Officials discuss development

By Michael Abramowitz
Thursday, June 14, 2012

Representatives of Greenville, Pitt County and their largest economic development partners gathered Monday to share visions for developing and branding the area’s growth.

The Mayor’s Economic Development Advisory Council, composed of 16 key partners, exchanged updates on the latest development efforts, opportunities and studies aimed at making the city and county a strong regional hub of economic development.

Seated at the table were representatives from Vidant Health, East Carolina University, the N.C. Biotech Center, Greenville Utilities, Greenville Convention and Visitors Bureau, Uptown Greenville, the Pitt County Arts Council, The Pitt County 100, and City Council and county commission representatives.

“This is a good group, and all the participants were excited to be there because we’re moving toward a shared analysis of what we want to
accomplish and look like as we grow together,” Greenville Mayor Allen Thomas said.

A major goal is to brand the city and area with an economic identity and develop a marketing plan, said Carl Rees, senior planner in the Greenville Development Office.

Professional assistance in brand development is being pursued next week with an issuance of requests for qualifications and proposals, due back within a month, Rees said.

“It’s really important that we have concise values to market, whether it is recreation opportunities for our citizens or to represent our city well to potential external developers, students and staff at our university and medical center,” Rees said.

People research their plans in new and changing ways, but however they find the area, the message and image must be consistent, Rees said.

“When we think about visiting a destination for business or pleasure, one of the first things they do is go into their favorite (online) search engine and punch up a location,” he said. “Whether it is the visitors’ bureau website or the city or county website, that will be their first impression. This branding will be a part of that value.”

Rees and Pitt County Development Commission Executive Director Wanda Yuhas presented an update on joint efforts for federal economic development support.

Greenville and Pitt County have been selected with Greene and Wilson counties to be North Carolina’s candidates for a U.S. Department of Agriculture Stronger Economies Together grant, they reported. The program enables rural communities and counties to work together and implement an economic development blueprint that builds on current and emerging economic strengths of the regions, according to USDA officials.

If selected, the agencies will receive 35 hours of policy training from experts in several fields related to successful economic development. Another 40 hours of training will follow, customized to meet the chosen needs of individual counties and communities, Yuhas and Rees said.

GUC Chief Executive Tony Cannon reported on efforts to perform an analysis of the area’s economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Such a “SWOT” analysis is essential before subsequent steps in
planning for selected economic objectives. The work is part of Greenville’s 2012 Strategic Plan, Rees said.

On other economic development fronts:

- Chamber of Commerce President Susanne Sartelle said the chamber is working on a plan to organize inter-city visits by peer cities, possibly Greenville, S.C., and Chattanooga, Tenn.
- Pioneer Surgical, working out of the Pitt County Technology Incubator, has doubled its employment during the last year, a possible motivation for more efforts to increase the biotechnology industry’s presence in the area, Rees said.

Other collaborative public and private efforts include a shared wireless co-worker space, called a SEED, for government and entrepreneurs to use independently for projects, seminars and joint business development efforts and a Pitt County biotech development study with nine focus groups, including Vidant Health, the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University and local private developers. From that study, the groups will pinpoint specific aspects of biotech development best suited for the area, Rees said.

Thomas said the group plans to form committees to develop individual action agendas and projects but still is developing a snapshot of what local communities have and what they need to strategically develop individually, together and in partnerships with other counties and municipalities in the region.

Contact Michael Abramowitz at mabramowitz@reflector.com or 252-329-9571.
Point of View

Making sense of sea-level rise

By Andy Keeler

North Carolina has made itself the target of mockery by scientists, environmental activists and even a satirical feature by comedian Stephen Colbert. A local political lobbying effort in Eastern North Carolina to discredit mainstream climate science has now become the basis of legislation making its way through the state legislature to codify specific (and very low) predictions about sea level rise as a basis for state and regional policy affecting the coast.

This legislation says that North Carolina’s Coastal Resources Commission can base its policies only on a predicted sea level rise that is the same as what has been seen in the last hundred years or so of observations from tide-gauge records. This runs directly against a vast body of scientific research (ably summarized by Duke University geologist Orrin Pilkey in a June 8 Point of View article) and essentially says that legislation can somehow force the future to be exactly like the past.

The idea that legislating scientific findings can prevent a rising sea level from threatening coastal communities is both silly and dangerous, but the concerns of the interests that have pushed this legislation are legitimate.

Many scientists and activists believe that government policy should immediately and strongly discourage continued human habitation on the coast. This belief enters the policy realm in the form of calls for restrictions on construction and new infrastructure in coastal locations, as well as reductions in spending on the maintenance and building of roads and bridges in coastal areas.

The belief that high levels of sea level rise should cause widespread adoption of no-growth policies on the coast is shortsighted for two reasons. First, it ignores the role that people and communities play in making their own decisions about how to adapt to changes in climate-driven hazards. Real estate markets will reflect the dangers from rising seas, and individual property owners and businesses will make decisions about defensive actions, construction standards and relocation based on their own assessments of risk and the price signals in markets.

Second, many policy prescriptions do not deal with time, and timing, in a sensible and efficient manner. Even with sea level rise and storm regimes that are worse
than expected, there are still many years for people to live, work and visit productively in coastal locations with acceptable levels of risk. Short-term abandonment or roadblocks to new investments can impose large losses on businesses and communities in the short- and medium-run based on conditions that are most likely still many years in the future.

The interests that have been behind a legislative definition of sea level rise are concerned about local self-determination and the value of their existing businesses and assets. They view the science and the resulting policy prescriptions as one and the same, and have chosen a political attack on science as the best strategy for protecting their autonomy and financial interests.

The real issue here is how individuals and communities adapt to climate change – what combination of top-down planning, market forces and individual decisions guide outcomes on the coast. There are strong reasons why government needs to take account of the best available science in its decision-making – avoiding subsidies to maladaptive behavior, minimizing public spending on disaster relief and guiding public investment all require the best available knowledge about future risks. Good information based on sound science also gives the widest possible scope for individuals and local communities to make their own best decisions.

Finding the right balance between public and private decision-making on coastal investment and land use will be difficult. It will require experimentation and learning. It will also take place over an extended period of time, and will change as more is learned about climate change and ways that human actions can avoid the worst consequences of increased risks at the coast.

Neither public policy nor private decisions will be helped by denying reality. The issue in North Carolina is public policy, not science, and competing interests should battle directly in that arena. The groups behind this attack on science have good reason to advocate for balanced policies, but their attempts to override the scientific process through legislation will not help anyone as coastal communities figure out how to adapt to a changing and highly uncertain climate.

North Carolina should not need Stephen Colbert to remind us of that truth.

Andy Keeler is program head of public policy and coastal sustainability at the UNC Coastal Studies Institute in Manteo and professor of economics at East Carolina University.
Universities and the pace of change

By Carter Eskew

University of Virginia President Teresa Sullivan has departed after only two years on the job.

It’s not surprising that this news would hold interest for many in the Washington region, given the prestige of Mr. Jefferson’s university. But if initial reports are true, this story has deeper implications for universities and colleges across the country.

Reportedly, Sullivan was pushed out because she and the university’s trustees disagree over how to confront the challenges facing not only Virginia but many institutions of higher education: declining state aid, an aging tenured faculty, a bad economy and how to adapt universities’ value proposition in a digital age.

While our nation has had a debate recently about how students will afford to pay for college, we have yet to have a broad-based discussion on what students are getting for their money. Interestingly, one of the areas of disagreement that led to Sullivan’s ouster was over whether U-Va. should move into a more digitally oriented curriculum.

We live in an age where most information is free – or about to be – and where it is almost universally accessible. Every course taught at MIT, for example, is available free, online, to anyone. Many of us, of course, would need several classes in how to understand an MIT course before we could benefit from this offering.

Universities are not going away, and sitting alone with Google as your instructor is no substitute for the complex social and intellectual transactions that take place in college. But universities are facing the same revolution that transformed the music and newspaper businesses – indeed, all of the content businesses, of which they are a part.

This will take a while to shake out, but in the meantime prepare for more shake-ups.

The Washington Post

Carter Eskew was the chief strategist for the Gore 2000 presidential campaign.
Local group restarts The First Tee for youth golf

By Brian Mull

A successful national youth golf program that teaches leadership skills and develops character is taking another swing in Wilmington, and this time is extending its reach into neighboring counties.

The First Tee of the Cape Fear Region aims to serve the 50,000 children in New Hanover, Pender and Duplin counties, filling a void created when the First Tee of Wilmington folded in March 2009.

E.B. Bartlett, 33, is the chapter's executive director. A Greenville native with a strong background in golf, he holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from East Carolina and has workforce experience in sales and accounting.

"We have new leadership, new key leaders locally on board that are not going to let it fail," Bartlett said. "There are a lot of passionate and committed leaders this time. With everybody I've met we have a committed group that's passionate about character education and really wants to see this succeed."

Founded in 1997, The First Tee teaches nine core values: honesty, integrity, sportsmanship, courtesy, confidence, respect, responsibility, judgment and perseverance. There are 200 chapters nationwide, serving children ages 6-18.

The previous local chapter failed due to poor management, insufficient fundraising and minimal volunteer support.

The First Tee of the Cape Fear Region will have a greater chance of success because it falls under the umbrella of the Carol S. Petrea Youth Golf Foundation, which in November 2005 founded The First Tee of Brunswick County and also recently resurrected the First Tee of the Grand Strand in Georgetown, S.C.

The Brunswick County chapter is considered a national model due to a capable and diverse board of directors, strong fundraising and ground level support from approximately 350 volunteers.
Having that nearby guidance to lean on will be invaluable for the leaders of the Cape Fear Region chapter. However, all volunteers and funds must be generated independently.

The Cape Fear Region chapter plans to begin programming in the fall at a minimum of four elementary schools, with a goal of eventually making its mark in all 40 elementary schools in the three counties. The five-year vision calls for two facilities – one in the Wilmington area, one in Duplin County, approximately 500 volunteers, and a program that reaches half of the 50,000 youth who reside in the three counties.

Bartlett said the chapter plans to hold a golf tournament as a fundraiser in the fall and there are plans for a "Golf Card" in 2013 that would allow golfers to support the First Tee and also gain access to area courses.

PGA member Craig Sandstrum will be The First Tee of the Cape Fear Region's program director. His primary responsibility will be recruiting volunteers and training them. Sandstrum currently serves as tournament director of the Coastal Junior Tour, started in 1991 by Joey Hines, the director of golf at Cape Fear Country Club.

Hines sees the First Tee as the perfect complement to the junior tour and a pathway to help the PGA of America reach its goals of growing the game among the nation's youth.

"We're now talking about county-wide, three county-wide. We're grabbing them at the school level. Not every kid has access to golf at country clubs or daily fee courses or whatever, but everybody goes to school," Hines said.

"We're now reaching every individual in a learning environment, teaching them core values and leadership skills for the rest of their life and teaching it through golf. I was fortunate to grow up around golf, but a lot of kids were not."
Police: 2 robbed, attacked by stun gun near UNCC

By Meghan Cooke

Two students were attacked with a stun gun during a robbery at their apartment across from the UNC Charlotte campus Tuesday night.

The incident happened around 11:15 p.m. Tuesday on Legacy Walk Lane, located in the University Walk apartment complex off University City Boulevard.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg police said a 19-year-old man and a 20-year-old woman, both students who live in an apartment there, were assaulted by two men with a stun gun.

Then, the suspects fled in a vehicle after taking the young man’s wallet, which contained cash and a debit card, according to a police report.

Police said both victims suffered minor injuries.

The suspects have not yet been identified.
The Wilmington Star News

“Carolina Beach” in pictures

Wednesday, June 13, 2012 at 2:18 by Ben Steelman

Lois Carol Wheatley wrote Arcadia Publishing’s new “Images of America” book, “Carolina Beach.” She’ll be the guest Friday, June 15, for Jemila Ericson’s “Midday Cafe” interview on public radio station WHQR (91.3 FM at a little after noon).

Then, on Saturday, June 16, she’ll be greeting visitors and signing copies from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Carolina Beach Farmers’ Market, by the lake at Lake Park Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue.

Wheatley isn’t a local; she grew up in rural Maryland near the site of the famous “new city” of Columbia. (Sometimes, she describes herself as “pre-Columbian.”) Yet she loves the beach as only a convert can.

The book began, she said, as a series of history features she wrote for the website http://www.ncbeaches.com/. “I was sitting in the local history room of the New Hanover County library,” she said, “and I was finding all these pictures.”

The Federal Point Historic Preservation Society was another big source of photos, Wheatley added, as well as scores of local volunteers. “Getting into people’s photo albums was a lot of fun,” she said. Wheatley gave a slide presentation on what she found in May for the FPHPS regular meeting.

Other fertile sources, she noted, were the Hugh Morton collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the state Underwater Archaeology Branch at Fort Fisher.

“Carolina Beach” also encompasses Kure Beach and Fort Fisher. Wheatley admits these are all well-combed beaches. Arcadia still sells Elaine Blackmon Henson’s postcard history of Carolina Beach, now in its second edition, and Daniel Ray Noris has released two coffee table-sized photo collections on Carolina Beach through his hometown SlapDash Publishing.

Wheatley, however, found an entirely new spin by adding a section on Seabreeze, the mostly African-American community north of Snow’s Cut. In the Jim Crow era, Seabreeze was famed up and down the Eastern Seaboard as a black-friendly beach resort (and as a percolating center for new music).

“I live close to Seabreeze, so this just fascinated me,” said Wheatley, who’d like to devote a whole volume to the area (also known as Freeman’s Beach) and its rich history. Members of the Freeman family, who owned much of the real estate there, were especially helpful, she said.

“Folks down there say they’ve been interviewed half to death by writers,” she said. “And I kept asking myself, where’s the book about all this?”

A graduate of the University of Maryland, Wheatley earned a master’s degree at East Carolina University. (Her thesis was on the women poets of Black Mountain College, the famed “beatnik” and non-conformist hangout in the North Carolina mountains from the 1930s through the 1950s.)

She worked for several years for the Durham Herald-Sun and other papers and even contributed to the StarNews. Next up, she says, is a projected “Images of America” volume on Myrtle Beach.
Do we need a revolution in higher education?

By William J. Bennett, CNN Contributor
updated 3:44 PM EDT, Wed June 13, 2012

More than half of recent college graduates are underemployed or jobless.


(CNN) -- In spite of ever rising tuition and ballooning student loan debts, a large majority of students still desire to attend college. Traditional notions are deeply engrained in the public's mind. College is considered the path to a better, higher paying job, the best way to make connections and propel a career, and a status symbol, especially for those who go to elite universities.

However, given the dismal reality facing college graduates, perhaps the future of higher education will have to change.

In some cases, a college diploma may no longer guarantee the high potential lifetime earnings it once did. An online salary ranking system called PayScale.com calculates a student's 30-year return on investment at the top 1,300 colleges nationwide based on average alumni salary and tuition costs. Their recently issued 2012 report suggests that out of the 4,500 colleges and universities in the nation only the top 800 to 850 give you an annual return on investment greater than 4%. In pure financial terms, students might be better off investing their tuition money in stocks rather than four years with one of our nation's many colleges.

But this does not stop an overwhelming number of students from paying an exorbitant amount of money or taking on huge amounts of debt in order to attend college. It seems like such conventional wisdom. "A diploma wasn't a piece of paper. It was an amulet," as columnist Frank Bruni wrote in the New York Times. That may no longer be the case.
A college degree does not hold the status and significance it once did. Recent data from the Census Bureau and Department of Labor found that almost 54% of recent graduates were unemployed or underemployed. As our world becomes more globally integrated and competitive, economic status now turns on many other things, like intellectual capital and skills training, things which colleges are supposed to instill, but many don't.

According to a recent world economic study, about 10 million manufacturing jobs worldwide are going begging because of a lack of skilled workers. In the United States alone, at least 600,000 manufacturing jobs cannot be filled. Meanwhile, legions of arts and humanities majors occupy the unemployment rolls. Many students are ill prepared for the labor market, whether by fault of their own or by colleges and universities that are out of sync with the needs of a skilled work force.

However, technology may just transform everything. Better, smarter, more adaptable and cheaper education will soon be available to all. Initiatives like the ED-X partnership between Harvard and MIT promise to give non-traditional students elements of a world-class education online, and for free. Coursera, recently founded by Stanford professor Andrew Ng, will offer not only free online courses, but also a great deal of individualized instruction in the form of grading, testing, student-to-student help and certificates of completion. What Salman Khan and his Khan Academy did for elementary and secondary education, offering world-class instruction online for free, will soon be replicated throughout academia. These new ventures will no doubt challenge the traditional four-year residential, physical university model.

In the future, access to college may be nearly universal, with little or no tuition costs. We may be on the cusp of a higher education revolution. College may look very different 20, 10, or even five years from now.

In the meantime, the national and kitchen table conversation over higher education should no longer be looked at in the isolation of student loans. It's time for parents and students to look at the entire enterprise of higher education and ask -- how, when, where, for whom, in what studies and at what cost is a college education appropriate?