Fatal wreck marks Pitt’s 27th in 2008

Jenna Nicole Seagraves, 23, was killed when her car collided with the back of a tractor-trailer.

BY BOBBY BURNS
The Daily Reflector

A wreck that killed an ECU graduate student early Thursday marked Pitt County’s 27th traffic fatality in 2008, nearing the one-year record of 30.

Jenna Nicole Seagraves, 23, of Harrisburg was killed when her car collided with the back of a tractor-trailer on Greenville Boulevard near 10th Street at 2:43 a.m., according to Greenville police.

Seagraves was in her first year of graduate school in East Carolina’s College of Education, a university spokeswoman said. She was transported to Pitt County Memorial Hospital where she was pronounced dead, Cpl. Kip Gaskins of the Greenville Police Department said.

Police had not determined Thursday what caused the wreck. An investigation is continuing, said Gaskins, spokesman for the police department.

Seagraves was driving her Jeep SUV south on the boulevard from the Tar River toward the 10th Street intersection near Hastings Ford, Gaskins said. The truck was idling in a left-hand turn lane, waiting to turn east on 10th Street. The Jeep slammed into the rear of the truck.

The truck driver, Felix Maurice Wilkins, 27, from Houston, Texas, was not injured.

A running tally of Pitt traffic fatalities maintained by The Daily Reflector shows her death is the 27th this year on county roadways.

Pitt County has averaged slightly more than 22 fatalities per year during the past decade, according to law enforcement officials and highway safety advocates.

Fatalities reached highs of 29 in 2003 and 30 in 2007, according to records kept by several agencies.

Seagrave’s death is the fifth since Sept. 28, when Ruby Johnson, 78, of Fountain was killed when her car drove off Spain Bridge Road into Kitten Creek. Other deaths since then include:

Vera Troutman, 83, killed Oct. 31 when the car she was in collided with an SUV on Reedy Branch Road.

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WRECK

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Guillermo Garcia Perez, 26, 302 Meredith Road, Washington, N.C., killed Nov. 1 when he was struck from behind while walking on U.S. 264 Bypass.

Francisco Javier Santiago, 13, who died after he was hit Nov. 22 while trying to cross the southbound lane of U.S. 264 Bypass near the intersection of N.C. 33.

Byron Joel Brown, 49, of Grifton also was killed Monday in Lenoir County when a pickup hit the scooter he was driving on N.C. 11 South.

The year started off with a record pace of fatalities: 12 people were killed in 12 wrecks between Jan. 23 and April 5.
Road closed due to graves' relocation

BY JOSH HUMPHRIES
The Daily Reflector

A section of road in the medical district will be closed next week to allow for the removal of about 43 graves at the future site of East Carolina University's School of Dentistry.

McGregor Downs Road between Arlington Boulevard and N.C. 43 will be closed Monday through Wednesday to allow for the removal. There will be a detour around the road.

Officials discovered the cemetery during a property survey of the dental school site. There were only two broken grave markers found at the site, said Scott Buck, associate vice chancellor for business services at ECU.

The remains will be moved from the site of

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on the grave site, Buck said.

After investigating, the university was able to identify 14 individuals buried at the site. Their names will be placed on a marker at Homestead Memorial Gardens that also will state that the graves were relocated to allow for the development of the dental school.

Buck said he did everything possible to identify the individuals buried in the cemetery but got little response from the ads in local papers.

"I got very little response, but the ones I got I took it to the fullest extent," he said.

With help from Bill Kitrell of the Pitt County Historical Society and Kevin Hefferson and Colleen Sicley of Greenville Public Works, officials were able to identify seven individuals who may have been buried on the property.

From there, Buck checked with local mortuaries operating from the early 1900s to the 1970s and discovered one more lead.

GRAVES

Individuals identified at the site

- Mary Forbes 1871-1906
- Jacob Forbes 1848-1919
- James Forbes died 1918
- Fabie Forbes died 1918
- Manassa Forbes died 1929
- Ellen Forbes died 1942
- Tiller Forbes died 1942
- Lula Tyson died 1919
- Daisy Forbes died 1943
- James Barnes died 1968
- Pennie Gray Barnes died 1953
- Lillie Blow Barrett died 1922
- Walter Barrett died 1974
- Dorothy Graham died 1934
Too good to be true

If you bought what Mike Easley was selling last week, then you've probably never heeded that saying, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

North Carolina's governor, in a news release sent out a couple of hours before most people headed out for a long Thanksgiving weekend, announced that he intended to speed up the sale of $722 million in construction bonds to help stimulate the state's economy.

To hear the Easley administration, the accelerated bond sales could take place with all gain and no pain. The University and prison-related construction would generate 26,000 jobs, administration officials said.

Easley spokeswoman Rene Hoffman noted that no principal or interest payments need be made for six months.

Oh goody. Free money.

In fact, there's some sound logic behind Easley's decision. Borrowing money when times are tough, and repaying it when they're good, is a method that governments often use to work through tough times and give a nudge to the economy. Whether that spending produces 3,500 jobs or 26,000 jobs, the construction financed by that borrowing will provide a needed jumpstart.

But I've never found $700 million lying beside a road. Have you?

The money will have to be repaid. It will put a bigger hole in an already holey state budget, if not this fiscal year then next. It will create added pressure for state legislators to raise taxes or cut services.

Without the decision to accelerate the bond sales, state lawmakers may well have begun a new legislative session in late January with some objecting to the sale of any bonds in 2009. Sen. Dan Clodfelter, a Charlotte Democrat who co-chairs the Senate's powerful Finance Committee, has already said that delaying the sale of bonds is at least worth discussing.

By delaying the sales the state would avoid additional debt service payments approaching $70 million. Those kinds of savings shouldn't be casually dismissed given dire predictions of a budget shortfall exceeding $1 billion.

Easley may well be correct, though. The benefits to the larger economy of moving ahead with the projects may outweigh the negatives of having to fill a bigger budget hole.

But should an outgoing governor be making the decision?

Final approval by the 10 statewide elected officials known as the Council of State would come in the first week of January, just days before Easley leaves office.

Gov.-elect Beverly Perdue has endorsed Easley's proposal. But why shouldn't this decision come on her watch, allowing some public and legislative debate? She — not Easley — will be forced to deal with the financial fallout.

Instead, it appears we're headed toward a decision that smells a lot like it was reached behind closed doors by the state's powerbrokers with very little thought given to a public discussion of the pros and cons.

It's not a good way to end one administration and begin another.
Holland addresses Skip Holtz rumors

The Daily Reflector

East Carolina Director of Athletics Terry Holland sent a preemptive message to ECU football fans on Thursday.

Two days before the Pirates play for the Conference USA championship at Tulsa, Holland said in a message posted on the university's athletic Web site he would grant head coach Skip Holtz permission to speak to other universities about coaching vacancies.

But he stressed that Holtz, rumored to be in the running for the Syracuse job for the last two weeks, had not had time to consider his

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future. The AD said programs with vacancies had reciprocated by not asking to speak with Holtz until after the Pirates' season had ended.

Holland and Holtz will be in New York following their return from Saturday's game in Tulsa, but Holland stressed Holtz did not have any interviews scheduled.

Following is Holland's full statement:

"I have asked Coach Holtz to allow me to address the continuing rumors about his interest in coaching positions that are currently open at other institutions.

"First and foremost, there is no doubt in my mind about the fact that Coach Holtz' total focus is on doing everything possible to help his East Carolina team win its first ever C-USA Championship. He simply has not had the time or the inclination to consider any other coaching positions and any institutions that might want to ask for permission to speak with him have had the good manners and professional courtesy to refrain from doing so until our season has been completed.

"Coach Skip Holtz, along with many of his family members, will be in New York (and so will I) to celebrate the induction of Coach Lou Holtz into the National Football Foundation's College Football Hall of Fame. While we are in New York, I would expect Coach Skip Holtz to have contact with many good football people who will have their own personal opinions on his career options.

"However, Coach Holtz does not have interviews scheduled with any institution during this time period and will not schedule any interviews for coaching positions while he is in New York. It is certainly possible that he will rub elbows with or even have a cup of coffee with athletic administrators who have coaching positions open at their institutions. We are in complete agreement that he has no reason to avoid such encounters.

"Upon our return to Greenville, we will sit down to discuss whether or not he wishes to consider scheduling interviews concerning open coaching positions. If he indicates he wants to interview with another institution, I will wrap both hands around his throat and throttle him until he agrees to coach at East Carolina for the rest of his life. Well, at least that is what I would do if I thought it would work.

"The truth is that no one could be more loyal to East Carolina University and his football players than Coach Holtz has been. The Pirate Nation has earned that loyalty and needs to continue to earn Coach Holtz' loyalty by making sure that he knows we care about his own future and career more than we care about simply winning football games.

"The best way to earn undying loyalty is to encourage Coach Holtz to continually the job we are all doing with what he can expect from the fans and administration at other institutions. After all, we each compare him constantly to what the coaches of our competitors are doing so it is only healthy if it is a two-way street.

"If Coach Holtz wishes to interview at other institutions, he will schedule the interview with my permission to do so. Coach Holtz and I will have no further comment. I firmly believe that Coach Holtz has earned the support of the Pirate Nation regardless of what his decision may be in this or any other year."
Annual Scholarship Fundraiser features cast of musical, theater students at ECU

The Daily Reflector

The East Carolina University School of Theatre and Dance will hold its annual Scholarship Fundraiser at 7 p.m. Saturday at McGinnis Theatre.

“There’s no black-tie, no rubber chicken. Audiences will see a great revue, hob-nob with other arts supporters and know they are doing more than buying a ticket — they are investing in the future of theater and dance at ECU,” said Jeff Woodruff, managing director of the school. “I like to call it a little music, a little dance, a little theater, a great cause.”

Before the show — which begins at 8 p.m. — patrons will be served light appetizers.

Act one of the gala will consist of a vaudeville-style revue of short works from Broadway musical theater staged by musical theater faculty, featuring scholarship student performers, as well as original ballet, contemporary and tap dance works by faculty choreographers.

Act two will be the premiere performance of a major new full-length jazz dance work by faculty choreographer Tommi Galaska.

Rehearsals for the premiere have spanned the entire semester with a cast of more than 25 dance and musical theater students. The work is based on the Uncle Mountain CD, “Salt Sweet and Memory Feet.” Uncle Mountain is a folk/country/bluegrass band based in Asheville.

All proceeds will go to support scholarships for students in the School of Theatre and Dance.

“These scholarships are critical in two very important ways. First, they provide aid to gifted and talented students during academic careers while in the ECU School of Theatre and Dance. Second, they support recruiting the best and brightest new students to the school, making ECU their first choice,” Woodruff said.

Since its inception, the Friends have awarded more than $100,000 in merit scholarships.
Shaw students protest dorm conditions

They also complain about the university’s debt and a dean’s layoff

BY LEAH FRIEDMAN  
STAFF WRITER

RALEIGH — More than 100 Shaw University students packed the lobby of the university president's office Thursday morning in a silent protest over poor dorm conditions, including moldy bathrooms, toilets that don’t work and overcrowded dorm rooms.

Several students demanded to see Shaw President Clarence Newsome while others sat quietly, crammed and hot on the fourth floor of Estey Hall, with duct tape over their mouths. On the duct tape, they had written words, such as “rats,” “ants,” “vents” and “resources.”

Newsome met with the students at 12:45 p.m., proclaiming “I'm all ears.”

Eugene Johnson, a senior, pointed out that the school is still housing five students per dorm room since the men's side of a dorm flooded when a sprinkler went off.

“Administration, are you prepared to remove all the mold?” he asked. “It needs to be addressed today.”

Jarrell Johnson, also a senior, wanted to know why the university was $27 million in debt and why a beloved dean had been laid off. He said he pays the university $18,000 a year, and “the administration has not addressed us about the layoffs.”

“We need change in our finance department, change in our academics and change in our residential life,” he said. “I'm tired of talking about mold.”

Other complaints included the serving of leftovers in the university cafeteria, dirty dorm showers and a dirty laundry room.

When the students were done, Newsome explained that every university has debt, and Shaw was trying to bring its income in line with the debts.

Students, he said, are part of the financial problem.

“About a month ago, there were 500 students who had not finished paperwork to pay the university,” he said. “That makes an impact.”

Newsome asked the students to provide him a list of their demands and said his administration would get to work on it.

The students planned to gather Thursday night at a student government meeting to make the list, Jarrell Johnson said. But he said he and many other students left the meeting feeling that Newsome had not answered their questions.

“We still have concerns,” he said. “He didn't really hit on the nail where we're at financially.”

Transferring to another college, however, is not an option for Jarrell Johnson.

“I love my university,” he said. “We don't have any regret or ill will towards our university. I want to be part of this change, and I believe we will see it.”

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UNC-CH libraries leave Christmas trees in storage

BY ERIC FERRERI
STAFF WRITER

CHAPEL HILL — For as long as anyone can remember, Christmas trees adorned with lights and ornaments have greeted holiday season visitors to UNC-Chapel Hill’s two main libraries.

They aren’t there this year.

The trees, which have stood in the lobby areas of Wilson and Davis libraries each December, were kept in storage this year at the behest of Sarah Michalak, the university’s associate provost for university libraries.

Michalak’s decision followed several years of queries and complaints from library employees and patrons bothered by the Christian display, Michalak said this week.

Michalak said that banishing the Christmas displays was not an easy decision but that she asked around to library colleagues at Duke, N.C. State and elsewhere and found no other one where Christmas trees were displayed.

Aside from the fact that a UNC-CH library is a public facility, Michalak said, libraries are places where information from all corners of the world and all belief systems is offered without judgment. Displaying Christian symbols is antithetical to that philosophy, she said.

“We strive in our collection to have a wide variety of ideas,” she said. “It doesn’t seem right to celebrate one particular set of customs.”

Michalak, UNC-CH’s chief librarian for four years, said at least a dozen library employees have complained over the last few years about the display. She hasn’t heard similar criticism from students, though they may have voiced their concerns to other library staff.

Public libraries generally shy away from creating displays promoting any single religion, said Catherine Mau, deputy director of the Durham County library system, where poinsettias provided by a library booster group provide holiday cheer.

If religious or holiday-themed books are put on display in December, they tend to be broad in range and subject matter, she said.

“It’s a conscious decision,” Mau said. “We want everyone to feel welcome.”

At UNC-CH, student Derek Belcher sees a case of political correctness running amok.

“I don’t understand it,” said Belcher, a senior from Havelock and president of the university’s College Republicans. “We have Christmas as a federal holiday. If we’re going to remove the Christmas tree, do we have to remove that holiday?”
That old, familiar feeling for ECU fans

These are anxious, but familiar, times for East Carolina football fans.

As the Pirates prepare to visit Tulsa for Saturday’s Conference USA championship game, Skip Holtz’ coaching stock continues to rise just as the annual onset of postseason job jumping and job hunting moves into the frantic stage.

Syracuse is looking for Greg Robinson’s replacement, and Holtz obviously is on the Orange’s radar. Tommy Tuberville is out at Auburn.

More firings are on the horizon. Should Syracuse raid Big East rival Connecticut and take Randy Edsall, how does UConn counter? Holtz, perhaps? If Texas Tech’s Mike Leach goes to Auburn, would the Red Raiders move on Holtz?

Remove Holtz’s name and insert those of past ECU coaches Mike McGee, Sonny Randle, Pat Dye, Bill Lewis and Steve Logan, and you can get an idea of how many times ECU fans have been down this road in years past. Among that group, only Logan said “no” to offers from other schools, and he wound up getting fired in Greenville. McGee left for Duke then Randle for Virginia, Dye for Wyoming and Lewis for Georgia Tech.

With the exception of Dye, who quickly exited Wyoming for Auburn, those decisions worked out poorly across the board. But it doesn’t change the fact that ECU has become a coaching incubator for bigger schools in more established conferences — schools with what is generally considered a bigger career upside.

Some Pirates fans used to refer to it as “The Big Sweat” — the few weeks following each successful season when ECU coaches were sized up and often picked off. Outside the primary Bowl Championship Series conference schools, few programs are more vibrant than ECU. The fan base is large and loyal, and there is a winning tradition dating back for decades.

Since the 1960s, ECU has been a football-first school surrounded by the ACC, Southeastern Conference and now, the Big East.

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It’s an enviable coaching job but also still widely seen as a steppingstone position, which is why Pirates fans have good reason to be concerned about Holtz’s intentions and particularly if his team upsets two-touchdown favorite Tulsa.

Such is the lure of the BCS schools. The Syracuse program, for now, isn’t as strong as what Holtz has quickly built at ECU. But how far is Syracuse away from Big East champion Cincinnati, which is 10-2 entering Saturday’s game at Hawaii and already certain of playing in the Orange Bowl?

Holtz’s team, early in the season, easily defeated West Virginia, another Big East team that challenged in the national polls last season.

It isn’t fair, but the BCS pecking order has only accentuated the long-held perception that the old-line schools and leagues are innately superior to those in the less familiar conferences. It’s a problem ECU can’t completely avoid. As long as the Pirates continue to win with regularity in football, Greenville will remain a popular shopping mall for coaches.

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