THE DAILY CLIPS

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She owned her own trailer, has a bachelor's degree in exercise and sports science from East Carolina University and is two classes shy of a degree in business administration from DeVry University.

No one is more surprised than Summer Mease that she and her two young children will spend Christmas in a homeless shelter.

Mease, 33, has called the Greenville Community Shelters on Manhattan Street home for a month and a half. Originally from Maryland, she had been working as a cashier at Rite-Aid in Greenville when she left her job to journey to Maryland to reunite with her children.

When she returned to Greenville, there was no work for her, she said. She received her last paycheck in August.
“Right now I don't really have an alternative because I have no way to get to Maryland, and I have no family here,” Mease said. “It's more of a lifesaver right now.”

This Christmas, families staying in shelters is a common occurrence as the sour economy squeezes the middle class, creating some unexpected guests. Typically, the shelter serves about 400 to 600 people annually.

That number has gone down to about 450 people in 2010, shelter officials said. Lower numbers indicate less turnover, meaning people are staying longer because they are out of work.
“I think that's been a factor,” Lynne James, executive director of the shelter, said. “There's not been much of a seasonal flux at all,” she said. “That tells me there's other factors.”
Adults and their children are common at the shelter, she said. At the end of the summer there were 15 children in the emergency shelter.

The weather turned cold, and there are fewer now, although they may be put off in part by the congregate facilities, which sometimes means a child of a certain age may be separated from a parent of a different gender.

“We've seen a lot of families,” James said. “We have a lot of families calling, and they just won't come in.”

Mease finally came in after “bouncing from house to house to house to house” with her children, Alyndia, 9, who wants to go to veterinary school, and Elijah, 6, who dreams of becoming a police officer like his uncle.

The job search has been frustrating — many she has spoken with say she is overqualified for the work she has applied for.

“With my experience I should be able to get a job, and it being a decent-paying job,” she said. “I am college-educated; I have management experience from the time I was 18. Still, I'm not working.

“We just came here so we could try to start from scratch,” she said. “I just want to get out of here so me and my kids can have our life back.

“I try to remain positive,” she said. “I have two kids I need to stay positive for.”

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Leading the charge to Hawaii

Now that he's walked the stage for a diploma this week, fullback Vonta Leach aims for another stage — the Pro Bowl

By DALE ROBERTSON
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Brett Coomer Chronicle
Texans fullback Vonta Leach, center, hopes his blocking abilities send him to the Pro Bowl.

The T-shirts might say "Leach to the Beach" — as in to the Pro Bowl in Honolulu — but Vonta Leach flew in the opposite direction to a much less exotic locale Friday.

Although the Texans fullback badly wants to represent the AFC in the NFL's annual all-star game, having served as NFL rushing leader Arian Foster's bruising lead blocker when the Texans use the two-back set, Leach, 29, got another important milestone out of the way first.

He graduated from college.

With coach Gary Kubiak's blessing, Leach missed the final Texans light workout before the Tennessee game in order to fly to Greenville, N.C.,
where he put on a cap and gown and received his degree in child development and family relations from East Carolina University.

He'll meet the team in Nashville this afternoon.

"You only walk across that stage one time, and it really mattered to me," Leach said. "I felt like not a lot of people get their degrees, and that was something I wanted.

"When this football stuff is over, I've got something to hang my hat on." He passed his final class online last summer, seven years after he completed his football eligibility at East Carolina, but the school doesn't hold a formal summer commencement.

He thought participating in the ceremony was important, especially because his mother, children, girlfriend and other family members will be able to attend.

Leach is from Lumberton, N.C.

"I promised my mother and my high school coach I'd do it, and I did," he said. "I hope some of the guys who don't have their degrees will see that I did it and they'll think about doing it, too."

Despite the Texans' loss Monday night to Baltimore, which all but ended their playoff hopes, Leach (6-0, 255 pounds) has been on a nice run, no matter how the Pro Bowl voting turns out. On Thursday, USA Football named him and Texans wide receiver Kevin Walter to its All Fundamentals team for their solid play on the field and also the efforts they make in the community. USA Football is the official youth development partner for the NFL and the NFL Players Association.

"That should help me out a little bit (regarding the Pro Bowl vote) — I hope so," said Leach, who has a number of his teammates working on his behalf, both by tweeting support and lobbying behind the scenes. "Hopefully I'll get the chance to go to the beach."

'He deserves it'
André Johnson and, of course, Foster are huge boosters. Johnson asked the Texans equipment staff to make the official "Leach to the Beach" T-shirts.
"I definitely think he deserves it," said Johnson, a four-time Pro Bowler.

Foster, a contender for a first Pro Bowl trip, said: "I'd rather Vonta go than me. I mean that. He's been a huge part of what I've been able to do this season."

If they both make it to Hawaii, it will be an unprecedented achievement for a pair of undrafted teammates.

Foster said he hopes people will look at his numbers — 1,330 rushing yards, 13 touchdowns on the ground — and think of Leach, who has little in the way of numbers to help state his case.

Although playing about half the offensive snaps — that's Kubiak's estimate — Leach has yet to carry the ball. But he has eight receptions for 91 yards, with a long gain of 21.

Fullback is a far different position than the one the likes of Green Bay's Jim Taylor defined, but that's not to say Leach doesn't do what he's asked to do as well as anyone in the NFL.

With the Pro Bowl voting this weekend, Kubiak also has gone to bat for him, saying: "Vonta's a hell of a player. Any time you're leading the way for the leading rusher in football you get some respect."

"Usually when the guy behind you is doing good, you'll get some of the credit too."

San Diego's Jacob Hester tops the AFC's fullbacks in receptions with 22 and has 24 rushes for 59 yards.

The conference's Pro Bowl pick last year, Baltimore's Le'Ron McClain, has carried 25 times for 66 yards and caught 17 passes for 125 yards.

**Team comes first**

The Ravens' 9-4 record — compared to the Texans' 5-8 — could help put McClain over the top in the voting again, but the man he blocks for, Ray Rice, has only 898 yards and three touchdowns, stats dwarfed by Foster's.
Leach said he takes pride in Foster's astonishing totals, and that gives him enough satisfaction, no matter what the voters decide.

"The most important thing is to try to get (three) wins," Leach said. "We have three games left here.

"Everybody wants to go (to the Pro Bowl), but first you look at what you did as a team, then the individual stuff.

"I just hope Arian goes. If I go, I go. If I don't, I don't."

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Letter: ECU: Look within for cost cutting
Tuesday, December 21, 2010

With all the talk about college students' debt burden, I worry about the debt burden to parents and to North Carolina taxpayers as well when budgeting for universities such as ECU. Though predictably ECU plans to raise tuition another 13 percent this year alone, I have heard no plans whatsoever from ECU to rein in costs internally.

Anyone who works or worked at ECU will tell you there is tremendous fat and waste and no one there is publicly talking about cutting costs internally. If I hear one more ECU employee whine about not getting a raise in three years, I think I will puke. After 14 years of higher education and three degrees, I am making less now in real dollars (not adjusted for anything) than I was 20 years ago. Cost of living increases? Unheard of in my field.

State employees are living in fat city and ECU should look internally at cost cutting before reactively and predictably merely loading increases upon the backs of taxpayers, parents and college students.

MARSHALL SIMPSON
Greenville
Residents of Greenville may notice an aircraft flying over the city at low altitudes today. City of Greenville officials say there is no need to be alarmed about the plane, which will be taking pictures needed for the design of the 10th Street Connector.

Residents of west Greenville and people from the hospital to the downtown area will most likely notice the plane.

The 10th Street Connector is a road planned to connect the hospital with downtown Greenville and provide visitors and residents an easy way to come into the city from the west.

The plane will be flying mostly at an altitude of less than 2,000 feet and taking pictures from Stantonsburg Road towards 10th Street in downtown Greenville.

The 10th Street Connector is scheduled to begin construction in the fall of 2014.
Other Opinion:
What's ahead for UNC system?

After five years as president of the University of North Carolina's 17-campus system, Erskine Bowles steps down at the end of this month. He discussed his work at UNC in a telephone interview Thursday, calling UNC "a great university," expressing disappointment in the revelations about football at his alma mater, UNC-Chapel Hill and predicting that incoming system president Tom Ross would be the system's best chief executive since Bill Friday. Here's an edited transcript of that discussion:

As you wind up your years as the head of the system, what shape is the University of North Carolina in?
I inherited a great university. It's not like I inherited a fixer-upper. Bill Friday and Dick Spangler and Molly Broad all entrusted to me North Carolina's greatest treasure, and I've worked hard to make sure I could preserve this treasure and help enhance it. I think we are passing a great university on to Tom Ross.

What worries you the most about upcoming state budget cuts that are certain to affect the university?
I'm positive we will have a significant cut in our funding, and we have prepared for that. We know they are going to have to make really hard
choices and North Carolina is blessed that we have leaders who can make those tough choices. The university again will have to look at how we can operate even more efficiently after having cut over $600 million in costs from the administrative side. In this next round of cuts we will have to look harder at protecting the academic core, and it is really tough to do that.

*Will that mean closing campuses?*

I don't think we have to look at campus closure for this round of cuts, but if we have to look at it in the future, instead of lessening the quality of each campus we would have to look at lopping some of that off. But not in this next round. We need to consider such things as, do we need five film schools, or should we be looking at closing down one? Do we need five online history courses or should we look at having one or two? Those are the kinds of things we will have to look at. We will have to look at larger class sizes, fewer class offerings, and perhaps cutting as many as 2,000 positions, of which 1,000 could be faculty. But I am confident we can do it and protect our academic core.

There are a couple of things I do worry about. One is our faculty. We haven't given them a raise in three years, and I worry about our faculty getting pirated away. They could not have been more cooperative in understanding our challenges, but how long can that go on?

But probably my biggest concern is for our students. I've always wanted to keep the legislature as our primary source of funding and keep students as our secondary source. The legislature has been very generous, but if the money is not there and if we cannot raise enough from third parties or find enough cuts to make up for the loss, you have to look at students as a source of more revenue.

And if we have to do that, we run the risk of pricing lower income families out of the market for higher education. It's never been more important for our kids to go to college to compete not just here but globally, and we have a moral obligation to keep the university as accessible as possible.

*Has the NCAA investigation of the football program at UNC Chapel Hill affected the university system?*

Athletics are your front porch, whether that's good or bad, and anytime you have a problem in athletics it's not a good thing. Do I think Holden (Chancellor Holden Thorp) has done a first-rate job in managing it once it
became known? I do. But there is no way it can be characterized as anything other than a disappointment for those of us who love the university.

_What would you do next with the UNC system?_
We would continue to work on making real progress on such things as improving teaching for grades K-12. We have broken down artificial barriers so kids can get a seamless education from community college to universities. ... We also wanted to focus on ease of transfer so we could work on affordability and access, and we've gone from a standing start to almost 75,000 students in online courses.

And most important, we have tried to change the culture of the university. Most universities are supply-driven. They do what they durn well please. Every other successful organization is demand-driven, where you have to meet the needs of your customers, and we have got to be more responsive to the needs of this state. So I'd do more of all this.

_What advice do you have for your successor?_
Tom Ross doesn't need my advice. Tom Ross is going to be the best leader of the university since Bill Friday. He has North Carolina written on his heart.

_What's next for you?_
I don't know. I've said no to every single offer made to me. I'm going to go home. For the last 19 years I haven't spent more than two nights a week at my house. I'm going to spend a lot more time in Charlotte with my family, and I'm going to think about what do I really love to do, what do I want to do?

Crandall (Bowles' wife) says I'll be great in retirement on Monday, but she's not sure about Tuesday.

Jack Betts is a Raleigh-based columnist and associate editor for The Charlotte Observer. He can be reached at jbetts@charlotteobserver.com.
Mental Health Needs Seen Growing at Colleges

By TRIP GABRIEL
STONY BROOK, N.Y. — Rushing a student to a psychiatric emergency room is never routine, but when Stony Brook University logged three trips in three days, it did not surprise Jenny Hwang, the director of counseling.

It was deep into the fall semester, a time of mounting stress with finals looming and the holiday break not far off, an anxiety all its own.

On a Thursday afternoon, a freshman who had been scraping bottom academically posted thoughts about suicide on Facebook. If I were gone, he wrote, would anybody notice? An alarmed student told staff members in the dorm, who called Dr. Hwang after hours, who contacted the campus police. Officers escorted the student to the county psychiatric hospital.

There were two more runs over that weekend, including one late Saturday night when a student grew concerned that a friend with a prescription for Xanax, the anti-anxiety drug, had swallowed a fistful.

On Sunday, a supervisor of residence halls, Gina Vanacore, sent a BlackBerry update to Dr. Hwang, who has championed programs to train students and staff members to intervene to prevent suicide.

“If you weren’t so good at getting this bystander stuff out there,” Ms. Vanacore wrote in mock exasperation, “we could sleep on the weekends.”

Stony Brook is typical of American colleges and universities these days, where national surveys show that nearly half of the students who visit counseling centers are coping with serious mental illness, more than double the rate a decade ago. More students take psychiatric medication, and there are more emergencies requiring immediate action.

“It’s so different from how people might stereotype the concept of college counseling, or back in the ’70s students coming in with existential crises: who am I?” said Dr. Hwang, whose staff of 29 includes psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and social workers. “Now they’re bringing in life stories involving extensive trauma, a history of serious mental illness, eating disorders, self-injury, alcohol and other drug use.”

Experts say the trend is partly linked to effective psychotropic drugs (Wellbutrin for depression, Adderall for attention disorder, Abilify for bipolar disorder) that have allowed students to attend college who otherwise might not have functioned in a campus setting.
There is also greater awareness of traumas scarcely recognized a generation ago and a willingness to seek help for those problems, including bulimia, self-cutting and childhood sexual abuse.

The need to help this troubled population has forced campus mental health centers — whose staffs, on average, have not grown in proportion to student enrollment in 15 years — to take extraordinary measures to make do. Some have hospital-style triage units to rank the acuity of students who cross their thresholds. Others have waiting lists for treatment — sometimes weeks long — and limit the number of therapy sessions.

Some centers have time only to “treat students for a crisis, bandaging them up and sending them out,” said Denise Hayes, the president of the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors and the director of counseling at the Claremont Colleges in California.

“It’s very stressful for the counselors,” she said. “It doesn’t feel like why you got into college counseling.”

A recent survey by the American College Counseling Association found that a majority of students seek help for normal post-adolescent trouble like romantic heartbreak and identity crises. But 44 percent in counseling have severe psychological disorders, up from 16 percent in 2000, and 24 percent are on psychiatric medication, up from 17 percent a decade ago.

The most common disorders today: depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, alcohol abuse, attention disorders, self-injury and eating disorders.

Stony Brook, an academically demanding branch of the State University of New York (its admission rate is 40 percent), faces the mental health challenges typical of a big public university. It has 9,500 resident students and 15,000 who commute from off-campus. The highly diverse student body includes many who are the first in their families to attend college and carry intense pressure to succeed, often in engineering or the sciences. A Black Women and Trauma therapy group last semester included participants from Africa, suffering post-traumatic stress disorder from violence in their youth.

Stony Brook has seen a sharp increase in demand for counseling — 1,311 students began treatment during the past academic year, a rise of 21 percent from a year earlier. At the same time, budget pressures from New York State have forced a 15 percent cut in mental health services over three years.

Dr. Hwang, a clinical psychologist who became director in July 2009, has dealt with the squeeze by limiting counseling sessions to 10 per student and referring some, especially those needing long-term treatment for eating disorders or schizophrenia, to off-campus providers.
But she has resisted the pressure to offer only referrals. By managing counselors’ workloads, the center can accept as many as 60 new clients a week in peak demand between October and the winter break.

“By this point in the semester to not lose hope or get jaded about the work, it can be a challenge,” Dr. Hwang said. “By the end of the day, I go home so adrenalized that even though I’m exhausted it will take me hours to fall asleep.”

For relief, she plays with her 2-year-old daughter, and she has taken up the guitar again.

**Shifting to Triage**
Near the student union in the heart of campus, the Student Health Center building dates from the days when a serious undergraduate health problem was mononucleosis. But the hiring of Judy Esposito, a social worker with experience counseling Sept. 11 widows, to start a triage unit three years ago was a sign of the new reality in student mental health.

At 9 a.m. on the Tuesday after the campus’s very busy weekend, Ms. Esposito had just passed the Purell dispenser by the entrance when she noticed two colleagues hurrying toward her office. Before she had taken off her coat, they were updating her about a junior who had come in the previous week after cutting herself and expressing suicidal thoughts.

Ms. Esposito’s triage team fields 15 to 20 requests for help a day. After brief interviews, most students are scheduled for a longer appointment with a psychologist, which leads to individual treatment. The one in six who do not become patients are referred to other university departments like academic advising, or to off-campus therapists if long-term help is needed. There are no charges for on-campus counseling.

This day the walk-ins included a young man complaining of feeling friendless and depressed. Another student said he was struggling academically, feared that his parents would find out and was drinking and feeling hopeless.

Professionals in a mental health center are mindful of their own well-being. For this reason the staff had planned a potluck holiday lunch. While a turkey roasted in the kitchen that serves as the break room, Ms. Esposito helped warm up candied yams, stuffing and the store-bought quiche that was her own contribution.

Just then Regina Frontino, the triage assistant who greets walk-ins at the front desk, swept into the kitchen to say a student had been led in by a friend who feared that she was suicidal.

Ms. Esposito rushed to the lobby. From a brief conversation, she knew that the distraught student would have to go to the hospital. The counseling center does not have the ability to admit suicidal or psychotic students overnight for observation or to administer powerful drugs to calm them. It arranges for them to be taken to the Stony Brook
University Medical Center, on the far side of the 1,000-acre campus. The hospital has a 24-hour psychiatric emergency room that serves all of Suffolk County.

“They’re not going to fix what’s going on,” Ms. Esposito said, “but in that moment we can ensure she’s safe.” She called Tracy Thomas, an on-call counselor, to calm the student, who was crying intermittently, while she phoned the emergency room and informed Dr. Hwang, who called the campus police to transport the young woman.

When Ms. Esposito heard the crackle of police radios in the hallway, she went to tell the student for the first time that she would have to go to the hospital.

“This is not something students love to do,” Ms. Esposito recounted. The young woman told her she did not want to go. Ms. Esposito replied that the staff was worried for her safety, and she repeated the conversation she had had earlier with the young woman:

Are you having thoughts about wanting to die?

Yes.

Are you afraid you are actually going to kill yourself?

Yes.

She invited a police officer into the counseling room, and the student teared up again at the sight of him. Ms. Esposito assured her that she was not in trouble. Meanwhile, an ambulance crew arrived with a rolling stretcher, but the young woman walked out on her own with the officers.

Because Ms. Thomas, a predoctoral intern in psychology, now needed to regain her own equilibrium before seeing other clients, Ms. Esposito debriefed her about what had just happened.

Finally she returned to her office, having missed the holiday lunch, and found that her team had prepared a plate for her.

“It’s kind of like firemen,” she said. “When the fire’s on, we are just at it. But once the fire’s out, we can go back to the house and eat together and laugh.”

Reaching Out

Even though the appointment books of Stony Brook counselors are filled, all national evidence suggests that vastly more students need mental health services.

Forty-six percent of college students said they felt “things were hopeless” at least once in the previous 12 months, and nearly a third had been so depressed that it was difficult to function, according to a 2009 survey by the American College Health Association.
Then there is this: Of 133 student suicides reported in the American College Counseling Association’s survey of 320 institutions last year, fewer than 20 had sought help on campus.

Alexandria Imperato, 23, remembers that as a Stony Brook freshman all her high school friends were talking about how great a time they were having in college, while she felt miserable. She faced family issues and the pressure of adjusting to college. “You go home to Thanksgiving dinner, and the family asks your brother how is his gerbil, and they ask you, ‘What are doing with the rest of your life?’ ” Ms. Imperato said.

She learned she had clinical depression. She eventually conquered it with psychotherapy, Cymbalta and lithium. She went on to form a Stony Brook chapter of Active Minds, a national campus-based suicide-prevention group.

“I knew how much better it made me feel to find others,” said Ms. Imperato, who plans to be a nurse.

On recent day, she was one of two dozen volunteers in black T-shirts reading “Chill” who stopped passers-by in the Student Activities Center during lunch hour.

“Would you like to take a depression screening?” they asked, offering a clipboard with a one-page form to all who unplugged their ear buds. Students checked boxes if they had difficulty sleeping, felt hopeless or “had feelings of worthlessness.” They were offered a chance to speak privately with a psychologist in a nearby office. Sixteen said yes.

The depression screenings are part of a program to enlist students to monitor the mental health of peers, which is run by the four-year-old Center for Outreach and Prevention, a division of mental health services that Dr. Hwang oversaw before her promotion to director of all counseling services.

She is committed to outreach in its many forms, including educating dormitory staff members to recognize students in distress and encouraging professors to report disruptive behavior in class.

In previous years, more than 1,000 depression screenings were given to students, with 22 percent indicating signs of major depression. Dr. Hwang credits that and other outreach efforts to the swell of new cases for counseling. “For a lot of people it’s terrifying” to come to the counseling center, she said. “If there’s anything we can do to make it easier to walk in, I feel like we owe it to them.”

Stony Brook has not had a student suicide since spring 2009, unusual for a campus its size. But Dr. Hwang is haunted by the impact on the campus of several off-campus student deaths in accidents and a homicide in the past year. “With every vigil, with every conversation with someone in pain, there’s this overwhelming sense of we need to learn something,” she said. “I think about these parents who’ve invested so much into getting their kids alive to 18.”
One student who said yes to an impromptu interview with a counselor after filling out a depression screening was a psychology major, a senior from upstate New York. As it happened, Dr. Hwang had wandered over from the counseling center to check on the screenings, and the young woman spent a long time conferring with her, never removing her checked coat or backpack.

“I don’t have motivation for things anymore,” the student said afterward. “This place just depresses me the whole time.”

She had been unaware that students could walk in unannounced to the counseling center. “I thought you had to make an appointment,” she said. “Yes,” she said, “I’ll do that.”