THE DAILY CLIPS

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A minor wreck at the intersection of US 264 and Martin Luther King Highway in Greenville was among many weather-related fender benders reported Thursday morning.

**Reflector.com**

**No Pitt delays; many fender-benders**

By KJ Williams

The Daily Reflector

Thursday, December 16, 2010

Weather prompted no delays or cancellations for Pitt schools, ECU or PCC today, but emergency officials are responding to many minor traffic accidents.

A light snow was falling Thursday morning, and that was expected to turn to rain later in the day as temperatures remained above the freezing mark.

That was good news for educators trying to finish exams before the winter break at ECU and PCC, and for Pitt County Schools students, who would have to go to class on Monday to make up any cancellation. Monday is the first day of their winter break.

Most buses made their way to school before significant accumulation on roads. The precipitation later Thursday morning was making roads slick in places, particularly bridges and overpasses.

Emergency communication officials reported several minor wrecks in the Greenville area.

The National Weather Service meteorologist Casey Dail in Newport said Wednesday that snow was in the forecast for today, possibly starting about 6 a.m.

“We're going to have some snow showers, and then it might transition to a wintry precipitation mix,” she said. “It could have periods of sleet in there—freezing rain.”

Thursday morning the Weather Service was predicting snow, freezing rain, and sleet between noon and 3p.m, then rain likely after 3 p.m. A high near 37 today and a low near 33 tonight would keep temps above freezing.

The weather was expected to warm to 43 on Friday with sunshine and dry conditions.
The N.C. Department of Transportation began spraying a salt solution on roadways Wednesday, said Joe Ross, transportation supervisor for Division 2 in Pitt County. School district spokeswoman Heather Mayo said in an e-mail that if it becomes necessary to close school today, a makeup half-day of school will be held Monday.

Today also is the last day of ECU's exams, which are set to proceed on schedule beginning at 8 a.m., spokesman John Durham said in an e-mail.

PCC students have exams today and Friday.
“At this particular time, we are planning on full operation,” Susan Nobles, vice president of institutional advancement, said Wednesday.

Students at both campuses will receive alert messages if there are any delays or closures via e-mail or text message, officials said.

Dail said she expects the snow to accumulate. Temperatures will be in the 20s this morning but will reach the high 30s by afternoon, turning a wintry mix to rainfall. Rain on Friday is forecast to continue through Saturday night, Dail said.
“Sunday, in the morning, we have about a 20 percent chance of a wintry mix of rain and snow showers, drying out Sunday afternoon,” she said.

Contact K.J. Williams at kwilliams@reflector.com or (252) 329-9588.
Wendell park plan in final stages
Money figures to be the limiting factor for putting the plan into action.

BY AARON MOODY, Staff writer
WENDELL - Wendell Parks and Recreation staff are pleased with the latest draft of the Wendell Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Parks, Recreation and Open Space master plan, but not all in attendance at last Monday's parks and recreation commission meeting agreed the plan was best suited for the town.

A class from East Carolina University presented its latest draft of the plan, which included nine priority recommendations for the department based on findings from public surveys over the last several weeks.

According to the draft, the top recommendation called for expanding Wendell Park into a "much larger multi-purpose park" to include facilities such as a multi-purpose field, a skate park, trails, a dog park, a splash pad, a disc golf course, an outdoor basketball court, a track and volleyball courts. The class estimated these facilities would take up 24 acres including additional parking.

The proposal also calls for an expansion of indoor facilities. Recommended indoor additions included volleyball nets, racquetball courts, and more rooms and open space for other activities like karate classes. The plan also identified the public's demand for a weight room, renovated tennis courts and expanded youth soccer and football programs.

The other recommendations included the equal distribution of parks facilities around town, increased opportunities for physical activity and educational programs to fight obesity, more greenways and trails, preventive programs to keep juvenile delinquency low, addressing barriers identified by the public such as health/age, availability and money, repairs and renovations to existing facilities, providing modern recreation opportunities such as
camping, canoeing and hiking, and the construction of a public swimming pool.

**Not the right time**
While the ECU students pointed out the plan was not intended to be tackled at one time -- but instead was meant to serve as a guide for consideration as the department addresses various needs and concerns of the next five to 10 years -- Wendell resident Ann Stewart said she still thinks it's the wrong time to consider improvements beyond those of necessity. She spoke against the notion that various improvements might result in more burden on taxpayers in a slow economic time.

"I thought the students did a wonderful job, but our tax rates are the highest in eastern Wake County and I don't believe we should be paying more taxes to furnish recreation every afternoon for the children," Stewart said.

"Parental responsibility needs to come into play. I think a Boys & Girls Club would help fit the bill for that."

It's not that Stewart is against youth sports. Her children and grandchildren have all been through the department. She said the Wendell Parks and Recreation programs are doing fine as they are. She said a Boys & Girls Club would remedy many of the proposed services identified in the plan, "like after school-services the taxpayers shouldn't have to be paying for."

"I think we have a terrific department," Stewart said. "If we can just maintain what we have for the next few years until the economy straightens up. It [the plan] just seemed to be a dream, or something for a town much larger than Wendell."

Stewart said not all of the recommendations should be considered, but noted some will be approachable when the economy levels out. She said some recommendations can be fulfilled through existing facilities -- particularly the idea of a new public swimming pool. She pointed out that Wendell has three pools that can be used at a reasonable price.

**A place to start**
Wendell Parks and Recreation Director Brinkley Wagstaff was pleased with students' effort in compiling the data for the lengthy document. He said while everything in the plan may not be instructions for where to start today,
it gives the department a good idea of where it stands and what will be needed as projected growth occurs in the future.

"We can look at it and see where we stack up and make sure we're headed in the right direction," Wagstaff said. "I think we're moving along here. They put a lot of time and effort into it, that's for sure."

Wagstaff thinks the ECU students accurately prioritized their recommendations with regard to what's needed the most in the parks and recreation department. He and the group worked back and forth in finalizing the most recent draft and he said the surveys indicated areas the department would like to have but may not be feasible right now because of cost. Some of the projects he mentioned were the swimming pool and expanding to satellites parks across town, but he noted some things are likely to change with time.

"Even though the park is on the west side of town now, if Wendell grows on the Wendell Boulevard side this park will be in the center of town in the future," Wagstaff said.

He said the list of priorities identified by parks and recreation staff was a little different in terms of order, but the issues were addressed in the plan. "Tennis courts, lights on the large field, which are 30-plus years old, and the playground area are the three big ones as far as staff is concerned," Wagstaff said. "They were all identified by the class, but you know this stuff all comes down to money."

Wagstaff said Wendell Parks and Recreation is in a good position. It has 45 undeveloped acres to work with to facilitate more activities as needed. He said growth needs to be accounted for, but at the same time the department needs to accommodate what it's already started.

The ECU class is working on a master draft Wagstaff hopes to receive this week. The next step is adopt the comprehensive plan and develop a site plan. "That will get us ready for our grant applications," Wagstaff said. "It's not going to happen overnight. It's going to take time. It's better for us to have all this planned out on the front end."

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ECU alumni to host singer for fundraiser

The Daily Reflector

Musician JT Spangler will perform three shows in an effort to raise funds for the East Carolina University Alumni Association Scholarship fund at 9:30 p.m. today at Winslow’s Tavern, 120 W. Fifth St. and at 10 p.m. Friday-Saturday at Chefs 505, 505 Red Banks Road.

The Louisiana native now lives in Los Angeles, pursuing a music career full time. For the last two years he’s spent time playing shows, meeting other artists, fans and industry people.

His lastest EP, “Songs for the Holidays,” was released Dec. 7 and includes “Silver Bells,” “Chestnuts Roasting (The Christmas Song),” “Hard Candy Christmas,” “O Holy Night” and “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.”
Gamble on Riley pays off for ECU

_Pirates' 27-year old offensive coordinator has offense clicking_

East Carolina’s first-year offensive coordinator Lincoln Riley (gray shirt) looks on during a Pirates’ practice earlier this season. Under Riley’s guidance, the Pirates are posting 38 points per game this season. (WDN Photo/Brian Haines)

By BRIAN HAINES, Brian@wdnweb.com, Sports Writer
Published: Thursday, December 16, 2010 2:12 AM EST

GREENVILLE — A first-year coach hiring rookie coordinators is a rather unorthodox formula for success, but for East Carolina coach Ruffin McNeill and his crew that recipe has led to the school being able to reach it’s fifth straight bowl game.
It’s been an up and down season for East Carolina, which started out by winning five of its first seven games, only to lose four of its last five.

Despite the roller coaster ride, ECU finished the regular season even at 6-6 and earned its unprecedented fifth-straight bowl appearance when it accepted an invitation to play in the Military Bowl against Maryland (8-4) at RFK Stadium on Dec. 29.

Inconsistency was to be expected this season, as the Pirates lost several key players from their two-time defending Conference USA champion team, as well as the coach that guided them to those titles.

When Skip Holtz decided to accept the head coaching position at South Florida, it opened the door for ECU alum, and long-time Texas Tech assistant, Ruffin McNeill to come back home and coach the Pirates.

For McNeill, it was his first head coaching gig at the collegiate level, but that did not stop the former Red Raiders’ defensive coordinator from surrounding himself with youthful assistants who came to town as green as the field they practice on.

In an era of type-A coaches, McNeill is a bit more hands off than most, which is extremely gutsy for a guy in his first year at the top of the helm.

When McNeill came to Greenville one of his first moves was to name former Texas Tech inside receivers coach Lincoln Riley, 26 at the time, the offensive coordinator, making him the youngest in the country.

The new ECU skipper also cited that Brian Mitchell, 42, would get his first defensive coordinator job after serving as Texas Tech’s cornerback’s coach since 2006.

Other youthful new staff members included the 26-year old offensive line coach Brandon Jones, as well as 28-year old running backs’ coach Clay McGuire.

McNeill, who has said repeatedly stated that his mix of young and veteran coaches was by design, did make it a point to sprinkle in guys like associate head coach John Wiley, who at 48 has over 20 years of coaching experience at the collegiate level.

While college football is a great way for a fan to kill a few hours on a Saturday, it’s big business for everyone involved from on the university’s side from athletic director to ball boy. Just look at all the programs scrambling to join more prestigious conferences with bigger TV deals. In all of the recent moves, the school’s football program has been the main catalyst.

With that in mind, it makes McNeill's decision to hire the 26-year old Riley even more bold. If the Pirates had flamed out on both offensive and defense this season, the big question right now would be how could a first-year coach come to town and
hire two first-year coordinators to run his team. It would be viewed as lunacy.

For McNeill, the thought of facing any kind of backlash never crossed his mind.

“I don’t worry about opinions outside of my circle,” McNeill said. “I learned a long time ago that you make your decisions and you think about it, (but the thought of potential criticism) had no bearing on that; I knew we would be successful. ... Failing never crossed my mind, and if anything were to happen, any backlash or criticism, you just can’t worry about that in this business.”

McNeill said he felt confident hiring Riley and Mitchell because they have earned his respect and trust over the past few years.

“I was methodical. Everything with me is based on trust and verification of trust; do I trust them, and then have I verified their trust. Everyone I have hired had to pass that first obligation with me,” McNeill said. “Then the next thing was chemistry. That’s the most important thing in any type of organization or business. We have great staff chemistry and we have great team chemistry. ... I had those two guys in mind (for the coordinator jobs), we have been in battles and wars and the trust was established and verified.”

Working on the recruiting trail over the years helped Riley forge a relationship with McNeill, but the future offensive coordinator earned his seal of approval during the Alamo Bowl last season.

After former Texas Tech head coach Mike Leach was fired for alleged mistreatment of a player, McNeill was tabbed to coach the Raiders as they prepared to face Michigan State.

McNeill didn’t hesitate to ask Riley to direct the offense, and the young coach handled the pressure-packed situation admirably as his offense scored 41 points in the team’s 41-31 win over the Spartans.

“Having recruited with him a bit was the first part. I know how hard he recruits and how hard he works. We have worked together in the staff room since he was a student assistant, to grad assistant, to being a full time coach,” McNeill said. “Then at the bowl game I asked him to be the coordinator. I saw how he ran that group the whole week, then the night of the game I saw how he handled all his calls. That was a big influence.”

Under Riley’s direction ECU has run the “Air Raid” offense effectively and the unit has been the most consistent one on the team, and one of the most productive in the country.

The Pirates lost six starters from last year’s C-USA title-winning team, most notably quarterback Patrick Pinkney and running back Dominique Lindsay, however, the
team finished the regular season ranked 12th in the nation with 38 points per game.

This season East Carolina has accrued 445 yards of total offense per game which is the 22nd best total in all of the FBS, while the team’s 319 passing yards per game ranks 12th.

The Pirates’ rushing game lags a bit as they have averaged 126 yards a contest, but when you’re posting 38 points per game pointing out the lack of emphasis on running the ball just seems like nitpicking.

With quarterback Dominique Davis and a host of talented Pirates players coming back for another year in the system, the ECU offense is expected to take a step up. McNeill knows if the offense continues to be the signature of the program that other team’s will come calling for Riley. McNeill said that when that time comes he will not stand in the prodigy’s way.

“It’s always a compliment in hiring in this business. If you hire a good coach people are going to try and come after him,” McNeill said. “I think Lincoln has a bright future in this business and I think he will do a great job when he becomes a head coach. Whenever he is ready I’m sure he will let me know. I’m there for him, I would never do anything to hold one of our guys back.”

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RALEIGH—Two college-age friends found dead on a Hillsborough Street fire escape in October died from lethal doses of oxymorphone, a potentially addictive pain reliever, according to documents released by the state Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

Authorities originally thought Ray Ausbon, 21, and Zac Tigner, 19, both Apex High School graduates, may have been poisoned by mephedrone, a little-known designer drug often called "meow-meow" frequently marketed online as plant food.

Mephedrone was present in the bodies of both men and could have contributed to their deaths, the medical report found, but the levels of oxymorphone were lethal.

Alprazolam, a sedative used to treat anxiety disorders and other conditions, was also found in the blood of both men and was listed as likely contributing to their deaths.

The report on Tigner stated that he also had ethanol and a low level of the narcotic hydrocodone in his system, all "likely contributing factors" in his death. The report indicated that Tigner could have died from asphyxiation because of the positioning of his neck against the balcony railing, but it was "probable that his positioning was due to his underlying intoxication."

Ausbon and Tigner were discovered dead the morning of Oct. 2 - just two days before Tigner was to join the U.S. Army. They met through Apex United Methodist Church and had legions of friends who called them fun-loving and enjoyable company.

Ausbon was an Eagle Scout, lifeguard and honor student who majored in accounting at N.C. State University.
Tigner, whom friends recalled as having a playful and easy manner, was an avid soccer player, both at Apex High School and at Gardner-Webb University.

Several friends from Gardner-Webb noted, however, that Tigner was no stranger at a party and didn't always conform to the strict rules of a private Christian college.

"He was a really lively guy, always the life of the party," said Jordan Love, who knew him through soccer friends. "He was always kind of pushing his limits."