown said also will be brick but “more artful,” with a curved top. The design will coordinate with fencing and other improvements.

The sign is included in the second phase of the overall Olympic complex, which should be completed by March, Brown said. Major renovations spread through various phases at that site include women's softball and soccer fields, a track and storage areas for grounds maintenance and equipment.

Greenville city code forbids signs which have text or display that is “changed to include any new or different copy, color, intensity or graphic representation” more than once an hour. However, state statutes trump local zoning restrictions.

City Attorney Dave Holec said the rules only apply to state property in buildings under construction or in use. The sign is outside that enforcement area.

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Liquor stores in Pitt County joined a statewide effort this week to restrict the sale of 95 percent pure grain alcohol, but the product will still be available by the case.

An e-mail to local ABC boards and brokers statewide on Nov. 17 expressed concerns about the potential dangers of selling 190-proof alcohol, particularly at stores in close proximity to college campuses.

The notice from Michael C. Herring, administrator of the N.C. Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission, advised county operations that stocks of 190-proof Everclear and Diesel grain alcohol would not be replenished beginning Dec. 1.

Stores will be able to sell the strongest Everclear product only through special pre-paid ordering procedures, and only by the case of six. The Diesel brand has been completely discontinued, Herring advised.

The less potent, but still powerful, 151-proof versions of Everclear will still be available on store shelves in three sizes, Herring said.

“We are always concerned about the dangers of binge drinking and alcohol poisoning, particularly among young adults,” said Agnes Stevens, public affairs director for the state ABC commission. “It's our hope and expectation that this change, which has been initiated in other states as well, will serve as a deterrent to the problem.”

The Everclear brand, 100 percent neutral spirits distilled from grain, is manufactured by Luxco Distillers of St. Louis. It is marketed as ‘the original’ grain alcohol product and
“enjoys tremendous brand recognition and a loyal, near cult-status, following” according to the manufacturer's Web site.

A warning label on each bottle says that it is not intended for consumption unless mixed with other beverages. It is most popularly used on college campuses as a mixer with fruit juice, known in that fashion as “PJ,” or party juice.

The concoction is a frequent focal point of drinking parties held by East Carolina University students, many interviewed this week said. “It's strong. It doesn't taste good, but it gets you drunk really fast,” said ECU sophomore Chase Corn, who lives at an off-campus apartment complex near the 10th Street ABC store.

“You'll see PJ parties here every weekend. No beer or other stuff,” Corn said. “There's no doubt the 190 stuff is dangerous. Some people don't know their limit. “If people want to have the 190 and are willing to go to the trouble to get it, they still can,” Corn said. “But I think it's a good idea for stores to take the 190 proof version off the shelves, so people who don't make good decisions can still use the 151 proof version.

How strong do you really need it?”

The 10th Street ABC store sold 1,092 bottles of Everclear and Diesel between July 1 and Dec. 1. The Arlington Boulevard store led county sales with 1,153 bottles sold during the same time frame. The store on Cotanche Street sold 172 bottles of the alcohol.

ECU Sophomore Steven Hancock said it is a dangerous decision by the state to have the 190 proof Everclear available to students by the case only.

“They're going to try harder now and will go out of their way to get it, and if they buy it by the case, they'll use more of it at one time,” Hancock said.

Senior apartment dweller James Cosmas said he believes most students will go with the 151 proof version rather than go to the trouble of placing a special order, but others will team up to get the case of 190 proof Everclear.

“I see lots of students wander from one PJ party to another here on weekends,” Cosmas said. “No one watches out for them and they end up in trouble. (The state) is making the right move. When I think about how accessible it's been here since I was a freshman, I think the change will deter some students.”

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Just because he can wipe his brow now that his football team is bowl bound doesn't mean Ruffin McNeill is ready to take a break.

In fact, now is McNeill's chance to do one of the things that has helped him make his name over coaching the last 30 years.

Last Sunday, the contact period began for coaches and recruits, and McNeill had his staff on the road in pursuit of a signing class that will help define his ECU tenure much more than his first team.


The most recognizable weakness of the Pirates was a porous defense, which leading into the final week of the regular season sunk all the way to the bottom of the Football Bowl Subdivision.

The undoing of the Pirates in a couple of blowout losses this season, the defense started in shambles after 29 seniors departed last year's team, chief among them defensive line stalwarts Linval Joseph, Scott Robinson, Jay Ross and C.J. Wilson.

Trying to find the next version of that foursome will be one of the main focuses for McNeill and his staff leading up to the annual National Signing Day in February. “We have to gather back up and defensively, get some Linvals and some Scottys and some C.J.s and those guys,” McNeill said. “That's big for us.”
Even in the very short time McNeill had to work with after his late-January hire last offseason, the coach was able to make vital strides.

Perhaps most important, he kept in place almost the entire recruiting class pieced together by former head coach Skip Holtz, including transfer quarterback Dominique Davis. McNeill also managed to sign a couple of significant players upon his arrival in Greenville.

He inked junior college transfer receiver Lance Lewis, who walked in the door and promptly set a new single-season ECU record for touchdown catches with 13. McNeill also brought in quarterback Shane Carden from greater Houston, who appears to be in the Pirates' future.

“‘You want to be able to reload and not rebuild,’” McNeill said of his recruiting plan. “‘I'm not going to try to quick-fix it. I'm going to do it the right way ... make sure our foundation is strong for years to come. I want to build it the right way.’”

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