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East Carolina University News Bureau
E-mail to durhamj@.ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481 FAX: 252- 328-6300
Stated intent: Zoning debate centers on district’s future

Friday, December 18, 2009

The second of three initiatives aimed at improving safety in downtown Greenville advanced on Tuesday when the city’s Planning and Zoning Commission approved a 500-foot separation between public and private clubs. The ordinance originally would have covered the entire city, but was reduced during debate on the issue.

Yet, while this rule represents action on the part of city officials, the City Council must now consider if the new restrictions would achieve the intended effect of reducing crime in a key part of this community. Reasonable doubts emerging about that conclusion should give council members pause when it comes before them next month.

When two men were killed on a Fifth Street sidewalk this summer, residents demanded action from the city. The incident was the most obvious indication of an apparent decline in public safety downtown, and was followed days later by another shooting one block away. The City Council moved swiftly to advance a few ordinances that would ostensibly address the issue by boosting law enforcement patrols and imposing new restrictions on the bars and clubs that operate in that district.

The 500-foot separation minimum represents the most significant of these proposals since it promised to radically change how the city addresses those businesses. By creating such a buffer, Greenville would vastly limit the areas in which they could open and operate, creating a virtual monopoly for existing clubs in the downtown district and reducing the options of would-be entrepreneurs throughout the city.

In Tuesday’s debate, the folly of placing such limits on the entirety of the city were made apparent to members of the Planning and Zoning Commission, which defeated the original measure on a 5-3 vote. It instead approved a narrow version of the ordinance, focused only on the downtown district, by the same vote. The revised proposal will come before the City Council next month, when a public hearing will precede a vote that would make it law.

However, the community should very carefully consider the implications of such a measure. In addition to eliminating the threat of possible competition for existing clubs, the rule would mean that, were a club to close and remain vacant for six months or more, a new bar could not open in its place due to the restriction. The end result could mean the scattering of these businesses across Greenville.

That may be exactly what the council desires, but that may not be what citizens want. So the upcoming debate should be about the long-term future of downtown, making it among the most important now facing the city.
ECU’s Wilson named Sporting News MVP

The Daily Reflector

Thursday, December 17, 2009

East Carolina senior C.J. Wilson has been named Conference USA Defensive Most Valuable Player for the second straight year by Sporting News Magazine.

The Belhaven native, who was named first team All C-USA by the leagues’ coaches and second team by Phil Steele Magazine, has started 36 straight games and has tallied 56 tackles (23 solo), 5.5 sacks and 10.5 tackles for loss (TFL) this season. Wilson helped the defensive unit force at least two turnovers in eight games and hold six opponents to less than 100 yards rushing.

Wilson received an ESPN GameDay Final helmet sticker for his play against Southern Miss, when he recorded three stops and blocked his fourth career kick, a point after touchdown which he returned 90 yards for two points to give the Pirates a 22-20 lead with 7 minutes, 35 seconds left in the game.

During his four-year career, the three-time All C-USA performer has booked 191 tackles, 27 sacks and 45.5 TFLs in 53 career games. Wilson currently ranks among the NCAA active leaders in assisted TFLs (first), assisted sacks (tied for fifth), total TFLs (tied for eighth), total sacks (eighth), solo sacks (10th), sack yards (12th), TFL yards (14th) and solo TFLs (tied for 17th).

Last week Wilson became the second Pirate this season, along with safety Van Eskridge, to accept an invitation to participate in the 85th East-West Shrine Game, which will be played on Jan. 23, 2010, at the Florida Citrus Bowl in Orlando, Fla.

Wilson and the Pirates will play Arkansas in the AutoZone Liberty Bowl on Jan. 2.

— ECU Media Relations

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H1N1 kills UNC student

CHAPEL HILL -- Lillian Chason was the sort of bubbly dynamo who could fill up a room with positive energy.

That's the Lillian her friends are left to remember. The UNC-Chapel Hill student died Wednesday from complications brought on by the H1N1 virus.

The 18-year-old freshman from Rhode Island contracted the disease in November. Her father, Eric, announced her death on Facebook, the popular social networking Web site.

"I'm sorry to have to tell everyone that Lillian died this afternoon at 5:20 PM," his post reads. "As you all know, she put up an incredible fight and if there was anyway she could have overcome this disease, she would have."

As of Tuesday, 76 deaths across North Carolina had been attributed to H1N1 and other types of influenza, said Carol Schriber, a spokeswoman for the state's Department of Health and Human Services. Friends describe Chason as the inquisitive sort who would grill you on your interests, hopes and dreams.

"She was so excited about everything," said Sara Carlson, a senior who met Chason during tryouts for a student play. "She wanted to know where you were coming from. She wanted to know things about you."

Chason planned to study drama at UNC-CH. Soon after arriving, she auditioned for a part in "A New Dress for Mona," a student play. She won the lead role.

"We were wondering if we'd find the right match," remembered Mark Perry, the drama instructor casting the play. "It's a very strong, young woman character. And then she walked through the door, and she was perfect for it. She was magnetic on stage."

Laura Page, who met Chason this fall, said her friend's death is particularly jarring because Chason led a healthy lifestyle that included a daily workout. "She was fine, and then she was on life support," Page said. "There was almost no in-between."

Her death may lead more students to seek the H1N1 vaccine, Page said. "The swine flu, you thought it was a joke, but it really hit us close to home," she said. "A lot of people I know are getting the vaccine now."

For months, the vaccine was tough to find, but it is now more widely available, and the university has offered it to the campus for weeks.

For many students, a flu shot is a low priority because of cost, skepticism or they're just too busy, said Jasmin Jones, UNC-CH's student body president. Chason's death will lead more students to get the vaccine, she said.
"It makes us more aware that this thing can take away lives," said Jones, who has not yet been vaccinated. "We tend to relate to each other as students, so we may be prompted by this. And parents will be, too."

eric.ferreri@newsobserver.com or 919-932-2008
Hackers hit colleges to get personal data

Patrons of the state's community colleges may have had their driver's license and Social Security numbers stolen by a hacker.

College officials said Tuesday that they were notifying nearly 51,000 library users at 25 campuses, including Wake Tech and Johnston County, that they were victims of a security breach this year.

 Officials said they discovered in August that a hacker had gained access to a Raleigh server, which holds information that can be used to steal identities. The breach has been under investigation since.

Community college officials could not be reached late Thursday to explain the delay in announcing the breach.

Officials say the server held driver's license numbers for library patrons at 18 campuses. For 12 campuses, it also held Social Security numbers. The information was collected to help identify library users.

At Wake and Johnston campuses, only driver's license numbers were compromised.

College officials said their investigation indicates that the hacker did not view the personal information on the server. But they are taking steps to make sure that security breaches are not possible.

"We regret this situation has occurred, and we apologize to those with information on the server," Dr. Saundra Williams, a senior vice president with the community college system, said in a statement. "Our colleges and our system office are making every effort to ensure that personal information is permanently removed from our records."

The affected colleges have started removing personal data from the server. And officials in the system office in Raleigh are working to ensure that the server no longer stores such data for library patrons.

Those affected will receive letters explaining what happened and outlining steps to prevent identity theft and protect their credit.

Aside from Wake and Johnston, campuses with sensitive information on the server were Alamance, Beaufort, Bladen, Blue Ridge, Brunswick, Central Carolina, College of the Albemarle, Gaston, Halifax, Haywood, Lenoir, Martin, Nash, Pamlico, Piedmont, Richmond, Roanoke-Chowan, Rowan-Cabarrus, Sandhills, Southwestern, Tri-County, Vance, Granville and Wilson.

kristin.collins@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4881
Injured turtle's odyssey

Anita the hawksbill turtle is one first-class reptile.

She's also very, very lucky.

In early 2007, Anita was found struggling to swim off the southern Caribbean island of Curacao after apparently being injured by a boat.

On Tuesday, Anita flew to her new home at a Florida animal hospital in the first-class cabin of an American Airlines jetliner accompanied by her friend, UNC-Wilmington professor Alina Szmant.

The small hawksbill, an endangered species, is alive because of the tenacity of the professor, who arranged for the turtle's medications, daily care, and finally, transport to the United States.

Szmant was teaching an ecology course in Curacao when the injured turtle was found. She and her students set up a schedule for round-the-clock feedings in Curacao for six weeks after the 5-pound turtle's head injury and hyperinflated lung. They massaged her crooked neck. They dubbed her Anita.

After seeking advice from turtle experts at UNCW and N.C. State University, Szmant got medications for the injured creature, and tried to figure out how to administer them.

"I'm a coral reef ecologist," she said. "That doesn't mean I know anything about injecting a turtle in the neck with antibiotics."

But the medication seemed to help. Szmant and her students also had to pry open Anita's mouth and shove bits of fish inside without getting bitten.

 Eventually, Szmant and her students had to leave the island. They wanted to take the turtle with them, but it would take months, maybe a year, to get the necessary permits from the government.

In the meantime, volunteers at the Curacao Sea Aquarium cared for the turtle, but they couldn't take her on indefinitely. A turtle hospital in Marathon, Fla., agreed to take her if Szmant could get her there.

So, after six months, the proper permits arrived. American Airlines provided a free ticket for Szmant to pick up the ailing turtle.

Rubbed down with petroleum jelly and ointments to keep her from drying out, Anita was placed in a small pet carrier for the journey. She was a little uneasy on takeoff, but soon settled down. The airline upgraded Szmant and her charge to first class and arranged for a double seat.

"We took her out one time to take pictures and she pooped on me," Szmant said.

The turtle may live out its life at the turtle preserve in Florida. But if she makes a full recovery, Anita could go back to the wild in Curacao.
"We've done so much to destroy the Earth, it may seem silly to go to this much effort for one little turtle," Szmant said. "She grabbed my heart, and I'm glad I could help her in some little way."

jane.stancill@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4559
Blue Cross CEO warns of costs

The state's largest health insurer contends that the health care reform bill in the U.S. Senate would trigger major premium increases for its customers and lead people to drop coverage because of high costs.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina projects the average annual cost of premiums for its individual policies would be 53 percent higher, or $1,714 more, in 2018. Premium costs for small businesses would rise an average of 29 percent, according to the nonprofit insurer.

Congress is widely expected to enact reforms that will have the greatest effect on health care since the creation of Medicare. But the bill being considered by the Senate is still in flux and, if and when it is passed, the Senate's brand of reform would have to be reconciled with the House version.

Although many consider Blue Cross an opponent of reform because it has campaigned against provisions such as the public option for health insurance, CEO Bob Greczyn insists Blue Cross is on board.

"We expect - and hope ultimately - that something passes," said Greczyn, 58, who is retiring Feb. 1. "We just want to make sure at the end of the day that we don't end up with something that makes it worse, not better."

Greczyn, in a meeting with reporters and editors at The News & Observer, argued that the insurer's analysis offers a compelling argument for a final bill that includes a strong mandate requiring health insurance. Another issue is that reform, at least in a version being considered by the Senate, would shift costs to younger, healthier people, Greczyn said.

Advocates of reform counter that the insurer's warnings gloss over the benefits of proposed reforms, including subsidies that would be available to low- and moderate-income families. There also would be a tax subsidy to help small businesses offer health insurance to their employees.

"In the end, consumers would pay significantly less because of their ability to access the tax credits," said Families USA spokesman Dave Lemmon. A family of four could earn up to about $88,000 and still qualify for tax credits under the Senate bill, he added.

Families USA, a national advocacy group, issued a report Thursday that estimates that by 2019, reform will increase the number of North Carolinians with health coverage by nearly 1 million. About 1.5 million North Carolinians were uninsured last year.

Blue Cross' projections are misleading, said Adam Searing, a health care expert at the Raleigh-based N.C. Justice Center and a frequent critic of the insurer.

"It's like someone who is running around an airplane yelling the plane is going to crash because it doesn't have any wings," Searing said. "But if you look out the window you can see the wings."
Other economists and the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office have reached very different conclusions, Searing said. Most North Carolinians get health insurance through their employers, and the CBO projects the cost of those policies won't be affected by reform.

The CBO projects the average cost of individual policies would rise 10 percent to 13 percent.

"Even Blue Cross admits," Searing said, "that for people who are older, say, in their 60s, who are paying the highest premiums, their premiums are going to go down."

Searing contended that Blue Cross is doing its best to torpedo reform, despite its protests to the contrary, because it profits enormously from the current system.

Blue Cross has more than 3.7 million members statewide, including about 300,000 people with individual policies.

A significant flaw in the proposed Senate bill, Greczyn said, is that the penalties for those who choose not to buy insurance - a $95 penalty the second year and eventually up to $750 - aren't strong enough to compel people to purchase coverage.

A stronger mandate is important, said Greczyn, because "the more people you get in the pool, the more opportunity you have to spread those costs over a greater number of people."

Greczyn said he suspects that many younger, healthier people won't purchase health insurance because the penalty pales compared to the thousands that they would have to pay in premiums.

Whatever version is approved by Congress, Greczyn predicted that health care reform will be with us for a long time.

"My guess is that, no matter what passes, you're going to have Health Care Reform II, you're going to have Health Care Reform III, because we're going to get into the implementation of this and we're going to find out that some of these things just ain't gonna work, and then we'll have to fix them."

david.rani@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4877
... Donate Your Body to Science

No matter how far technology comes, some things remain the same: Farmers still harvest the land. Fishermen still use nets. And medical students still need to learn on real human bodies.

Though some of these bodies are unclaimed cadavers from the coroner, others are planned donations. So what do you do if you want to donate yours?

Donald Fletcher, Ph.D., is professor and vice-chair of anatomy at the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C. He gave us the lowdown.

MFD: How long would my body be in use?

DF: Bodies are used for the duration of the particular course or training that needs them. They can be used for several days, such as when training surgical residents, or throughout a semester in an anatomy course for first-year medical students. Generally, studies on a body are finished within a year after the body has been received.

MFD: What are the ethics? Would medical students laugh or gawk at it?

DF: Your body is treated with the utmost respect and dignity by faculty and students. It is kept in a restricted area.... Most programs also have an annual memorial service to honor the donors.

MFD: Why would I want to donate my body? Do they really need it?

DF: Donated bodies are essential in the education and training of doctors, nurses, dentists and other health-care professionals.... While computer programs and simulated patients are helpful, there is no substitute for learning human anatomy directly from a body. By donating your body, you provide a wonderful gift to future and current health-care providers.

MFD: How should I tell my family?

DF: You need to do this since next-of-kin are the legal custodians of a deceased relative's body. You can explain how your donation will provide a tremendous asset to the health-care profession. Individuals associated with anatomical donation programs will also be glad to discuss the issue with family members.

MFD: How would I donate my body?

DF: You should contact a body-donation program in your state, which is usually associated with a medical school. These programs will have the information and necessary forms for body donation. You can also contact your state's health or human services agency for information.

MFD: Anything else you'd like to mention?

DF: There may be factors or conditions that will make your body unacceptable for donation; these include having an autopsy or death by certain infectious diseases. You should always have an alternate plan in case your body is not accepted for donation.

Why I'm Doing It

Carol Weis, of Philadelphia, Penn., talks about her decision.

I don't remember when I decided on donating my body, but I was never comfortable with the idea of being cremated or buried. Burial seems cold and lonely. Cremation is too hot. (Yes, I know I'm dead and won't feel anything).

I believe very strongly in the philosophy of reduce, reuse, recycle. Why waste a body if it can help others? If I die young enough, I hope parts of my body can help others live a better life. If not, then why not let medical students learn from me? I know it sounds odd, but I like the thought of being able to hang around a little longer.

When my parents were buying cemetery plots they asked me if I wanted one, and I said no and explained why. They didn't argue.

As the John Prine song states, "Please don't bury me down in that cold, cold ground. I'd rather have 'em cut me up and pass me all around." Maybe that's why I decided on this path—I heard this song when I was in my early teens.