Star of documentary about dwarfism speaks to 1,100 at ECU

By Brock Letchworth
The Daily Reflector

Far away from the castle, tree house and pumpkin catapult that occupy his farm and helped his family gain television fame, Matt Roloff's message remains the same.

He is trying to peel away society's misperception of little people.

The star of TLC's documentary series "Little People, Big World," discussed the obstacles he has faced Tuesday night at East Carolina University's Wright Auditorium.

Rollof, 46, who was born with diastrophic dysplasia, a genetic disorder causing short stature and short arms and legs, spoke of his entrepreneurship at an early age, and his work with the Little People of America, a national organization that advocates for the rights of little people.

He also offered the crowd of about 1,100 behind-the-scenes stories from the 34-acre Oregon farm he shares with his wife and four kids.

Amy, Roloff's wife, also has a form of dwarfism, as does their son Zach. Zach's siblings, including his twin brother, are average height.

Rollof says he wanted to do the show because he hoped it would provide the exposure families like his need to break down some of society's barriers.

"We just wanted to show a family that is not always on its best behavior, but a family that is living their life and happy to be small," Roloff said. "People need to realize we are very capable."

The show, which debuted in 2006, will continue its third season in March. Roloff says there are plans to begin filming a fourth season in May. That will likely end its run, he says, but hopefully not the impact it has on the perception of dwarfism.

"Everyone has challenges they face in life," said Roloff, a former president of the Little People of America. "It's a matter of how you overcome them with your attitude. I think the show does a good job of showing how our family does that, and it helps inspire others."

Several who attended Tuesday's event said the TLC show has opened their eyes to some of the struggles little people face in a world which is not always accommodating.

John Gurkins, 28, was among them. Gurkins, of Ayden, said he has a couple of friends who are little people, and he appreciates Roloff's advocacy for them.

"It really gets you thinking a lot different," Gurkins said. "Little people can do the same things as everyone else. They just do it a little differently."

"Little People, Big World"

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ROLOFF
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isn't the first television gig for Roloff.

The former computer programmer once portrayed a character in a 1985 Star Wars television movie, "Ewoks: The Battle for Endor," and he also had a role in the 1981 film "Under the Rainbow."

He has dabbled in writing as well, releasing "Against Tall Odds: Being a David in a Goliath World" in 1999. The book chronicles Roloff's business and professional success despite medical and social adversity.

Roloff also recently started his own business, Direct Access Solutions, which develops products to help little people adapt to their environment.

But none of that has affected his life as much as the current show.

"I've been scratching my head wondering what it is about the show that appeals to people, and the best I can come up with is we're a good family at the core, and I think people see that," Roloff said. "But at the same time, we're making mistakes. There is a lot of self-learning that goes on. People see that while we may be a little eccentric, we're not that much different than them and their families."

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Chamber luncheon addresses weather

By Mike Grizzard
The Daily Reflector

Although Pitt County has weathered the area's worst drought on record without mandatory restrictions, experts are still going to the well to meet future challenges.

Richard Spruill, associate professor in Department of Geosciences at East Carolina University, and Barrett Lasater, plants manager at Greenville Utilities, explained Greenville's advantages in maintaining an adequate water supply while laying out contingency plans in drought conditions during a Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce luncheon Tuesday.

Lasater said being prepared is the key.

"One thing that Floyd taught us was don't say it can't happen," Lasater said, referring to the 1999 hurricane that brought historic flooding to eastern North Carolina.

In a span of less than a year, the state has gone from only a few western counties facing a drought to 71 classified as "exceptional drought," including the western half of Pitt County. The dry conditions

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are the worst since 2002, when a couple of tropical systems came through.

"This drought has been going on now for a year," Lasater said. "It's spread very fast, and it's hung around longer than any drought we've ever had before.

"... The message for business and industry is we're fortunate because of our location here in Greenville to have an adequate water supply," he said.

And that can be significant when companies are shopping around for a place to locate.

"We get inquiries all the time ... and one of the things they always ask us is 'What's your water capacity, and what's your storage capacity?'" Lasater said. "We're fortunate that we have excess capacity that is available. That's obviously good for business and for industry because water and sewer capacity is one of the first things they ask about.

Greenville Utilities takes its water from the Tar River, which gives it an edge over water suppliers in drought-stricken areas like the Triangle and Piedmont that depend on reservoirs. Raleigh draws from the Falls Lake reservoir, which has about 200 square miles of drainage; the Tar-Pamlico River basin has about 5,400 square miles of drainage.

Another advantage of the Tar is the effect of tides.

"Greenville is in a unique position in North Carolina," said Spruill, who provided a quick geological lesson on tides and their influence of water flow in eastern North Carolina.

"When there's a whole lot of flow, a lot of water coming down the river ... we don't see any tidal cycling at all in the Tar River," Spruill said.

"... When the Tar River level gets pretty low, like during a drought, all of a sudden the Tar River will start the tide cycle."

GUC keeps a close eye on the intrusion of saltwater of the Pamlico River, which merges with the Tar in Washington. Lasater said the saltwater interface came within 15.6 miles of the intake point in Greenville during the 2002 drought; it was within 10 miles last December before some much-needed rain.

"In the worst drought that we've had, we maintain somewhere around 800 million gallons of fresh water in the Tar River," Lasater said. "... It doesn't seem that the saltwater-freshwater interface was capable even in the worst drought on record to move up too close to the intake for the City of Greenville.

"... If the saltwater wedge ever made it to our treatment plant, we can't remove salt from water with our current treatment process. That would take a desalination technology."

Businesses like DSM and Fuji dependent on water in their manufacturing processes would be hit, Lasater said.

"That saltwater would really affect them," he said. "We don't know if it could ever make it to our water treatment plant, and that's why we monitor it every day."

To combat possible shortages, GUC has several drought management strategies in place and has begun contingency plans for the short and long terms.

With 62 million gallons of untreated water in storage, GUC has an emergency supply for five to six days. The treatment plant can handle 22.5 million gallons per day — GUC customers use an average of 10 million to 11 million gallons per day.

GUC also has eight deep wells that can pump 2 million gallons per day into the system.

An Aquifer Storage and Recovery System that is expected to be in operation in about a year will provide an additional 1.5 million gallons. An ASR takes water from the river during periods of high flow and low demand, treats it and pumps it 200-500 feet underground into aquifers. The water is stored until times of need.

"That gives us a little insurance in times of drought," Lasater said.

Among options being explored are temporary or permanent dams on the Tar that would block salt water and keep enough freshwater over the intake pipes. GUC also is looking at adding additional intake pipes deeper than the two that were not threatened during the latest drought.

"Whoever decided to put the intake where it's at now, I don't know if it was luck or design, but it was a good decision," Lasater said. "If we had gone further up the river and been out of the tidal cycle we'd be in a lot more precarious position as far as our water supply during a drought."

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College donations set record

BY JUSTIN PEPPE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Donations to colleges and universities rose solidly last year, to a record of nearly $30 billion, with the wealthiest universities again attracting a hugely disproportionate share, a new survey shows.

Private donations to higher education rose 6.3 percent last year to $29.75 billion, according to the annual Voluntary Support of Education survey, to be released today by the Council for Aid to Education.

The already wealthy schools — with leading faculty researchers and the most sophisticated fundraising operations — had the most success attracting new donations. The top 20 fundraisers raised $518 million more than the previous year, and a total of $7.66 billion. They account for just 2 percent of survey respondents but for more than a quarter of all contributions to colleges and universities — and nearly one-third of the total increase in giving.

The survey tracks donations by fiscal year, so it essentially covers the 2006-2007 school year and doesn't reflect the economic slowdown that began last fall.

THE TOP 10

Here are the nation's top 10 fundraising universities in fiscal 2007:

1. Stanford University: $832.35 million
2. Harvard University: $613.99 million
3. University of Southern California: $469.65 million
4. Johns Hopkins University: $430.46 million
5. Columbia University: $423.85 million
6. Cornell University: $406.93 million
7. University of Pennsylvania: $392.42 million
8. Yale University: $391.32 million
9. Duke University: $372.33 million
10. University of California, Los Angeles: $364.78 million

COUNCIL FOR AID TO EDUCATION

Next year's survey could mark the end of an extraordinary run that has let at least 76 institutions build endowments of $1 billion or more, according to the most recent figures from the National Association of College and University Business Officers.
NCCU sets official installation for Nelms

Though he's been on the job at N.C. Central University since late last summer, Chancellor Charlie Nelms hasn't yet received the official academic ceremony customary for new university leaders. That comes now.

All week, NCCU is holding events leading up to Friday's formal installation. Following Nelms' wishes, the week's festivities are public, academic and designed to involve students, said Carlton Wilson, a history professor and co-chairman of the university's installation committee.

"Chancellor Nelms is very, very student-oriented, and so he wants to make sure it's an academic experience for our students," Wilson said. "He wanted it to be open. He didn't want anything that would exclude people. There are no black-tie balls and things like that."

Here's what the week includes:

**Today**


**8 A.M. TO 6 P.M.** - Student art exhibition, Fine Arts Building, first floor breezeway.

**3 TO 5 P.M.** - International celebration of the arts, Alfonso Elder Student Union.


**Thursday**

**7:30 A.M.** - Chancellor's health and wellness walk. Leaves from the Walker complex. Participants representing other countries are invited to wear or carry symbols representing those countries.

**9 A.M.** - Chancellor's local food drive. Food will be collected on campus through the Community Service Learning Program.

**9 A.M. TO 4 P.M.** - Student art exhibition, Fine Arts Building.

**10:40 A.M.** - Campus beautification project. A campuswide cleanup, tree-planting and recycling awareness campaign.

**2 TO 4 P.M.** - "Preparing Educators for Diverse Cultural Contexts: Education with an Educational Focus," Michaux School of Education.

**7 P.M.** - Jubilee concert, White Rock Baptist Church, 3400 Fayetteville St. The concert will feature NCCU's Jubilee Singers and members of the alumni choir.

**Friday**


--Compiled by Eric Ferreri
They’re not ‘the big boys,’

but Wake Tech adds collegiate sports

BY LORENZO PEREZ
STAFF WRITER

RALEIGH – In a sports-mad region dominated by N.C. State, North Carolina and Duke, Wake Technical Community College hopes to carve a new niche by giving its commuter students their own teams to cheer.

The school’s board of trustees voted unanimously Tuesday to jump into collegiate sports this fall with an athletics program. Aiming to compete against other community colleges and junior colleges in the Carolinas, the new program will field teams for women’s volleyball, men’s soccer and men’s and women’s golf next school year before adding basketball and baseball the following term.

And incoming students will have to come up with an extra $10 each semester to pay for the privilege of rooting for the Wake Tech Eagles. To cover the estimated price tag of $176,576 needed to hire an athletic director and part-time coaches and pay liability insurance and other costs, the Wake Tech board approved a doubling of student fees from $10 to $20 each semester.

“Don’t start comparing us to the big boys in town,” Wake Tech President Stephen Scott said Tuesday. “There will be a lot of volunteers in this, and we’ll be operating on a shoestring.

“But it’s a chance for our students to be able to compete at a higher level … and I think that it’s a benefit to the whole community, because students need to see that these opportunities are available.”

Wake Tech is the second-largest community college in the state and each fall enrolls about

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Catching the wave

With Tuesday's move, the school joins a growing surge of community colleges that have begun competitive athletics programs. More than 40 junior and community colleges across the country have adopted new sports programs since 2003, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education; in North Carolina alone, Wake Tech will be one of 20 community colleges that offer competitive sports.

The rising popularity of competitive sports programs prompted the N.C. State Board of Community Colleges to form a study group last year and issue guidelines for sports teams. At the time of the study, only seven of the 19 community colleges in the state with sports programs offered scholarships as a recruiting inducement for prospective athletes. Although Wake Tech does not plan to actively recruit players from outside Wake County, the community college's foundation may fund an undetermined number of athletic scholarships in the future.

Recruiting has become more important to fielding competitive teams, said Phil Gaffney, athletic director for Guilford Technical Community College in Jamestown. The school recently intro-

DIVISION I-BOUND
WAKE TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Wake Technical Community College will field National Junior College Athletics Association teams as a Division I member. Division I member schools may offer scholarships covering tuition, fees and room and board expenses, although few schools offer scholarships covering all those expenses. Playing in the NJCAA's Region 10, Wake Tech will compete against schools from North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia.

According to the NJCAA's eligibility requirements, a full-time student must be taking at least 12 hours in a degree-granting program to play on a community college team. There are no age limits, but players are limited to two years of eligibility. Student-athletes with two years or less of varsity sports experience at a four-year institution would still have two years of community college eligibility.

Wake Tech will be scrambling just to find playing space for its new teams. Now it offers students four sand volleyball courts and a string of tennis courts at its North Campus.

The college likely will rent high-school gyms for its basketball teams, Wake Tech officials said. The community college's foundation will dangle corporate naming rights and endowment opportunities in front of potential donors in hopes of funding the construction of a $3 million complex of baseball, soccer and softball fields on its North Campus.

No faculty flak

Wake Tech's Student Government Association has endorsed the ambitious plan, and little faculty opposition has been detected, said Chuck Bunn, an accounting instructor and president of the Wake Tech faculty association.

"If there had been faculty members opposed to it, I would have heard by now," Bunn said.

On Wake Tech's main campus Tuesday morning, many students welcomed the news. Jorim P. Obong, 24, questioned why he should pay an extra $10 for teams for which he was unlikely to play, yet his friend, Prince Ndossoka, could not hide his excitement.

A 2007 graduate of Cary's Green Hope High, the Congo native played soccer there and still plays every weekend with friends. Ndossoka said he misses the school spirit and camaraderie sparked by athletics.

"If they bring sports here, I'm going to be the first one to raise my hands," said Ndossoka, 19. "Because people need to have fun sometimes."

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OUR VIEWS

No place to cut

Basic research in the physical sciences helps build a foundation. It can lead to progress in health care, in protecting the environment, in more efficient food production. And thanks to foolish, shortsighted budget cuts (omissions, really) by Congress, universities are facing crises in getting the money to advance such research.

Apparently, the shortfall, something like $500 million left out of Congress' spending plans, came as a surprise. That's why Duke University President Richard Brodhead is among those university and business leaders who have been on Capitol Hill trying to secure emergency money to make up the difference.

It's true that Congress has to balance many competing and important demands when it comes to allocating federal dollars, but letting research funding wither would be a mistake. Furthering basic research is what it always has been — an investment in the future, and one that belongs on the list of national priorities.

Such research leads to discoveries of all sorts. These days that could mean better ways to meet the energy and environmental challenges, both acute and long-range, facing the country. The Department of Energy, for example, would get about $300 million of the $500 million these leaders are seeking, money that would go in a major way to university research.

The United States always has been regarded as a leader in the field of scientific research of all kinds, and of course it still is. But putting federal funding for many physical science research programs on short rations could threaten that status, and in addition, it could diminish the attractiveness of physical science study to top students.

These are not happy prospects. Brodhead and other leaders, one hopes, will find champions in Congress who will recognize the importance of maintaining this funding — and do something about it.
You don't have to owe an arm and a leg once you're a college graduate

Most students graduate from college with a lifetime of memories. Unfortunately, a lot of students also graduate with a lifetime of debt.

About two-thirds of students leave college with student loans; the average balance is $19,237. Some students who attend out-of-state public universities or high-cost private colleges graduate with much more debt.

With college costs rising faster than most family incomes, some students have no choice but to borrow. But there are steps you can take to reduce the amount you'll owe when you graduate.

To start, make sure you take full advantage of the federal student loan program before you take out any private loans.

Unsubsidized federal Stafford loans have a fixed rate of 6.8% and are available to all students. For subsidized Stafford loans, available for students who can show economic need, the rate is 6% for loans taken out after July 1. Private student loans, which aren't guaranteed by the federal government, have variable rates that are typically tied to the prime rate or another benchmark. Rates range from about 6% to more than 14%. But while the prime has been falling, rates for many private loans are moving higher.

The credit crunch has made it even more expensive for some lenders to raise money for student loans, says Mark Kantrowitz, publisher of FinAid, a financial aid website. He expects rates for private loans to rise by a quarter of a percentage point to 1.5 points over the next few months.

Private lenders have also tightened their lending standards, says Kevin Walker, CEO of SimpleTuition, a website that lets borrowers compare loan rates and terms. Student borrowers who don't have a co-signer with good credit will pay much higher rates and might not be able to get a private loan at all, Walker says.

Legislation approved by the House of Representatives this month would require private lenders to inform potential borrowers of the availability of federal student loans.

The legislation would also require private lenders to provide better information about the terms of their loans.

Diana Mey of Wheeling, W.Va., says her experience illustrates the need for better disclosure of private loan terms.

Last fall, Mey says, her son applied online for a private loan to make up the $1,800 gap between his federal loans, a scholarship and his college costs.

Because he had no co-signer, most lenders turned him down. Chase, however, approved a $14,000 loan, she says.

Mey says her son thought he had a fixed-rate loan. In fact, she says, the loan carries a variable interest rate that's now 11.3% and an origination fee of $531.

Chase recently offered to lend her son an additional $40,000, she says. "I'm appalled they're preying on naive college students."

Chase spokeswoman Mary Kay Bean says Chase doesn't comment on individual borrowers. But she says the lender's website recommends that potential borrowers exhaust their federal loan options before taking out a private loan.

Chase also informs students that they can get a lower rate if they have a co-signer, she says.

Many borrowers turn to private loans because they've maxed out on their federal student loans. For most college freshmen, the cutoff for Stafford loans is $3,500 (see box).

But instead of taking out private loans, you might consider attending a school that's more affordable.

Don't be surprised if some of your friends are doing the same.

As private loans become more expensive and harder to get, Kantrowitz says, "Students may think twice before going to a more expensive school."

Improved financial aid

To make college more affordable, a growing number of colleges and universities have eliminated loans from their financial aid packages.

For example, Colby College, a private school in Waterville, Maine, announced in January that it's replacing loans with grants, a move that school officials say will save the average graduate $14,000.

In a typical financial aid package, the college will calculate how much it thinks a family can afford to pay, known as the expected family contribution. The school will then offer a mix of loans, grants and work-study to make up the gap between that amount and the actual cost of college.

If you attend a school that's replaced loans with grants, you might still need to borrow to cover your family's expected contribution. But you probably won't have to borrow as much.

You can find a list of schools that have reduced or eliminated loans from their aid packages at the website for the Project on Student Debt, www.projectonsstudentdebt.org.

To suggest columns, e-mail sblock@usatoday.com.