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ECU sells its 7,000 tickets for Liberty Bowl

By Brock Letchworth
The Daily Reflector

Monday, December 28, 2009

Some of the East Carolina University football faithful are traveling this week in bunches to Memphis, Tenn., as a way to save money and enjoy the company of other Pirate fans attending the AutoZone Liberty Bowl.

ECU Assistant Director of Athletics Marketing and Ticket Operations Scott Wetherbee said the university has sold all of its 7,000 allotted tickets for ECU's matchup with Southeastern Conference foe Arkansas.

Kickoff for the game is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. Saturday and, for the second time in the past three years, the bowl is a sellout with more than 62,000 fans expected to attend.

But before those fans can pack the stadium, they have to get there, and some ECU officials and alumni say they are offering a more cost efficient and exciting way to do so.

ECU Assistant Director of Student Activities and Organizations Alex Davis said Monday that the university has arranged for three charter buses that will carry about 140 students to the game.

The demand for a ride was greater than last year when two buses were chartered, Davis said, so officials booked another bus for the 850-mile trip. He said all full-time students were eligible. The trip's cost was subsidized through student fees.

"It is a good opportunity for our students," Davis said. "They are going for a good time, but they also are going for the game. This was an affordable way for them to do it."

The student buses will leave Wednesday night and arrive Thursday afternoon. They will return immediately after the game, Davis said.

A pair of buses also have been chartered for other Pirate fans, including one that will make pick-ups throughout the state on its way to Memphis.

Michael "Whitey" Martin, a 1977 ECU graduate, has booked a bus that will board fans in Raleigh, Greensboro and Charlotte. The bus will leave Thursday, and Martin says passengers will be able to participate in a New Year's celebration during the overnight trip. It will leave Memphis immediately after the game.

The $185 cost covers the trip there and two nights in the hotel, Martin said. The bus will take the southern route to Memphis, and 10 seats have been reserved for coolers to be brought on board.

"For the price, you can't beat it," Martin said. "We did this party bus last year and, even though we lost, everyone had so much fun. It is just like a tailgate, and we have similar rules. Everyone must be respectful, and whatever happens on the bus stays on the bus."

Local radio personality Jeff Diamond will be making the trip and blogging along the way, Martin said. Trivia games also will be played, and prizes will be awarded.

Martin says there are eight seats remaining on the bus, and anyone interested in making the trip should contact him at whiteymartin@gmail.com.

Another bus has been arranged by Nancy Page of the Triad Counties Pirate Club. It will leave Greensboro Wednesday morning and return Jan. 3. The bus will seat 49, and the deadline for registration has passed.
Other Pirate fans are opting to fly although it is more costly. A check of the rates for flights from Greenville and Raleigh earlier this month revealed an average of about $400 per person while flights booked this week will cost nearly $800 per passenger.

Contact Brock Letchworth at bletchworth@reflector.com or (252) 329-9574.
Pinkney makes familiar trip back to Memphis

By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, December 29, 2009

Patrick Pinkney certainly doesn't have to act like he's been here before because he has.

East Carolina's starting quarterback, in fact, has made more trips to Memphis than anywhere else during his career at East Carolina.

He touched down in the city again this week for his fifth game inside Liberty Bowl Memorial Stadium since the sixth-year senior joined the Pirates back in 2004. He'll be hoping for a handful more touchdowns when he leads 9-4 ECU against 7-5 Arkansas in the 51st Liberty Bowl on Saturday.

Pinkney has been witness to the entire turnaround of the ECU football team during the five-year Skip Holtz coaching era. Now two-time defending Conference USA champions, the quarterback will leave an ECU team that has grown to expect trips to Memphis at the end of every season, and one which has grown accustomed to playing Bowl Championship Series opponents on a regular basis.

"The difference is that the expectations are higher now," said Pinkney, the only player left from the John Thompson coaching era. "When I first got here, we were down below sea level, so we just needed the right leadership and expectation to get higher and play those types of teams, BCS teams. You've got to get your credibility up and get that exposure."

Holtz replaced Thompson for the 2005 season, being hired by then first-year athletic director Terry Holland. Not long after, Holland took the bold step of manufacturing a collection of football schedules littered with BCS opponents and regional powerhouses.

With Holtz on the sideline and players like Pinkney on the field, the risk has paid large dividends.

"I think this program did a great job when we got in those situations and played those teams," Pinkney said. "We had big wins over West Virginia, Virginia Tech, (North) Carolina, and when you have wins like that on your resume, building a program is that much easier because you get recruits and you've got a lot of support. That's been a big help to this program."

One of the running themes of the Pirates' December layoff has been the notion that there is still much left to accomplish for Pinkney and 27 other ECU seniors, even though they're on the cusp of their last game.

A win would mark the first 10-win season at ECU for Holtz, Holland and Pinkney, and would be the first win for C-USA in the Liberty Bowl since it's featured a Southeastern Conference opponent.

"Not a lot of teams here have had a 10-win season, and we want to be a part of that history and we've got a good opportunity," Pinkney said. "We just have to prepare our minds for a tough game. We want to go out as champions. It's our last game, so we've got to leave it all out there on the field and just believe that we can win."

The Pirates have steadily won more and more each season under Holtz, from five wins in 2005 to seven in 2006, eight in 2007 and nine in 2008.

Pinkney's numbers have grown, too. He threw for 1,358 yards as a co-starter in 2007, then for 2,675 as the lone starter last season. This year, he has rebounded from a slow start to amass 2,738 yards as he approaches his final game.
Lindsay emerges as ECU workhorse

The challenge didn't bother Dominique Lindsay.

Nobody knew for sure what he would be able to do for East Carolina this season after a preseason knee injury sidelined him for all of 2008.

He had never rushed for more than 210 yards in a season, and Kentucky transfer Brandon Jackson had taken the tailback position during spring practice. A junior college transfer, Giavanni Ruffin, also was vying for playing time.

Lindsay didn't stress out about any of it.

"It made me work that much harder, knowing there was someone there beside you," Lindsay said.

It all worked out OK for Lindsay and the Pirates. A senior, Lindsay missed the North Carolina and Central Florida games because of a shoulder injury but still leads the Pirates in rushing.

As East Carolina (9-4) prepares to meet Arkansas (7-5) in the Liberty Bowl at 5:30 p.m. Saturday, Lindsay has 1,029 rushing yards on 206 carries.

Bill Geiler, who coached Lindsay at Charlotte Independence, isn't surprised by the way he shrugged off the competition and persevered through the injuries. At Independence, Lindsay was willing to share the limelight with quarterback Joe Cox and wide receivers Mohamed Massaquoi and Hakeem Nicks, who went on to prominent college careers themselves.

"He was a team guy that played through some injuries," Geiler said. "I knew when he got hurt that he was going to come back, because that's just the way he was. He was going to come back stronger and faster, bound and determined to get it done."

When Lindsay was in middle school, Geiler saw him dominating games with his great athletic ability but poor technique as he ran almost upright with the ball.

That needed to be fixed when he got to high school.

The Independence staff taught him to get low and run behind his pads so he could deliver the blow instead of absorbing it. That teaching still is evident in Lindsay's running style between the tackles.

He powers straight ahead, lowers his shoulder into the linebackers and forces the safeties to creep toward the line of scrimmage to stop the run.

That opens up opportunities for East Carolina and speedy wide receiver Dwayne Harris in the play-action passing game.

"The coaches always tell us that the running game is important," Lindsay said. "We've got to make them
play the run."

Lindsay said his success is partly the result of work he did during the 2008 season.

Even though sitting out the Pirates' Conference USA championship season was agonizing, he learned a lot about the game by watching from the sideline.

He said studying film and tendencies has been a key to his success this season, and he's eager to show what he can do one more time.

Conference USA teams are 0-3 the past three years against SEC opponents in the Liberty Bowl, and Lindsay hopes to change that in East Carolina's never-ending quest to prove itself against opponents from BCS conferences.

"It means everything," Lindsay said. "We've got a chance to beat an SEC team in the Liberty Bowl."

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Guard infantry NCO acts as mentor

Dec 28, 2009
By Spc. Kelly LeCompte


BAGHDAD, Iraq -- Sgt. Olin Wilkinson, of Greenville, N.C., is probably not the kind of person one might think of as a typical high school English teacher.

An infantryman currently serving his fourth deployment, Wilkinson's service includes several years as a Marine and nearly seven years in the North Carolina's National Guard.

Wilkinson earned a Master of Arts degree in teaching from East Carolina University, and barely completed his first semester on faculty at Roanoke High School when called to deploy to Iraq with the 252nd Combined Arms Battalion, 30th Heavy Brigade Combat Team.

"I had been out for a while and kinda missed it," Wilkinson said of joining the National Guard after his term in the Marine Corps. "And I live in North Carolina so I thought I should do something that's going to serve the state, the local community."

Wilkinson was a student at East Carolina University when he enlisted in the National Guard, and the benefits of the Guard enabled him to earn a bachelor's degree in English and History and then pursue graduate school.

"I was still an undergraduate when I joined the National Guard, Wilkinson said. "Getting a master's degree, for me, was more of a goal; it was something I just wanted to do." Wilkinson said the National Guard helped him obtain that goal.

"If it wasn't for the National Guard, I probably would not have gotten my master's degree, or it would have been a long process, little by little. The financial benefits that they gave me allowed me to do it one fall swoop."

Wilkinson said serving his community as a servicemember and a teacher have both been rewarding, and his experiences in the military help him in teaching in countless ways.

"Especially in the infantry, you never do anything without a plan, without a rehearsal. The hardest part is getting ready. [It's] the same with teaching... if you go in there and try to wing it, they're going to eat you alive," Wilkinson said. "And also, having been a (noncommissioned officer), and standing up in front of people, talking to people; you feel comfortable doing that. It's really intimidating when you walk into a classroom. Also, you have to learn to work with people."

With his education, Wilkinson could commission as an officer. He prefers the hands on environment being an NCO offers saying that it is the same thing he likes about teaching.
"I like being a squad leader, I like being a team leader, I like being an NCO," Wilkinson said. "It's good duty. You get a lot more hands on... and I think that's why I like teaching, it is really hands on...you get to know their emotions, what they're thinking, what they're feeling."

Wilkinson, who seems compelled to serve his country and community, said the rewards of being in the military are immeasurable, and he wishes others could share in the experience.

"Less than one percent of the U.S. population is in the military, and I think that's a terrible thing, because this is worth doing," Wilkinson said.

As a Soldier, Wilkinson says that he does not worry about politics just the mission.

"We don't get to choose what wars we fight or what duties we pull. I've guarded refugees in Albania, stopped genocide in Kosovo, I'm here in Iraq now. I didn't get to choose any of that. But I know there are people whose lives are better, because I was on a street with a gun and I didn't back down."

'Whatever else happens the rest of my life, I know I changed the world, and 99 percent of our population is never going to experience that."
As colleges add green majors and minors, classes fill up

By Julie Schmit, USA TODAY

Colleges are rapidly adding new majors and minors in green studies, and students are filling them fast.

Nationwide, more than 100 majors, minors or certificates were created this year in energy and sustainability-focused programs at colleges big and small, says the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. That's up from just three programs added in 2005.

Two factors are driving the surge: Students want the courses, and employers want the trained students, says Paul Rowland, the association's executive director.

"There's a great perception that there's a sweet spot with energy to do good and do well, and it appears to be the place of job growth," says Rob Melnick, executive dean of the Global Institute of Sustainability at Arizona State University.

The institute started an undergraduate program in sustainability studies — with a focus on solar — a year and a half ago. It now has about 600 students who've declared sustainability a major. "The growth rate is unprecedented," even though the program has the toughest admission standards of any school at the university, Melnick says.

Other schools are also seeing big demand, including:

• Illinois State University in Normal, Ill. The school of 21,000 students has 65 majors in renewable energy, a program started in 2008 with help from a $1 million Department of Energy grant. The program has "more students wanting in than we can handle," says Richard Boser, chair of the Department of Technology. Nearby employers, including those in wind energy, hope to hire future graduates, Boser says.

• Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In September it launched a minor in energy studies. A student survey said 43% of freshmen and sophomores were very or extremely interested in it. "That's a very large number," says Vladimir Bulovic, associate professor of communication and technology. MIT's student energy club has 1,700 members, vs. several hundred a few years ago, Bulovic says.

CONT...
University of California-Berkeley. The school has seen student interest in its introductory energy class explode. Ten years ago, it attracted 40 or so students. Now, the class runs 270, says Daniel Kammen, director of the school's Renewable and Appropriate Energy Laboratory.

The Obama administration has estimated that jobs in energy and environmental-related occupations will grow 52% from 2000 through 2016, vs. 14% for other occupations.

That's partly why budget-strapped schools are adding energy and sustainability programs even while cutting other majors, Rowland says.

Find this article at:
As college costs rise, loans become harder to get

By David Cho
Washington Post Staff Writer
Monday, December 28, 2009; A01

When Daniel Ottalini entered the University of Maryland in 2004, his family had an array of choices to cover the cost -- cheap student loans, a second mortgage at low rates, credit cards with high limits and their own soaring investments.

By the time his younger brother, Russell, started at the University of Pittsburgh this fall, the financial crisis had left the family with fewer options. Russell has had to juggle several jobs in school, and the money he could borrow came with a much higher interest rate that could climb even further over time.

The upheaval in financial markets did not just eliminate generous lending for home buyers; it also ended an era of easy credit for students and their families facing the soaring cost of a college degree.

To pay for higher education, most Americans had come to rely on a range of financial products born of the Wall Street boom. Nearly all of these shrunk or disappeared in the storm that engulfed the stock and debt markets.

Lenders have raised rates and tightened standards, dramatically limiting the availability of home-equity loans and private student loans. College savings accounts, known as 529 plans, had acute losses in the downturn. And a new law, set to take effect Feb. 22, will bar students younger than 21 from getting credit cards on their own.

Loans offered with federal backing were the lone form of student debt to expand, but only because the government stepped in last year to prevent this business from collapsing under the pressure of the credit crunch. Still, the most common type of federally backed loan has a limit of $5,500 a year, not enough to pay for most four-year programs.

Even as the financing options have narrowed for families, college expenses are rising faster than ever as schools suffer from endowment losses and cuts in state funding because of the financial crisis and the recession that followed.

Last month, California's public universities announced that tuition fees would rise by 32 percent, sparking student demonstrations across the state. University of Virginia officials said a 15 percent cut in state funding for higher education will also force them to significantly raise tuition.

Some educators are concerned that the new price tags will discourage poor students from applying and will price out middle-class families that make too much to obtain financial aid, but not enough to easily afford college.
"It's not only the credit model that has changed; the basic financial model of higher education has also become challenged," said Anthony Marx, president of Amherst College in Massachusetts. "We were already concerned that middle-class students were getting squeezed by racking up debt that could constrain their career choices after they graduate. All of that comes under more strain in these new circumstances."

Other educators worry that students will be forced to compromise on their education.

Russell Ottalini said he choose the University of Pittsburgh because he judged that it would be best for his Japanese-language studies. He relied on his parents to borrow money for his education. But he acknowledged that economic times are tough and said he is willing to transfer to a cheaper school if one parent gets laid off, even if it means attending a lesser program.

"My dad told me I should go to college where I wanted to go," said Russell, 19, whose family lives in Silver Spring. "But not only do my parents have to co-sign for most of my loans, they have to watch one of their sons take on immense amount of debt."

* * *

While public universities had little to do with causing the financial crisis, they are suffering its consequences.

To help close a record $60 billion gap in the state budget triggered by the real estate downturn, for instance, California announced $800 million in cuts to the University of California system of 10 schools. In the past two years, a fifth of the system's state funding has vanished. An additional $1.3 billion in reductions is expected next year.

In response, the system's board of regents announced in November the 32 percent increase in tuition, taking effect next year.

After the decision was made, armed police in riot gear had to protect officials from protesters. Students took over classroom buildings at Berkeley, Los Angeles and Santa Cruz, barricading themselves inside. Dozens of students have been arrested. Then, earlier this month, about 70 students and activists surrounded the home of Berkeley's chancellor while he and his family were sleeping, smashing light fixtures and windows and throwing torches at the house.

In Virginia, meanwhile, state funding for four-year colleges has decreased 15 percent. That has meant $19 million less this year at the University of Virginia, which has a $140 million budget. Larger reductions are expected by university officials for the 2010-11 school year.

Exacerbating the deficit are losses in the school's endowment, which declined from $5.1 billion on June 30, 2008, to $3.9 billion six months later as its investments in the market tumbled. The endowment has since recovered by more than $300 million, but officials are lowering their projections of what the fund will return over the next few years.

Administrators say the University of Virginia remains committed to offering financial aid to anyone who needs it, and so far they have avoided layoffs by eliminating vacant positions. But school officials said they have been forced to raise the price of admission significantly. No figure has been set yet for the coming school year.
Tuition costs at U-Va. had already been growing rapidly. A decade ago, the price, excluding room and board, was just over $4,000 for in-state students and nearly $17,000 for out-of-state students per year. Now it's nearly $10,000 and $32,000, respectively.

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Even before the financial crisis intensified the upward pressure on college costs, the price of a degree was soaring. Since 1980, the average cost of tuition and room and board has grown by a staggering 121 percent while median household income has risen a mere 18 percent, according to federal data. But the credit boom earlier this decade provided some relief for families.

Wall Street financiers packaged student loans into securities and sold them off to investors, who could trade them just like stocks. That, in turn, provided more money for lending, helping to make student loans cheaper and more available. Even people with poor credit histories could easily get a loan.

But during the last academic year, private student loan volume fell by half as financial firms became wary of lending to students, who generally do not have long credit histories. Officials from Sallie Mae, the industry leader in student lending, said they expect another significant decline this year.

Nor have families been able to keep borrowing against the value of their homes, which seemed for years to appreciate with no end in sight. Second mortgages have been shrinking along with real estate values. Money made available by banks to homeowners through home-equity lines of credit has fallen by 25 percent, to $538 billion, since the end of 2007, according to federal data.

About a decade ago, financial planners began to tout the benefits of 529 plans, which invest families' savings in the stock and bond markets with the aim of keeping pace with the growth in college expenses. Even before the crisis, these plans couldn't keep up. Then, in 2008, the average 529 plan lost 20 percent of its value.

And no longer can students count on the credit cards once available so freely, often by salespeople who lined campus walkways, offering free T-shirts and coffee mugs with their plastic. Many students used the cards to pay for books, meals and more.

Lawmakers passed a bill in May that dramatically curtails the issuance of credit cards to anyone younger than 21. Most consumer groups support the measure, saying credit card lenders have been taking advantage of naive youths, charging them hidden fees and exorbitant rates. Currently, about 84 percent of college students have credit cards, carrying balances of more than $3,000 on average, according to a study by Sallie Mae.

But some students said the law will cut off a critical source of credit for everyday expenses.

After Shauna Stuart, a senior at the University of Maryland, was denied student housing, she had to drive to campus and counted on her credit card to pay for gas and other costs of maintaining her car. She also used the card to buy food and cover unexpected expenses. One semester, when money was especially tight, Stuart bought her books with the card.

"It would be really difficult to not have it," she said.

Financial planners say parents will now have to carry more of the financial weight for their children. Students on their own can obtain federally backed Stafford loans, but they have limits of about $5,500 a
As college costs rise, loans become harder to get

year. The other major type of federally backed student loan, known as Parent PLUS, has no limit. But it requires Mom and Dad to co-sign, making them ultimately responsible for repayment, and the interest rates for these loans have nearly doubled in the past five years.

"If you are the average family and you've got two car payments and a mortgage, sadly, you are probably living paycheck to paycheck these days," said Gary Carpenter, executive director of the National College Advocacy Group. "And you've got a big problem -- how are you going to afford a state institution at $20,000 a year, not to mention a private one for than $40,000?"

Some educators worry that college programs will sacrifice quality to contain costs or become limited to those who can afford it.

"The big macro question is: Will we have to sacrifice the quality of education, or the access, based on talent rather than the ability to pay?" said Marx, the Amherst president. "Either of those make America less competitive for the next generation."

This report is the sixth in an occasional series.

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University Branches in Dubai Are Struggling

By TAMAR LEWIN

The collapse of Dubai’s overheated economy has left the outposts of Michigan State University and the Rochester Institute of Technology in the United Arab Emirates struggling to attract enough qualified students to survive.

In the last five years, many American universities have rushed to open branches in the Persian Gulf, attracted by the combination of oil wealth and the area’s strong desire for help in creating a higher-education infrastructure. Education City in Qatar has brought in Carnegie Mellon, Cornell, Georgetown, Northwestern, Texas A&M and Virginia Commonwealth.

Abu Dhabi, one of the seven emirates that make up the U.A.E. and the one that controls most of its oil, is still flourishing. And it is still generous in its support for the most ambitious American educational effort in the area, New York University’s liberal-arts college, which is scheduled to open there next fall with a highly selective class of 100 young students from around the world.

In Dubai, however, the timing for Michigan State and the Rochester Institute of Technology could hardly have been worse. Both started classes in August 2008, just before Dubai’s economy began to crumble. By this month, Dubai’s debt problems were so serious that Dubai World, a government-owned investment company, avoided a bond default only with a $10 billion bailout from Abu Dhabi.

Because most Dubai residents are expatriates, thousands of them left when their jobs disappeared, and the prospective college-student pool in the area has shrunk substantially. “Nobody could have anticipated the global meltdown, which has certainly had a negative effect on our student marketing,” said Brendan Mullan, executive director of Michigan State Dubai.

Michigan State, with only 85 undergraduates, is seeking to raise that figure with a scholarship offering half-price tuition to the first 100 qualified transfer applicants for the semester that starts next month.

“We’ve had close to 200 transfer applications, some from other universities in the U.A.E., but others from India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Oman,” Dr. Mullan said. “We are not compromising on quality, even if that means it takes us longer to gain traction here. We actually turned down 30 percent of our applicants last fall.”

Dr. Mullan said that while the break-even point for the campus was now expected to be five years, up from the original goal of three years, Michigan State was determined to remain in the Gulf.

“We still believe this is viable and valuable,” he said. “We’re not just going to be a teaching storefront here; we’re going to have significant research capacity, and our commitment to Dubai is unyielding.”
Rochester, which began only with graduate programs, accepted almost 100 students for this academic year. But Mustafa Abushagur, president of the Dubai campus, said it ended up with only about 50, spread among electrical engineering, computer networking, finance, and service and leadership studies. Rochester plans to start an undergraduate program next year, Dr. Abushagur said.

“Our plan for next year is 100 to 120 students,” he said, “which we think we can get, because we’ve studied the market very closely and we believe that as an institution, we can distinguish ourselves in certain programs that are in demand here.”

George Mason, one of the first American universities to open a branch in the United Arab Emirates, closed its Ras al Khaymah temporary campus in May, having never graduated a single student.

While the higher-education projects in Dubai face serious challenges, New York University’s plans in Abu Dhabi are moving ahead smoothly, with Abu Dhabi even going so far as to fly in top high school seniors from around the world for two days of meetings with those at the university.

“We’ve had a worldwide recruiting effort, identifying top candidates at high schools around the world,” said Linda Mills, the N.Y.U. senior vice provost overseeing the Abu Dhabi admissions process.

The cost of attending for a year, with tuition and travel and living expenses, is about $63,000, but Ms. Mills said students would get enough financial aid that no student would have to graduate with debt.

“We looked at the leading universities around the world,” Ms. Mills said, “and what we’re offering is on a par with Swarthmore, which I think offers the most generous financial aid.”

In fact, the head of the new Abu Dhabi campus is Alfred H. Bloom, the former president of Swarthmore, which has need-blind admissions, meets full financial need and, as of last year, replaced the loans in financial-aid packages with larger scholarships.

The admissions timetable has been somewhat different for the Abu Dhabi campus than the Greenwich Village one, with early-decision candidates having until Jan. 15 to accept a spot in the Gulf, and not expected to commit to Abu Dhabi without a visit.

Already, N.Y.U. has had more than 500 early-decision applicants for next year’s inaugural class, and has admitted students from Australia, Brazil, Britain, China, Ethiopia, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Morocco, Russia and Taiwan. About 100 have already been flown to Abu Dhabi for a visit.

“Everyone introduced themselves, in English and whatever language they wanted,” Ms. Mills said. “From French to Russian to Arabic to Hungarian, they’d say things like ‘I traveled 30 hours to get here,’ or ‘I’ve never been on a plane before.’ It was kind of a goose-bump moment.”