THE DAILY CLIPS

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A physician and educator who has dedicated his career to providing care to locally underserved children and adults will deliver the fall commencement address at East Carolina University.

Dr. Thomas G. Irons, associate vice chancellor for health sciences and professor of pediatrics at the Brody School of Medicine at ECU, will deliver the address during morning ceremonies at Minges Coliseum on Dec. 16.

Irons recently received the Award for Excellence in Public Service from the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina system. The public service award was established in 2007 to encourage, identify, recognize and reward distinguished public service and outreach by faculty across the university.

The commencement ceremony is scheduled to begin with a band concert at 9:30 a.m. in Williams Arena at Minges Coliseum. The commencement program will follow at 10.

More than 3,300 students are expected to receive their degrees — approximately 2,220 bachelor degree candidates and 1,110 graduate degree candidates, of which 30 are from the Brody School of Medicine.

A member of ECU’s faculty for more than 30 years, Irons has worked to improve access to quality health care for the people of eastern North
Carolina. As a physician and private citizen, he has focused his time, medical expertise and consensus-building skills on helping to address the needs of abused children, disabled children, at-risk teens, farm families and the rural uninsured.

Although Irons is not an ECU graduate, his roots run deep in Greenville and at the university.

His father, Dr. Fred Irons, was ECU’s first full-time physician and the director of Student Health Center when it opened in 1967, serving as its director for 36 years. His mother, Dr. Malene Irons, was a pediatrician in Greenville for more than 28 years and a 1935 graduate of East Carolina. She also was the first director of the Developmental Evaluation Clinic, housed in a building that now bears her name.

Irons is a graduate of Davidson College and the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine. From 1975 to 1978, he served in the U.S. Army in West Germany, where he developed a child abuse prevention and management program that involved clergy, social services and military police.

Upon his return to the United States, he practiced pediatrics in Raleigh before joining the medical faculty at ECU in 1981, where he became involved in child abuse prevention efforts and secured grants to launch programs to better address the medical needs of severely disabled children, adolescents and other at-risk groups.

He moved into administrative positions at the medical school, serving as associate dean, senior associate dean and associate vice chancellor for health sciences. In these roles, he worked to grow and retain the base of primary care physicians in underserved communities across the region.

In 1999, in the aftermath of Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd, Irons took responsibility for coordinating health services at all Pitt County emergency shelters, where he saw the plight of the region’s low-income residents in a new light.

Determined to address not only their immediate medical concerns, but also the underlying health care disparities across eastern North Carolina, Irons convened a group of state, regional and local health leaders and spearheaded
the creation of HealthAssist, a health improvement and health care program for low-income and uninsured residents of the region.

Those efforts later expanded to encompass other collaborative efforts including Access East and the Eastern Carolina Community Health Consortium.

Irons has received numerous awards, including the Alumni Merit Award and the Medical Alumni Distinguished Service Award from the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine. He is a four-time winner of the Clinical Science Faculty Award presented by graduating students at ECU’s Brody School of Medicine, and the medical Class of 2006 created the annual Thomas G. Irons Award in Medical Professionalism in his honor.
Only two weeks after trustees at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill recommended a significant tuition increase, East Carolina University’s trustees predictably followed suit. In fact, officials at UNC member institutions from Asheville to Elizabeth City are poised to dramatically increase the cost of a college degree to offset state budget cuts.

Such an effort undertaken by so many schools begs the question of how far North Carolina intends to stray from its constitutional requirement to maintain a university education as free as far as practicable. Each increase pushes the opportunity of college further from the reach of the state’s less fortunate and abdicates a responsibility to invest in North Carolina’s future.

Last month, the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees voted to raise tuition by $2,800 over five years, rejecting a plan that would have imposed smaller hikes to current students and handing a higher price tag to incoming freshmen. The university, like others in the UNC system, is struggling to cover funding losses under the state budget passed in June that doled out millions in cuts. For Chapel Hill, that meant an 18 percent cut to operating expenses — costs that must be made up elsewhere.

For East Carolina, the General Assembly’s spending plan equated to a similarly severe 16 percent reduction in funds. It too will seek higher tuition to offset the loss, with its board of trustees on Friday narrowly recommending a 9.5 percent hike for the 2012-13 school year. Both schools utilized a one-time provision in a rule that capped tuition increases at 6.5 percent in order to impose the sharp price hikes.

In both situations, and in those across the UNC system, schools will charge students a higher price for an education eroded by budget cuts. East Carolina Chancellor Steve Ballard was among those arguing during state budget debate that cuts to university funding would affect its core academic mission.
However, Republican leadership in the Legislature believes that shouldering the cost burden should be on students, not on taxpayers, despite what the state Constitution says. GOP hostility toward the UNC system while in the minority led to slashing the higher education budget once in the majority. These tuition increases are the natural result.

Higher education spending is an investment in the future and the strong university system is among North Carolina’s most treasured resources. The state must choose to honor those principles and the opportunity that comes with earning a college degree.
Honoring sacrifice with lights of love
By K.j. Williams
The Daily Reflector
Wednesday, December 7, 2011

Jackie Dean never knew her aunt, a flight nurse who died along with three other crew members and an infant patient in an EastCare helicopter crash in 1987.

But her life is taking flight on a similar medical path of service.

The East Carolina University student volunteers with EastCare and took part in Tuesday’s 24th annual Lights of Love program in which the victims of that crash were remembered at Pitt County Memorial Hospital’s Service League Interfaith Chapel. Dean was among a group of EastCare crew members who stood together in the back of the chapel.

In 1987, there were four lights on the tree to commemorate the deaths of Dean’s aunt, Pam Demaree; Mike McGinnis, a flight nurse; Perry Reynolds, a pilot; and Xenia Lewis, a pediatric intensive care patient. EastCare was en route to PCMH from Camp Lejeune Naval Hospital when it crashed in Jones County.
Family members were among the attendees, who listened to speeches about the importance of honoring the past, cherishing the present and celebrating the future, the theme of this year’s program.

From the four lights of the first ceremony, Lights of Love has grown to numerous white lights strung through the branches of a tree in the chapel’s courtyard, visible through the chapel’s glass front. Lisa Atkinson of the Pitt Memorial Hospital Foundation said the ceremony also recognizes other people’s loved ones with lights that are added to the tree for donations made in honor or in memory of someone.

PCMH President Steve Lawler said those single lights are like “points of love” remembering a loved one. The 50-minute ceremony included a prayer, speeches and musical performances by a children’s choir from Arendell Parrott Academy, soloist Sue Tripp and a group of three female vocalists called The Voices of Time.

“We don’t ever want to forget the sacrifices that have been made,” Sarah Davenport, vice chairwoman of the University Health Systems and Pitt Memorial Hospital foundations, said.

Carl Briley, a flight nurse with EastCare, knew members of the 1987 crash, and he recalled how McGinnis had written him a thank-you note, saying he would remember Briley if there were any openings for a paramedic on EastCare. Briley said in an interview that he was encouraged by that gesture to become a nurse.

EastCare has grown since 1987, from one helicopter to three as well as ground transport. In 1987, 3,000 patients were transferred; by the end of this year, it’s estimated that 11,000 patients will have been transported this year.

Dean said that she wants to become an EastCare flight nurse like her late aunt.

“There’s no other field that draws me, and I like the fast pace,” she said.

She hadn’t been born in 1987, but her mother’s family, like her late aunt, is drawn to medical careers.
This year, Dean attended the Lights of Love both as a family member in honor of Demaree and as a volunteer, standing with the EastCare crew, wearing one of its uniforms.

“I love that everybody is coming together and over many years how they’ve added all these lights,” she said. “Now it’s for everybody that wants to remember someone.”

Dean’s mother, Trisha Dean, of Raleigh said she’s attended several of the events to remember her sister.

“I think about how much she loved what she did,” Trisha Dean said “She was passionate about nursing and passionate about people and loved this job.

“It’s a special time of year to reflect, to honor, to remember and to feel the love (toward those) we care the most about.”

Asked about her daughter’s desire to be an EastCare flight nurse, she said: “I am excited for her and obviously very emotional about it. The fact that she aspires to be a nurse is very touching and heartwarming to me. I smile seeing a little bit of Pam in her.”
City staff and state transportation officials will update a citizens advisory group on a proposed highway project that will connect downtown Greenville to the medical center at a meeting scheduled for 6 p.m. today in the public works department.

The 10th Street Connector Advisory Committee will meet in the Public Works Assembly Room, 1500 Beatty St. It is the first meeting on the project since a public hearing was held last year.

“This is the first opportunity where we have had good information to present to the advisory committee,” Greenville Public Works Director Wes Anderson said.

The 10th Street Connector is a proposed 1.4-mile, four-lane road that will extend from Evans Street to Memorial Drive, connecting East Carolina University to Pitt County Memorial Hospital and the medical school.

It will travel down Farmville Boulevard before crossing a residential neighborhood and rising into a bridge over the railroad tracks across Dickinson Avenue.

It’s estimated 30 residences, 24 businesses and seven institutions will be affected by the construction, Anderson said.

The design consultant has completed 65 percent of the project’s design, so an overview will be presented, Anderson said. There also will be an update on the project’s timeline.

Right-of-way acquisition is expected to begin next summer with construction starting in mid-2014.

The project is expected to cost $34.6 million.

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Boise State players prepare to take the field for an NCAA college football game against New Mexico, Saturday, Dec. 3, 2011 in Boise, Idaho. (AP Photo/Idaho Press-Tribune, Charlie Litchfield)

**Big East to add Boise State, four others**
Wednesday, December 7, 2011

The Big East’s long-awaited additions were reportedly imminent on Tuesday, while Conference USA’s remaining core was in an expected limbo.

The Big East was preparing to announce the additions of Boise State and San Diego State as football-only members, and C-USA mainstays Houston, Central Florida and SMU for all sports as soon as today, a person with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press.

The five schools will join in 2013.

Meanwhile, East Carolina University director of athletics Terry Holland said in a statement on Tuesday that C-USA — which is in the planning phase of a merger with the Mountain West — is waiting along with the MWC for the conference shake-up’s dust to settle.

“Fleshing out the details of the C-USA/MWC merger has been on hold until the number of institutions remaining in each conference is stable,” Holland said. “Those teams will provide an outstanding base of competition and I hope there will be serious consideration given to a number of possible formats before we settle on a final version.”
ECU chancellor Dr. Steve Ballard said at a recent Board of Trustees meeting he expected the merger to be approved in January.

The Star-Ledger in New Jersey first reported the Big East was on the verge of making the additions.

The Big East has also been pursuing Navy and Air Force as football-only members, but the military academies are not yet ready to commit to the conference, the person said.

While the Big East is finally about to expand, it’s still very much a league in flux.

Commissioner John Marinatto has pledged to hold Syracuse, Pittsburgh and West Virginia to the league bylaws and keep the schools in the Big East for two more football seasons. Syracuse, Pitt and the ACC have said they would like to move on as soon as possible, but are not challenging the Big East’s rules.

West Virginia is. The school has sued the Big East and wants to join the Big 12 in 2012. The Big 12 needs a replacement for Missouri, which next year is headed to the Southeastern Conference, to have the 10 members it needs to meet the conditions of its television contracts.

“I think what John Marinatto just did, he should get a substantial raise for what he just accomplished,” Louisville coach Rick Pitino said. “Getting Boise State. Getting Houston, SMU. I think that is as good of a job for a commissioner with his back against the wall as I’ve seen since I’ve been in athletics. The teams you lost aren’t as good in football as the teams you’re bringing in.”

The Big East is in an even trickier situation. It has contract requirements to meet next season, as well, plus it will begin negotiating a new TV deal in 2012.

The notification date for Houston, SMU and UCF to switch leagues next year has passed. Boise State is in its first season as a member of the MWC, where San Diego State also competes.
CBSSports.com reported Boise State will place its other sports teams in the Western Athletic Conference, and that San Diego State’s other teams will compete in the Big West.
Blue Cross joins UNC Health in venture

BY DAVID RANII - dranii@newsobserver.com

Carolina Advanced Health, the new medical practice formed by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina and the UNC Health Care System, is a real-world test of a new way of serving chronically ill patients.

"This is really a learning lab for us as we try this new approach for treating patients," said Blue Cross spokeswoman Michelle Douglas. The two organizations are billing the joint venture as the first of its kind.

Carolina Advanced, which opens today at the Quadrangle office park in Chapel Hill, is a primary-care facility that will feature a team of health care professionals - including a pharmacist and nutritionist as well as physicians - who will collaborate to provide coordinated care for patients with chronic conditions.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony will be presided over this afternoon by Brad Wilson, CEO of Blue Cross, the state's largest health insurer; and William Roper, CEO of UNC Health.

The joint venture will examine medical data from the UNC Health perspective and claims data from the Blue Cross perspective to determine how effective the approach is in achieving desirable health outcomes and being cost-effective, Douglas said.

Kevin Schulman, a health care economist at Duke University, said the approach offers the promise of "streamlining the relationship between payer and provider and really getting them both to the table to rethink what their roles are in taking care of patients."

Schulman, a primary-care doctor, said one of the arguments in favor of using more primary-care services is that it would reduce costly hospital stays.

The new practice is designed to serve up to 5,000 patients. An initial round of letters inviting patients to check out the practice went out recently to eligible Blue Cross and Blue Shield members who live in the Triangle and have chronic illnesses, said UNC Health spokeswoman Jennifer James.

Carolina Advanced is focusing on patients over 18 with chronic conditions such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, obstructive lung disease, major depression and asthma.
"The model is set up for people who need the care the most," James said.

As an incentive to give the new practice a try, patients who received the letter were offered a free initial visit with no co-pay.

One advantage that the practice offers over the long haul, said James, is that patients can see multiple doctors during a visit with only one co-pay.

**Check eligibility**

Blue Cross members who have not received a letter but are interested in becoming a Carolina Advanced patient can inquire online about their eligibility at [http://carolinaadvancedhealth.org](http://carolinaadvancedhealth.org). Patients covered by Medicaid, Medicare and health plans other than Blue Cross aren't eligible for treatment at Carolina Advanced.

Carolina Advanced, which encompasses 10,000 square feet, is starting out with a handful of staffers.

The ultimate size of the staff, said Douglas, will be determined by the needs of the patients.

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Eve Carson

Lovette arguments start today

BY ANNE BLYTHE - ablythe@newsobserver.com

HILLSBOROUGH—Prosecutors and defense attorneys are expected to deliver their opening arguments this morning in the trial of Laurence Alvin Lovette, one of two men accused of murdering Eve Carson, the 2008 UNC-Chapel Hill student body president.

On Tuesday, the lawyers settled on the 12 men and women who will sit in the jury box to weigh whether Lovette, now 20, kidnapped, robbed and murdered Carson.

Carson, a widely admired student, was found shot to death early March 5, 2008, in a Chapel Hill neighborhood nearly a mile from campus.

DeMario Atwater, the 25-year-old Durham man accused of being Lovette's accomplice, was sentenced in May 2010 to life in prison after pleading guilty to kidnapping, robbing and murdering Carson.

He is serving his sentence in federal prison. Prosecutors have not said whether they plan to call Atwater as a witness, but the federal prison inmate locator site lists him as an inmate in Victorville Federal Correctional Complex, a high-security prison in Adelanto, Calif. He had not been moved to the Orange County jail, as he likely would have been if he were on the prosecution's list of witnesses.

Today's opening arguments come more than 3-1/2 years after Carson was shot five times and left dead in a wooded Chapel Hill neighborhood.
The Lovette case has taken longer than most to come to trial. Statewide, the median time it takes to dispose of a murder case is 449 days, or almost 15 months. Some of those cases end in pleas or dismissals, not trials. Ten percent of murder cases statewide have lingered for three years and two months, according to state court data.

The case against Lovette is complicated by the fact that he also is awaiting trial in a murder in Durham County, where he is one of two men accused of killing and robbing Abhijit Mahato, a Duke University graduate student found shot to death in January 2008.

Prosecutors plan to mention the Mahato case as they present evidence to the jury, District Attorney Jim Woodall told Judge Allen Baddour last week.

Woodall told the judge he planned to call witnesses who would talk about both cases. Woodall contends that Lovette told a friend in the months before the Carson shooting that he needed money and planned to rob people and then shoot them to hide the evidence.

Defense attorneys have argued that some of the witnesses on the prosecutors' list have given inconsistent stories as they talked with Chapel Hill police and later under oath while testifying before a federal grand jury.

Prosecutors contend that Lovette and Atwater kidnapped Carson in the early hours of March 5 after she had been home alone, working on a paper for school.

Prosecutors say the pair drove her around and forced her to withdraw money from ATM machines before shooting her.

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