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Council OKs downtown ordinance

By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector

Thursday, December 10, 2009

No one spoke in opposition of an ordinance placing requirements on bouncers employed at public and private clubs during Thursday’s Greenville City Council meeting.

Beginning May 1, clubs across the city must require their bouncers to complete an annual training course with the Greenville Police Department. The four-hour course will cost nothing for club owners, GPD Chief William Anderson said. It will address conflict resolution, use of force and the separate roles of bouncers and law enforcement.

Clubs also will be prohibited from hiring bouncers with certain criminal records.

That includes anyone convicted of:

The sale, manufacture, distribution or possession of a controlled substance;

Criminal street gang activity;

Prostitution or assignation;

Homicide, assault, affray, communicating threats, unlawful possession of dangerous or deadly firearms, or discharge of a firearm.

Background checks do cost money, but owners can make their employees responsible for that cost, and Anderson assured the council it’s affordable.

A person can be hired if between two and five years, depending on the crime, have elapsed since conviction or release, whichever date is later.

The measure passed unanimously.

Councilman Max Joyner Jr., who opposed nearly all potential actions presented by city staff to improve safety downtown, spoke highly of the approved ordinance.

“I think it’s a great idea and something that needs to be done,” he said. “I think this is something everybody’s happy with.”

Howard Conner, a retired police officer, was the only city resident to speak during the public hearing. He said most of the altercations downtown follow interactions with bouncers.

“You want to stop some of the violence — because you'll never stop all of the violence,” Connor said. “Pass this ordinance.”

City staff will evaluate any impact of these ordinances on calls for service and other factors six months after implementation and return that information to the council.

Also Thursday, the former convent building at the Lucille W. Gorham Intergenerational Center will be named for a respected community figure: Lessie Bass.
"She came with a dream," Councilwoman Rose Glover said. "We still miss her. Our hearts are still aching, and hopefully she's looking down and seeing we're keeping her legacy going."

Resident Jimmye Jones, chairman of the advisory board, suggested the memorial because of her work toward establishing the center. East Carolina University Chancellor Steve Ballard endorsed the measure.

Council members also unanimously approved:

An ordinance intended to streamline the Planned Unit Development (PUD) application process and facilitate affordable housing and multi-use development in the city. No one from the public spoke on this topic.

A request from recreation and parks to apply for a trust fund grant supporting development of the Drew Steele Center, which would outfit the Elm Street Gym for use by Greenville's special populations.

An Energy Conservation Strategy program from the Public Works Department and authorized submission of the grant application for the remaining federal Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant funds.

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Bowl matchup triggers memories for Holtz

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector

Thursday, December 10, 2009

Motivation and a sense of importance were just a couple of feet away from Skip Holtz Thursday evening.

It would be tough to convince the fifth-year East Carolina football coach — whose name continued to swirl in connection with the coaching vacancy at Kansas — that his team's impending Liberty Bowl matchup with Arkansas is a meaningless game in the sea of 34 postseason bowls.

"Looking across the table here at the Arkansas helmet brings back a lot of memories," said Holtz, whose ECU team will trek to the Liberty Bowl Jan. 2, a fourth consecutive bowl game and ECU's second straight Liberty Bowl appearance.

Holtz's father, former coaching great Lou Holtz, coached the Razorbacks from 1977 to 1983, prior to his long reign as Notre Dame's head coach.

The 9-4 Pirates' impending tussle with 7-5 Arkansas had the younger Holtz thinking back to his teenage years spent in Fayetteville, Ark., as a Razorbacks fan.

"I remember sitting in these press conferences admiring my father as he sat in that chair, talking in front of that Arkansas helmet," Holtz said Thursday as he and current Razorbacks coach Bobby Petrino addressed media members in Memphis, the site of the 51st Liberty Bowl.

Holtz was reminded at the press conference that a Conference USA team has never beaten the Southeastern Conference team on the other side of the bowl matchup. But Holtz's team, 9-4 for the second year in a row heading into the bowl, is all about new things.

The first team ever to repeat as the winner of the Conference USA championship game is bent on adding a Liberty Bowl victory to its long list of accomplishments.

For Holtz, the path to the 4:30 p.m. kickoff on Jan. 2 will be filled with memories of Fayetteville.

"I can remember back to the Orange Bowl (in 1977), when they had the big win over Oklahoma, 31-6, and they played Alabama in the Sugar Bowl (in 1979)," Holtz said of his days of watching the Razorbacks.

"There are some great childhood memories from growing up in Fayetteville around that program and being a huge fan of it."

Holtz latest

Word Thursday that Notre Dame was poised to announce Cincinnati's Brian Kelly as its next head coach meant another bullet was dodged by ECU fans hoping Holtz will stay put for at least one more season in Greenville.

But word out of Lawrence, Kan., suggests Holtz, along with Buffalo's Turner Gill and Central Michigan's Butch Jones, is a leading candidate to replace fired coach Mark Mangino at the University of Kansas.

Holtz and the Pirates return to the practice field today after the head coach returned from his annual trek to New York to attend the National Football Foundation's awards celebration.

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EDITORIAL

Stay

East Carolina University's 38-32 win over the University of Houston on Saturday was much more than just a victory that had ECU fans sitting on the edges of the seats, whether they were in Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium or at home watching the game on television.

The win made history. For the first time in Conference USA history, a football team won back-to-back conference championships. That speaks well for the university, its football program and head coach Skip Holtz.

The win means the Pirates will go to the Liberty Bowl, where the team will take on the University of Arkansas, a team from the SEC, arguably the top college football conference in the nation.

A win over the Razorbacks means a win over an SEC team. That would be a good thing for ECU to add to its football resume.

The win over a ranked opponent and consecutive Conference USA championships will make it easier for ECU to recruit more talented players.

Congratulations to the Pirates for making history. Congratulations to Holtz for helping make it possible for ECU to make that history.

ECU's successes on the football field could become a double-edged sword. The more successes the Pirates have, the more attractive Holtz looks to other college teams seeking a new coach to turn around their programs. Holtz proved he could do that at the University of Connecticut. He's done it at ECU.

It's no wonder his name has come up last year and this year as coaching positions came up or are coming up. Last year, Holtz was mentioned as a candidate for the head coach's job at Syracuse. Luckily, Holtz did not leave ECU. This year, his name came up as the coach who could replace Charlie Weis as the head coach at Notre Dame.

With beach music being popular in eastern North Carolina, we will use some lyrics of a beach-music classic to let Skip Holtz know how ECU fans feel about him: "Stay ... just a little bit longer."
BCBS chief to retire Feb. 1

The top executive at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina has set a date for his last day.

Bob Greczyn, 58, who has run the state's largest health insurer for more than a decade, told employees Thursday that he will retire on Feb. 1. Greczyn announced in October that he planned to retire next year, but had not said exactly when.

"The company is in a very healthy place," Greczyn said in a phone interview. "My goal is to make this transition as smooth and uneventful as we can make it."

The board of the Chapel Hill-based company in October named chief operating officer J. Bradley "Brad" Wilson as its new president, and designated him as Greczyn's replacement as CEO.

Greczyn said he's looking forward to spending more time with his 18-month-old daughter, including "taking her to Gymboree." He also expects to continue his work with various charitable boards and will explore the possibility of teaching at a local university.

"It's the right time for me to wrap up this phase of my life and look forward to the next phase," Greczyn said. "No one really retires any more. There's always something else."

He noted that he has been CEO of a health insurer for 24 years - he ran a company called HealthSource before joining Blue Cross - and he won't miss the pressure of having "ultimate responsibility for the lives and livelihoods" of Blue Cross' 4,900 employees.

Wilson takes the reins as looming health-care reform is expected to reshape the insurance industry. As CEO of Blue Cross, Wilson also will become a target for critics who worry that the nonprofit controls too much of the market in North Carolina and charges too much money.

Another sore point for critics: how much Blue Cross pays its executives. Greczyn received total compensation of $3.99 million for 2008, according to a filing with the N.C. Department of Insurance. Wilson is likely to get a raise in his new position. For 2008, Wilson made $1.78 million.

Greczyn predicts that some form of health-care reform legislation will pass, but pointed out that many of the new rules probably won't go into effect for several years. It makes sense to step aside now and let Wilson "take the company through the next transition."

Under Greczyn's tenure, Blue Cross expanded to 3.7 million members from 1.9 million at the end of 1999.

"The performance of the company under Bob's leadership speaks for itself," said Blue Cross board chairman Jeff Houpt, in a prepared statement.

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Nighthawks to hold concert Saturday at local bar

By Kristin Day
The Daily Reflector

Friday, December 11, 2009

The Nighthawks are back.

"The 'old timers' of Greenville have been dying for the Hawks to come back," Leonard Fleming, a friend of the band, said. "But there just hasn't been a venue."

About 100 fans have reserved seats for The Nighthawks' return to Greenville on Saturday at Tie Breakers. The Nighthawks, from the Washington, D.C., area, is an internationally recognized blues band that was a live music staple in Greenville from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s.

Vocalist, harmonica player and founding member Mark Wenner said it was 1976 when the group began traveling through a mostly college-town circuit in the Carolinas and Virginia. Back then, the drinking age was 18, and bars were packed with freshmen and sophomores excited about live country-rock bands.

"Here we came without cowboy hats and playing a different style, but with the same energy level," Wenner recalled. But he said the band was able to infiltrate the scene so well by reaching further into rock 'n' roll's roots.

"That blues sound is pretty deep in any form of American music," he said. "... The music had a natural appeal, and it just busted wide open."

Fleming, who works in communications for the Greenville Police Department, is a Washington, D.C., native and first saw the Nighthawks as a 17-year-old, when he would sneak into clubs to catch live music shows. He came to Greenville in 1975 to attend East Carolina University and got a job at The Attic, the most popular spot for live music in the area. He then helped owners of the club hook up with the Nighthawks.

"They're fantastic musicians," Fleming said. "And they write a lot of their own music. The music they do cover is very musically sound. It's steeped in the history of blues."

The Attic became so much of a regular spot for the Nighthawks, said Wenner, that the band's cover shot on Performer Magazine was taken during a show at the Greenville venue.

"I kinda remember the first time (at The Attic)," Wenner said. "It was one of the first places I saw people wearing baseball caps, when it was a coming trend," he laughed.

"... It was a nice mixture of students and bikers and people who looked like they possibly worked on a farm. Greenville felt like a smaller town than it does today. You felt like everyone was there (at the club)."

Wenner also remembers a favorite eating spot, Venter's Grill on Mumford Road, where he got a copy of the sweet potato biscuit recipe and gave it to a friend as a wedding present. Venter's was damaged in 1999 in the flood following Hurricane Floyd, but was rebuilt and is now called Nette's Country Cooking. It still sells sweet potato biscuits.

Harrison Ennis of North Myrtle Beach, S.C., was a performer and a Greenville resident during the time the Nighthawks frequented the city. From 1970 to the late '80s, Greenville was a "happening" place, and the Hawks fit right in, Ennis said.

"Bluesmen get into playing," he said, "and the Hawks get into it on a large scale. ... They are always dynamic and
never fail to get the joint rocking."

The Nighthawks developed a relationship with "Greenvillians," even inviting Fleming to drive the bus during their 1980 summer tour. During those years, the band traveled the country and showed up in new towns only to find that old D.C. residents had already created Nighthawk fans in their new cities.

But in the mid-1980s, guitarist and founding member Jimmy Thackery left the band and pursued other musical ventures, the drinking age rose to 21, and the live-music landscape changed for the Nighthawks. College students were interested in different music, frat houses were no longer as welcoming, and the Nighthawks spent years trying to find a new direction.

In 1990, Wenner said the band got back on track with the addition of Mike Cowan and Danny Morris, musicians from Chapel Hill. And while band members have changed a few times since, the Hawks are now back to their roots and are releasing a new album next year.

Only two musicians from the original lineup remain in the band — Wenner and Pete Ragusa on drums.

"They've got more energy now then when Jimmy (Thackery, guitarist and singer) was with them," he said.

It's for that reason that Joe Tronto, former owner of The Attic who books bands for Tie Breakers, decided to bring them back. In April, he spoke with Ragusa after a show in Charlotte.

"I told him, "I've got to get you back to Greenville. It's been too long," Tronto said.

The occasion also sparked the idea for Ennis to develop Greenstock 2009, a reunion of friends who frequented The Attic in the '70s and '80s, organized by the original "West 4th Gang."

"Some of us had remained in Greenville for over a 20-year period and thought it would be good to connect with everyone we could find that was inter-connected over this time frame," Ennis said. "So I built a Web site as a point of reference for information and started putting up names of everyone that we could think of. ... Within 48 hours, the thing had mushroomed, and within a couple of weeks had grown considerably — to the point that we needed a place bigger than someone's house as a place to get together."

Those coming for Greenstock 2009 chose the City Hotel and Bistro as a central location, and people are coming from as far away as Las Vegas, New Mexico and Florida.

"We will reunite and socialize at the hotel Friday and Saturday and top it off Saturday night with the Nighthawks," Ennis said. "How Greenstock 2009 will turn out is a mystery, but I'm sure a warm flame and the glow of camaraderie will show up."

Tronto said that all of the reserved tables at Tie Breakers (about 100 seats) are sold out for Saturday, but standing-room tickets will be sold at the door for $12. Reservations will be honored until 7:30 p.m.; music begins at 8:30. Since the concert coincides with Greenstock, Tronto is confident Tie Breakers will be packed on Saturday.

"There's been a real void for a venue in this town since I closed The Attic, where the demographic would feel comfortable to come out," he said.

If there is room for the 20-year-olds, however, there will be a chance for the Nighthawks to make new fans. Fleming not only brought his wife, June, on board — she says they have all kinds of Nighthawks paraphernalia in their house — but he also has made a fan out of his daughter, Hilary, who is now a freshman at ECU.

"They're just great musicians and great players," Tronto said. "They just know how to do it. I'm a huge fan of blues and jazz and they're just one of the top bands."

And Wenner says he hopes this show is just the first of several returns to Greenville.

"If it's just one special occasion, it'll be great," Wenner said. "But if it can be once a year or once every couple of years, it'll be a wonderful thing. ... One of the tricks is not to come back too soon."

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Key UNC Charlotte football vote today

By April Bethea
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Posted: Friday, Dec. 11, 2009

More than one year after UNC Charlotte trustees agreed to start a football team, the board faces a key decision today on when the future 49ers squad should begin play.

University leaders have long said they hoped to have a team ready in time for the 2013 season. But the soured economy, and its impact on fundraising, led officials to also consider the possibility of a delay.

Trustees must make up their mind, in part, so they'll know whether to pitch an athletics fee increase for football for next school year to UNC-system leaders. The Board of Governors begins debating tuition and fee proposals in January.

Student fees could increase by $200 per year to help pay the cost of running the football program, with the cost being phased in over four years, under plans previously discussed by the university. Dubois also told UNC-system leadems last month the school is considering a separate, additional debt service fee that presumably would help cover the cost of building the stadium and other facilities.

The stadium complex could cost about $45 million.

Still, while money raised from student fees will pay a bulk of the costs for running a team, university leaders have been adamant that they'll also need strong support from the public, including alumni and the business sector to make football work.

In recommending a football team last September, Chancellor Phil Dubois challenged university boosters and football fans to raise $5 million by selling 5,000 football seat licenses for the stadium.

Just over 3,200 FSLs have been sold, worth about $3.96 million. Meanwhile, Dubois recently wrote in a campus newsletter that school trustees have committed about $1.6 million in personal gifts toward the program.

Athletics Director Judy Rose said the FSL sales aren't where she hoped they'd be when the football team was announced a year ago, but noted the economy isn't where it used to be. "Once
the economy started tanking, at some point I began to be even more pleased with where we are,” she said.

Rose said leaders continue to solicit corporate or other individual donors for football, asking in some cases for anywhere from $100,000 to $10 million. Rose said she worried would-be donors would ask her if she’d lost her mind, but said that hasn’t been the case.

“It's not, this is a bad economy we can't help you,” Rose said. “What we've heard is 'get us more information.'”

Some of what people want to know, Rose said, is when the football team will start play and where.

The campus briefly flirted with having the team temporarily play off campus at Memorial Stadium, but later shifted focus on building a stadium on campus from the onset. Early plans called for erecting a temporary stadium around the Belk Track & Field complex.

But in September, Dubois and university consultants unveiled another plan to build a temporary stadium on the same site where they'd put a permanent facility, on land behind the baseball stadium and near the Charlotte Research Institute. Construction would cost about $45 million. The new proposal will make it easier to sell naming rights for the stadium and field, leaders have said.

Rose said she believes interest in a football program remains among students and alumni. She acknowledges, however, that the lack of a firm starting date or playing location does impact when people may show their support financially.

It “has slowed down and that's because if I've got limited resources, it doesn't mean I don't want football, but I want to make sure it's going to happen (before) I put my dollars down,” Rose said. “We've said it's going to happen, but we haven't showed them anything concrete.”

That something concrete could come Friday with the trustees vote.

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26 Students Arrested in Protest Over Tuition Increases

By MALIA WOLLAN

SAN FRANCISCO — Twenty-six students were arrested at San Francisco State University before dawn on Thursday after some students barricaded themselves inside a building to protest budget cuts and tuition increases across the state’s public university system.

“The doors were locked with chains from the inside so police broke through a window to get in,” a university spokeswoman, Ellen Griffin, said. “We’re approaching final exams and the end of the semester, and as many as 3,200 students have classes in that building.”

On Wednesday, classes in the building were canceled after the occupation began.

Along with indignation over budget cuts, a blog listing the protesters’ demands included forgiveness of all student loans and ending the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. With demands far beyond the purview of school administrators, negotiations with the students was nearly impossible, Ms. Griffin said.

The students occupied the three-story building for about 24 hours before the police took them into custody. They were charged with misdemeanors and released, Ms. Griffin said. Thirteen students were arrested inside the administration and classroom building, and 13 were arrested protesting outside.

The arrests came after months of growing student anger that followed a steep decline in state financing for public universities. Fees for students at the 23 California State University campuses, including San Francisco State, increased 30 percent this school year. In November, the University of California’s Board of Regents approved a 32 percent increase in undergraduate student fees, which resulted in protests across the 10 campuses.

Students on at least three campuses, including Berkeley, took over buildings and dozens were arrested in the days after the fee increase. Those protesting also took issue with layoffs, faculty furloughs and other cuts.
Slowlying Expansion, Harvard Suspends Work on Tower

By ABBY GOODNOUGH

BOSTON — Harvard announced Thursday that it would indefinitely suspend construction on a high-tech science complex in the Allston neighborhood of Boston because of money problems.

"The altered financial landscape of the university, and of the wider world, necessitates a shift away from rapid development in Allston," Drew Gilpin Faust, Harvard’s president, wrote in a letter released Thursday.

As part of a larger long-term expansion into Allston — a pet project of Lawrence H. Summers, Dr. Faust’s predecessor at Harvard and now President Obama’s chief economic adviser — the university also bought a string of buildings there over the last 20 years. But many have remained vacant, to the chagrin of Allston residents who have accused the university of buying land and holding onto it, a practice known as land banking.

The four-building science center, estimated to cost at least $1 billion, was originally scheduled to be finished in 2011. Dr. Faust’s announcement comes 10 months after she announced plans to slow the pace of the project while the university assessed whether it could continue. Harvard has since disclosed that its endowment declined 27 percent from June 2008 to June 2009, to $26 billion, and the university has made several cost-cutting moves.

In her letter, Dr. Faust said Harvard would step up efforts to revitalize Allston, a gritty neighborhood wedged between the Charles River and the Massachusetts Turnpike, even as it delayed the science center.

But Harry Mattison, an Allston resident who serves on the Harvard Allston Task Force, an advisory group, said he was skeptical.

"There’s nothing new here," Mr. Mattison said. "We need to get past vague assurances about leasing some of these decrepit buildings, to a comprehensive plan with follow-through."

The Harvard Corporation, the university’s governing body, voted Tuesday to formally stop the construction. Dr. Faust, who succeeded Mr. Summers in 2007, said the university would continue to expand into Allston "as resources allow," but only after an evaluation by a new "work team" made up of experts in design, urban planning, real estate and business strategy.

The evaluation will start in January. Meanwhile, the scientists who were supposed to occupy the new complex will work elsewhere indefinitely.

"This delay will in no way slow Harvard’s significant momentum in the life sciences," Dr. Faust wrote.

She raised the possibility of Harvard’s teaming up with private industry, hospitals or philanthropic
foundations to continue the science center construction and other Allston projects — an idea that Mr. Mattison found encouraging.

“We’re going to have to cast a wide net for creative solutions or funding for whatever is going to happen here,” he said, “because Drew Faust isn’t going to write a check. That’s clear.”

Katherine Lapp, the university’s executive vice president, said it was premature to confirm whether the science center, when construction resumes, would ultimately look the same — or have the same function — as originally proposed.

“It’s possible,” Ms. Lapp said. “The work team will determine as it goes forward what options might make sense.”

The construction will stop by March, when the first phase — the foundation and a street-level concrete deck — is finished, university officials said. But Harvard will more aggressively seek tenants for surrounding vacant buildings, Dr. Faust wrote.

Harvard will also develop and support education and job-training programs in Allston, she said, as well as plant trees and finish a new public park.

Harvard has struggled to find the kind of tenants — like shops and cafes — that Allston residents want for the vacant properties, many of which are along a dingy thoroughfare with an industrial feel. But Ms. Lapp said she was optimistic, especially since Harvard would now look to lease an additional 100,000 square feet of space in buildings that had been used to support construction of the science center.

“We think we can bring some very interesting activities into the community,” she said.