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ECU commencement on schedule

By Jackie Drake
The Daily Reflector
Friday, December 17, 2010

East Carolina University fall commencement ceremonies will take place as scheduled in the wake of Thursday's winter storm.

The ceremonies in Williams Arena at Minges Coliseum will begin with a band concert at 9:30 a.m. Friday. The commencement program begins at 10 a.m.

More than 2,000 degrees will be awarded, according to university spokesman John Durham.

Brig. Gen. James R. Gorham, the first African-American general in the N.C. National Guard, will deliver the commencement address. A 1981 graduate of ECU and a Falkland native, Gorham is director, Joint Staff, of the North Carolina Joint Force Headquarters in Raleigh. He also serves as commander of the N.C. National Guard Joint Task Force, responsible for joint training and deployment.

Tickets are not required for family members and guests of graduates. Guests should enter the arena through gates 2 and 3 and proceed directly to the seating areas. General parking will be provided in the lots surrounding the stadium.

College, school or departmental graduation ceremonies will follow the main commencement ceremony. For more information, visit www.ecu.edu/commencement.

Contact Jackie Drake at jdrake@reflector.com or (252) 329-9567,
Editorial: Debt burden on ECU graduates
Friday, December 17, 2010

Mirela Daughtry waves to a member of the audience near the conclusion of the graduation ceremonies at East Carolina University in Minges Coliseum on Friday morning.

East Carolina University holds its fall commencement exercises at Minges Coliseum this morning, conferring degrees on hundreds of young men and women. Hard work and commitment have seen them through to this moment and their determination to complete their university work shows an admirable determination that should serve them well in the coming years.

Though most will leave East Carolina with fond memories of their college careers, many will also leave with significant debt thanks to ever-rising tuition and sharply escalating fees. With additional increases on the horizon, North Carolina must seriously consider its approach to higher education funding and the threat that higher costs inflict on these young graduates.

One week ago, the British Parliament approved a threefold increase in university tuition, raising the cost of a year's schooling from about $5,000 to about $15,000. The decision was part of the new government's austerity plan, imposed to combat rising costs and declining revenues, but it sparked violent student protests only minutes after the vote. In central London, students' vocal outrage devolved into protestors smashing barricades and clashing with police, leading to 36 arrests and thousands in damage.

University students in North Carolina can sympathize with their peers across the pond (even though they should reject their actions) because they, too, have seen the cost of higher education increase sharply in recent years. East Carolina is one of several schools
in the University of North Carolina system set to increase tuition again in the coming years, though not at the pace seen in Britain.

East Carolina remains a great value for the money. It is a university with an upstanding reputation for service to the region and serves an integral role for the University of North Carolina system and all of eastern North Carolina. This recent tuition hike was endorsed reluctantly by Chancellor Steve Ballard, who recognizes the importance of keeping costs low and eliminating financial barriers to higher education. Additionally, there are financial aid programs, including grants, that can help low-income students afford the pursuit of a degree.

However, each tuition increase imposed by any of the UNC schools moves the university system away from its obligation under the state Constitution to keep education as free from expense as possible. It severely impacts a region like this, where students often hail from families of limited means. And it ensures that a growing share of graduates, like those receiving degrees today, take their first steps in the professional world already saddled with debt.
When Diana Overton's father James R. Overton passed away, she wanted to commemorate him in some way.

In May, Diana established a scholarship in her father's name at East Carolina University.

As a young man, the Winterville native received a full scholarship to ECU as an undergraduate. The scholarship paved the way to James Overton's success in the chemistry field.

“Before he passed he had a number of U.S. patents and some world patents in his name,” Diana said.

To raise money for the ECU Alumni Scholarship Foundation, Diana has organized three concerts with musician JT Spangler. He will perform at 10 p.m. today-Saturday at Chefs 505. The first event was held Thursday night at Winslow's.

“We wanted to do something that would give back,” Overton said.

She became familiar with Spangler's music when she did a YouTube search for the song “Arms of a Woman.”
“I just loved the song. His picture was there and he was cute, so I clicked on it. I heard him sing it a cappella and was blown away,” Overton said.

That was in 2008, when Spangler was in college. The two became Facebook friends and started talking.

Overton asked Spangler about performing in North Carolina.

“He was all about it and couldn't wait to do it. He's never been to North Carolina,” Overton said.

Spangler is a Louisiana native who now lives in Los Angeles. He first picked up a guitar while in college. For the last two years he's spent time playing shows, meeting other artists, fans and industry people.

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

His two other CDs include “Love Songs for No One,” released in November 2006, and “The Vienna Circle Sessions,” released in January 2009.

Two of Spangler's songs also will be featured on MTV's “The Real World: New Orleans.”
ECU researcher looking into depression during pregnancy

by Vicky Eckenrode
A researcher at East Carolina University has received a National Institute of Mental Health grant to study whether an intervention program helps low-income women at risk for depression during their pregnancy.

Elizabeth Jesse, an ECU associate professor of graduate nursing science and assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology in the Brody School of Medicine, will receive a three-year, nearly $641,000 grant for the program. Jesse is a certified nurse midwife.

As many as half of pregnant women experience depressive symptoms and about 13 percent develop antepartum depression, according to a press release from ECU. The symptoms can mirror typical pregnancy side effects like mood swings and fatigue.

Up to 50 percent of women who suffer depression during their pregnancy also will have postpartum depression.

The women enrolled in the program in Pitt County will meet with a social worker and assistant to identify and solve stress and emotional problems during their pregnancy to see if the interventions are beneficial.
$1.6M grant targets obesity

By K.j. Williams
The Daily Reflector
Friday, December 17, 2010

It takes the vision of a village to raise a healthier community.

That's the thinking behind a new planning initiative in Pitt County funded by a $1.6 million federal grant that's part of health care reform.

The county's health department is the lead agency for a multi-pronged effort to improve the health of residents by addressing obesity. The focus is on working with other agencies to develop ways to promote physical fitness and improve eating habits, Jo Morgan, a health department spokeswoman, said.

Morgan, the acting project manager, said the goal is to develop a “common vision” on what needs to be done to make it easier for people to pursue healthy habits. The Communities Putting Prevention to Work grant will be used to improve access to wholesome food and exercise options for the county overall.

“Nutrition and physical education are the primary focus,” she said of the program that's been funded through September 2012. “We envision different things happening in different communities.”

In Pitt County, one out of every three children ages 2 to 18 are either overweight or obese. About 62 percent of adults in the county also fit into those categories, according to the health department.

“Obesity, particularly of children, but also of adults, is one of the most important public health issues of today,” John Morrow, the health department's director, said. “It's critically important to the rest of the health care system that we find a solution to this problem.

“We're developing chronic diseases younger,” Morrow said, naming obesity as a significant factor. “But the fact is that we can't cure this obesity problem in a doctor's office. We have to change our environment to make our environment help people develop and maintain healthy lifestyles.”

In low-income or rural areas, the initiative likely will include a push to encourage neighborhood stores to sell healthier food at affordable prices, including fresher choices like fruit and low-fat dairy.
“So, we would work with the store to identify what they're willing to do,” Morgan said, adding that it needs to be easy for people to choose these items, or they might not be the consumers' first pick.

She said the program likely will work with farmers to expand venues for their products. Establishing mobile farmers markets is one way to increase accessibility, Morgan said.

Physical fitness programs to tackle obesity could involve anything from supporting the building of sidewalks and walking trails to championing Safe Routes to Schools, making it easier for children to walk or bike to school.

The program also will encourage businesses to promote employee wellness by offering healthier vending machine options and creating walking trails near work sites.

Partners in the community effort include representatives from area local governments, East Carolina University, Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce and Pitt County Memorial Hospital.

The team attended a conference last month in Atlanta hosted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is funding the grant as part of the health care reform legislation, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The state agency overseeing its implementation is the N.C. Division of Public Health under the Department of Health and Human Services.

Julie Henry, spokeswoman for the division of public health, said the grant's purpose is to “encourage them to be creative in what they're doing.

“With obesity on the rise as it is in North Carolina and across the country, we have to look at innovative ways to reach people,” Henry said. “And looking at what can work at the local level can help us at the state level with outreach initiatives in the future.”

The Appalachian District Health Department received the other $1.6 million grant for North Carolina. That district includes three counties: Alleghany, Ashe and Watauga.

Contact K.J. Williams at kwilliams@reflector.com or (252) 329-9588.
Amanda Drozdowski grew up in a creative family but never realized the commercial spin-offs until this summer when her first effort at making jewelry proved a big hit at Elizabeth City’s Downtown Waterfront Market. 

The 28-year-old who grew up in New Hope, was studying at East Carolina University at the time. She was back in Elizabeth City when one of her mother’s friends suggested she should start making jewelry.

Amanda, who now lives in Weeksville, had crocheted for most of her life and decided to make some items to sell at the farmers market. Within a month she had made almost $2,000 and her jewelry was being showcased in stores across the Albemarle and the Outer Banks.

“My mom had a friend who comes down here to the farmer’s market,” Amanda said. “She said ‘you should make some jewelry’.”

She had never made jewelry before but knew how to crochet.

“My mom had bought me a crocheted necklace as a gift. I liked the way it looked but thought I could change the style and make it look a lot different and add some things to it.
So I took that idea and ran with it, because you can find crocheted jewelry on the internet,” she said.

Amanda made about 20 necklaces and about 20 pairs of earrings to sell at the market in July. She uses ladder lace that she orders online to make her creations.

“I went to the farmer’s market and sold out of everything in about three hours,” she said. She made about $250 in one afternoon.

“I went home that night and started playing around with it. I thought I would start my own business. By the time I woke up on Sunday, I had made business cards, a label, come up with a name and everything. I had a vision and ran with it,” she said.

Amanda is from a creative family. “My mom is super crafty. She made my clothes when I was in kindergarten. She can sew, make or do anything,” she said. “There was always craft supplies at my house.”

Her older sister Melissa makes designer purses in Hawaii. Her claim to fame is the time she made one for Bette Midler.

Amanda’s fledgling crocheted jewelry quickly grew into a business enterprise for Amanda attended Perquimans County High School and College of the Albemarle and gained a degree in sociology at ECU.

The Saturday after her successful trip to the downtown market, Amanda paid a visit to Wave Riding Vehicles, a surf store on the Outer Banks.

“They picked it up immediately. It was in stores within a week of me making my first necklace,” she said. “After that I took it to the Secret Spot Surf Shop on the Outer Banks and she put it in her store as well.”

Amanda’s jewelry is also sold at Arts of the Albemarle in Elizabeth City and the Museum of the Albemarle gift shop, Carree Salon in Camden and three stores in Greenville. She is also following up marketing opportunities in New York and California.

“It’s kind of spread by word of mouth,” Amanda said. She made about $1,800 in the first month of operation and has sold about 400 items since she started the business that’s called Krocie. It means ‘treasure’ in Polish and reflects Amanda’s heritage because her father is Polish.

“What’s unique about it is that I don’t make the same thing twice,” she said. The crocheted necklaces all have charms on them but vary in price from $28 to $125. She also makes quilts.
Amanda says her business has an environmentally-friendly ethos. She uses reusable boxes and recycled paper and saves scraps. She also uses old jewelry she finds at thrift shores to add to her creations.

Now she has finished studying for a Masters degree in occupational therapy at ECU, Amanda hopes to develop the business further, bringing in new product ideas. She also wants to travel and to find new cities to market her products in.

In the early days of the business Amanda said she was making jewelry 12 hours a day, four days a week. In recent months she has spent less time on the business because she was studying but hopes to develop it further in 2011.

Amanda does most of her business via her website and Facebook but makes some appearances at local venues to sell her goods.

She will be at City Wine Sellar on Dec. 22 from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m.
Online: www.krociekrafts.com
N.C. State receives $40 million gift

Lonnie Poole

BY JAY PRICE - Staff Writer

RALEIGH Just in time for Christmas, N.C. State University is getting the biggest gift in its 123-year history.

Lonnie C. Poole Jr., who made a fortune in the garbage-hauling business, and his wife, Carol Johnson Poole, are giving the university $40 million. That single gift will swell NCSU's entire endowment by nearly 10 percent and instantly boost the profile of the university's young management college, which is getting most of the money.

"This is transformative," said NCSU Chancellor Randy Woodson. "To receive this size of a gift in this economic environment and at a time when the university is really trying to elevate its stature, you know, it's just transformative."

Poole, an NCSU graduate in civil engineering and a long-time supporter of the university, founded Raleigh-based Waste Industries in 1970, using $10,000 the couple got from selling their home in Ohio. The family moved in with his parents.

His name will now grace the College of Management, which will get $37 million of the gift for its endowment.

Of the remainder, $500,000 will go to the endowment of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and $2.5 million will be used to build a clubhouse at NCSU's new golf course on its Centennial Campus, which will be named for Carol Poole. The Pooles had earlier given $3 million to help build the golf course, which was named for him. The Pooles were expected to join university officials this morning to formally announce the gift.
Timely gift
The holiday season aside, their largesse could not have been more timely. Not only has
the stagnant economy hurt donations to universities everywhere, but officials across the
16-campus UNC system are trying to figure out what's left to slash when the next round
of cuts in state funding hits.

The gift will shine a spotlight on the university's technology-oriented college of
management which, at just 18 years old, is one of the youngest in the country.

Lonnie Poole has helped lead charitable foundations at NCSU for nearly 20 years and
said that he knows which colleges at NCSU get the most donations and which need more.
That's one reason Poole is steering the money toward the business school, he said in an
interview. He wants to help put it on equal footing with the larger, older colleges at
NCSU that can draw on a bigger donor base, and make it more competitive with the other
business schools in the area, including those at UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke University.
NCSU has an unusual number of small foundations set up to handle gifts for individual
colleges, and that has created inequities, he said.

"The end result is, when people go to North Carolina State, they expect the colleges there
to be comparable to each other in excellence, in teaching excellence and research
excellence," he said.

"In fact, it's a mistake to make that assumption because the colleges of agriculture,
textiles, natural resources and engineering have been around for a long, long time, and
they have alumni who are able to give back to the college and create very healthy
foundations to fund those things that make you just a level above an ordinary land-grant
college."

The management college already has some characteristics that distinguish it from
competitors that focus on typical business school topics such as traditional finance,
investment banking and consumer product marketing. Instead, it concentrates on subjects
such as commercialization of technology, new product and service innovation, global
supply chain, enterprise risk and management of biosciences.

In short, the school aims to produce graduates to fit the kinds of companies that populate
Research Triangle Park and that are being spun off from NCSU research.

The Poole's gift is a validation of that approach, said Ira Weiss, the dean of the college.
"Given the youth of our college, we feel that the size of this gift is a phenomenal
testament to who we are and what we've accomplished, but it's really about the future,"
Weiss said. "Obviously someone is investing in that future."

The money will not only raise the college's profile, he said. It also will help it compete
for new high-quality faculty members, fill endowed chairs and spend enough to keep key
faculty who otherwise might be lured away.
It also will help pay for new initiatives, Weiss said, notably the creation of a new center of excellence in sustainability. That's fitting, he said, because Poole has long been an advocate for sustainable practices in the solid waste industry, and because the college is well-poised for it.

"With our areas of expertise in innovation, technology, entrepreneurship and globalization, we're primed to be a leader in that area," Weiss said. "Clearly technology is a driver of everything that's going to happen in sustainability."

**No strings attached**
Poole said that he is putting no strings on the endowment gift because the school's needs will inevitably change.

Discussions with Weiss and other university leaders, though, convinced him that they want to bolster the college's teaching in three key areas that keenly interest him: entrepreneurship, ethics and the intersection of business and the environment. Poole said that when he was in school, classes on those subjects weren't available, and that they're all crucial now.

Such a big addition to the university's endowment, which can help pay for scholarships and professors' salaries, was particularly sweet for Woodson, who, even before he took office as chancellor in April, had said that boosting the endowment to make it a more stable source of funding would be one of his major goals.

The university's endowment needs to more than double, to about $1 billion, to put it on a par with similar institutions around the country, he has said.

Still to be worked out, Woodson said, are details of how the Poole gift to the College of Humanities and Social Sciences will be used. Poole is interested in an arrangement that rewards faculty excellence.

The new donation is double the size of the second-largest gift to NCSU, a $20 million donation in 2005 by a foundation endowed by High Point businessman Randall B. Terry Jr. That pledge was to help build a new animal hospital at the College of Veterinary Medicine.

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Lesbian Coach’s Exit From Belmont U. Has Nashville Talking

By CAMPBELL ROBERTSON

NASHVILLE — The day before Thanksgiving break, the members of the Belmont University women’s soccer team gathered in the locker room after a strength training session. Their coach, Lisa Howe, had something to say.

She told them that she was a lesbian, and that she and her partner of eight years, the team’s former assistant coach, had decided to have a baby.

“She said she wanted to talk about her personal life one time only and there would never be a discussion again,” recalled Erica Carter, a senior on the team.

But the topic was far from finished. It continued the next week when the players learned that their coach was leaving her job. And it has swelled into a full-blown existential debate at this fast-growing private university.

Belmont, once a small Baptist university whose students were mostly commuters, has had a remarkable decade. Student enrollment has roughly doubled since 2000, and 10 new buildings have gone up. A college of entertainment and music business, the university’s showpiece, was established in 2003, and next year, Belmont will open a law school. The university has rapidly risen in national rankings, and scored a high profile coup in 2008 as host of one of the presidential debates.

But the growth has not come without growing pains.

Three years ago, the university severed its 56-year-old ties with the state Baptist convention after a debate about whether the board could include non-Baptist trustees. But the university promised to remain Christian, if nondenominational.

Still, some see a continuing identity crisis — on the one hand, the university has long had a reputation as conservative and Christian, a reputation safeguarded by the board of trustees, which includes several Baptist ministers; on the other hand, Belmont has aggressively earned a reputation as a progressive, artsy place to study the music business.

“What are we trying to do?” asked Cassidy Hodges, a senior. “It’s kind of back and forth, push and pull, between what we want at the university.”

That identity crisis is now in full public view.
The university will not comment on the circumstances of Ms. Howe’s departure, nor will Ms. Howe, citing contractual reasons. They refer to her departure as a “mutual agreement.”

Ms. Howe did say in an interview that her decision to become a mother is what prompted her to talk to the players, many of whom knew she was a lesbian anyway. Ms. Howe’s partner, Wendy Holleman, left Belmont in 2008 to coach at a private high school; she is due with the couple’s first child in May.

“By continuing to hide, I felt like that was the wrong message to send,” said Ms. Howe, 41, who describes herself as a churchgoing Christian. “I thought maybe they assumed I was ashamed or that I was doing something wrong because it wasn’t coming straight from me.”

Ms. Carter said most of the players were excited about the baby. But the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, Ms. Howe called Ms. Carter and told her that the father of one player had complained over the weekend. Ms. Howe also said that she had been told by the athletic director that morning that if she did not resign, she would be fired, Ms. Carter said.

Ms. Howe had led the team to two conference championships, but the 2010 season was a disappointment, and on Dec. 1, Sari Lin, the team captain, asked the athletic director if that was the cause for Ms. Howe’s departure.

He told her that team performance was not the issue, Ms. Lin said, but that the baby “was going to be a problem” and would conflict with the university’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” approach.

The story has dominated headlines in Nashville, though the facts remain unclear.

Students staged protests on campus. Members of the faculty passed a resolution of support for gay faculty and students. Nashville metro council members introduced a bill to rescind an agreement that allowed Belmont to use a city park for a soccer field. The state Baptist convention commended Belmont officials for appearing to take a stand that “respected their Christian mission as well as their heritage.”

Nothing resonated quite like the surprise statement by Mike Curb, a trustee emeritus of the university and the deep-pocketed donor for whom the college of music business is named.

“It’s time for Belmont to change,” Mr. Curb, a prominent record executive and successful Nascar owner and sponsor, told The Tennessean. “Belmont has to decide whether they want to be a national, recognized university, particularly with their school of music business, or they want to be a church.”
A day later, Robert Fisher, the university’s president, made his first public comments, declaring that sexual orientation was not a consideration in hiring, promotion, salary or dismissal decisions at Belmont.

While many welcomed this statement, others said that the issue seemed to be whether gay faculty could openly be in relationships and start families.

“We’ve always had gay faculty as long as I’ve been here,” said Michael Awalt, a professor of philosophy who has been at Belmont since 1970. But, he said, “it’s been a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ kind of mentality.”

In 2001, after a business instructor named Michael Burcham was outed by a student, he was told he would need to defend himself in front of the board. Mr. Burcham, who now teaches at Vanderbilt University, said that he did not feel that the faculty, students or even the administration had a problem with his sexual orientation, but that he sensed the board would not approve. He resigned.

In a joint interview, Dr. Fisher, who has been the engine behind the university’s decade of rapid growth, and Marty Dickens, the chairman of the board, said the Belmont community needed to have a serious discussion before making any official changes or clarifications of its policy.

Dr. Fisher has met with some of the faculty and with a gay Christian student group whose requests for recognition have been denied.

He said he welcomed the discussion. But, he added: “I would have envisioned this kind of discussion being a lot more measured and taking a lot longer and probably producing a lot less heat in a typical, structured university approach. But we’ve got what we’ve got.”

Asked if having openly gay faculty and staff members could create a conflict with the university’s Christian character, Mr. Dickens said, “there could be.”

“But everything needs to be taken in a proper context, and we are continuing as a university to dialogue on all of these issues,” he said.

Mr. Dickens also said that this controversy had little to do with the university’s recent growth.

But others say that a debate like this was bound to arrive at some point.

“We feel at Belmont that we’ve moved academically to a very different place,” said Professor Awalt. “I’m not sure a lot of other things at the university have fully caught up.”