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UNC bureaucratic ranks swell 28%

BY DAN KANE, ERIC FERRERI AND DAVID RAYNOR, Staff Writers

This decade has been good for associate vice chancellors at UNC-Chapel Hill. Their numbers have nearly doubled, from 10 to 19, and the money paid to them has more than tripled, to a total of nearly $4 million a year.

The university now admits that some of these people were in jobs that were not vital. They represent the rapid management growth in the 16-campus UNC system that has added tens of millions of dollars to annual payrolls.

Now, with a tough economy and sinking tax revenues, UNC officials and state lawmakers say these jobs need cutting first.

A News & Observer analysis of university payroll data and similar work done by the UNC General Administration shows that many of the 16 campuses have expanded their bureaucracies at a big expense. Administrators are among the best paid people on the campuses, typically earning $100,000 or more.

Systemwide over the past five years, the administrative ranks have grown by 28 percent, from 1,269 administrative jobs to 1,623 last year, UNC-system data show. That’s faster than the growth of faculty and other teaching positions -- 24 percent -- and faster than student enrollment at 14 percent.

"That’s troubling," said UNC-CH Chancellor Holden Thorp, who took over the campus in July 2008 and soon after started cutting administrative jobs. "We're here to educate the citizens of North Carolina and produce scholars that help North Carolina and the rest of the world with their problems, and if we are spending money on the administration, we are not spending money on that."

The number of people with provost or chancellor in their titles alone has increased by 34 percent the past five years, from 312 in 2004 to 418 last year. The cost was $61.1 million, up $25 million from five years before.

UNC President Erskine Bowles, other UNC-system chancellors and state lawmakers say they are looking to prune the disproportionate administrative growth. The state budget, in seeking a $73 million cut from the universities this year, listed cutting "senior and middle management positions" as its top priority.

"If you are looking at the cuts we are making, they are heavily, heavily, weighted on the administrative side," said Bowles, who oversees the UNC system.

He and other UNC officials say it’s not necessarily a case of bureaucracy run amok. Voters passed a $3.1 billion bond referendum in 2000 that started a building boom, adding more facilities that need to be managed. Research programs, which are mostly funded by federal grants, have also grown dramatically at UNC-Chapel Hill and N.C. State University, creating the need for more people to manage the research and the money.
But there's also evidence that positions were created with little eye toward the bottom line.

A recent UNC-CH study found that administrative costs since 2004 have swelled at a pace of 6.6 percent a year; in that same span, academic spending rose 4.8 percent a year. The university is 10 layers deep in some areas, which means there are nine supervisors above some workers.

Much of the growth has been in managing computers and other information technology. As the university has grown, departments and divisions have hired their own IT staff members, creating a structure that is far too decentralized, according to a recently-released efficiency report by a private consultant hired to look at UNC-CH's spending.

"It's not a product of universities specifically; it's a product of an organization our size," Thorp said. "As we grow, functions become more decentralized. Everyone wants their own IT staff or their own development people. That's one trend we want to turn around."

Thorp also chopped out a department for public service and engagement formed by his predecessor, James Moeser, and is trimming human resources staff to squeeze more bureaucracy out of the UNC-CH administration. He predicts that these and other cuts will allow the university to protect teaching and make more classes available to students in the upcoming school year.

N.C. State University's new chancellor, James Woodward, said he is going to go to school on the UNC-CH report to look for ways to reduce bureaucracy. He said NCSU already has roughly 100 communications staffers; different colleges or departments have added their own publicists over the years. He wants to centralize communications and whittle the numbers.

Budget-busting growth

Personnel records show significant growth in third- and fourth-tier management jobs.

NCSU, for example, had four assistant vice provosts in 2004; last year it had 10. Similarly, the university had five assistant vice chancellors in 2004; last year it had eight.

At UNC-CH, in addition to the associate vice chancellor growth, the number of assistant vice chancellors grew from zero to 14 in that period. (In the university pecking order, an associate outranks an assistant.)

None of these administrators made less than $75,000 last year, except for a part-time assistant vice chancellor at NCSU who worked half-weeks for $69,000.

The biggest percentage growth in positions with provost or chancellor in their titles took place at UNC-Greensboro, where it nearly doubled to 50. UNCG Provost David Perrin downplayed the growth. He said nearly all the additional positions involved promotions, so the overall management growth was not as significant.

Still, UNC records show that the university's administrative jobs grew by 71 percent in five years. Perrin said the university has needed more administrators to respond to an enrollment boom, more grant-funded research and a new capital campaign.

Administrative growth led to much better pay for some employees, though university leaders say added responsibilities are part of the deal.

At UNCG, an information technology director, Gloria E. Thornton, has climbed the administrative ladder since 2005. She is now an associate vice chancellor in IT who earned $159,724 last year; that's $64,774 more than she earned prior to entering upper administration, according to payroll records. Donna Heath, a programmer, saw her pay more than double, to $128,000, when she became an interim associate vice chancellor in information technology services in 2005.
In the last several years, UNCG's information technology department went through a restructuring as it added to its managerial ranks, said Linda Brady, UNCG's chancellor.

"In order to keep people and be competitive, people need to have titles that reflect their job responsibilities," Brady said. "You've got to pay at that level to get good people."

UNCG's current budget-cutting plan largely targets workers in middle management, Brady said, in an attempt to protect both front-line workers and top administrative leaders.

Titles under review

Four years ago, Vicki Pennington was an administrative manager within the provost's office at NCSU. She made $65,866. But when she was promoted to assistant vice provost, her salary shot up more than 20 percent to $80,000. She now makes $105,725 a year. NCSU officials say she has taken on responsibilities of two other assistant vice provost positions that were abolished.

NCSU Chancellor Woodward said he could not speak about individual cases, having been appointed two months ago. (His predecessor, James Oblinger, stepped down in the wake of a hiring and pay controversy involving former first lady Mary Easley.) But Woodward said he is reviewing newly created middle or upper management positions to see whether they had received additional or more critical duties to justify the jobs and their higher salary.

"The bottom line is these are legitimate public concerns, and we need to have a heck of a lot more friction in the system that prevents us from just adding a lot of administrative positions or bumping up the salaries or reclassifying positions," Woodward said. "One of the good things with these budget cuts is we're going to eliminate some of these positions."

Faculty have noticed the administrative growth. At NCSU, professors produced a report showing that from 2002 to 2007, the number of full-time tenure track faculty decreased slightly, while full-time administrators grew at a fast clip. It reflects a trend at universities across the nation.

One of the authors, chemistry professor and former dean Jerry L. Whitten, said the systemwide numbers compiled by The N&O and UNC were astounding.

"The tragedy is that the legislature appropriates money for teaching, and that's where the public thinks it's going," he said. "But in truth, huge amounts are obviously going for things that are completely unrelated."

Unlike much of state government, the universities generally have the authority to set raises for faculty and administrators. The UNC system's Board of Governors has also granted some of the universities, including NCSU and UNC-CH, the flexibility to make many administrative changes.

Thorp said one goal in attacking administrative growth is to make sure that authority isn't lost.

"One of the main reasons why I'm doing all this is to demonstrate that we have the gumption and fortitude to do that on our own," he said. "And I think if you look at some of the moves I've made, these are pretty strong."

One such example is those associate vice chancellors. Thorp said he has already cut them from 19 to 15.

Staff writer Jay Price contributed to this report.

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Assistants are richly rewarded in academia

UNC-system salaries soar

BY JAY PRICE AND DAVID RAYNOR, Staff Writer

Across the UNC system, it's not just the layers of management that have grown quickly in recent years. Salaries have, too.

Among the administrators whose pay has soared the fastest are some of those who act as the right-hand, do-anything staffers for chancellors and boards of trustees. In the past five years, according to UNC-system records through the 2008-09 academic year, the pay for some of them had leapfrogged that of the governor, SBI director or secretary of Crime Control and Public Safety.

These employees have titles such as chief of staff, secretary of the university or secretary to the board, and the tasks they are assigned can vary hugely from university to university, depending on the size and role of the university and how its management is organized. Some of the assistants also wear a second or third hat such as the university's staff lawyer or -- in the case of East Carolina University's John Durham -- director of communications.

"Essentially, it's whatever the chancellor or trustees need done," Durham said.

According to the records, he was making $146,400 in 2008-09, up from $85,808 in 2004, the year before he accepted his additional role as assistant secretary to the board of trustees.

At UNC-Chapel Hill, Brenda Kirby, the secretary of the university, was making $150,000, up from $94,000 five years ago, a jump of nearly 60 percent.

Those who do this work have backgrounds as varied as the tasks they're assigned. Some,
such as Fayetteville State's chief of staff and vice chancellor, Thomas Conway, came up through academia. He holds a doctorate and was once dean of undergraduate academic programs at NCSU. He was paid $184,000 in 2008-09.

Among the others are former administrative assistants. That shouldn't fool anyone about their abilities, said Marlene Ross of the American Council on Education, an expert on the upper ranks of university leadership.

"The people in these jobs are really working intensely and have an enormous amount of responsibility," she said.

At fast-growing Western Carolina University, Chief of Staff Dianne Cook Lynch made $138,087 last school year, a 75 percent increase from her salary in 2004, when Chancellor John Bardo promoted her from executive assistant.

Bardo said she had already been doing some of the work of a chief of staff before he also gave her some duties that had been performed by a vice chancellor who was retiring. That move did not include adding any new staff to his office, which has consisted of five people for decades, he said.

Enrollment is soaring, the campus has grown from 270 acres to 650, and the university is about to break ground on the first building of a new campus of hybrid public-private functions modeled on NCSU's Centennial Campus, Bardo said. As planning for that campus began, the need for someone who could make decisions just as he would on land planning, water, sewer and road issues while meeting with local government officials has been crucial.

Bardo said that he considers himself a careful steward of the taxpayers' money and that Lynch's salary was well spent.

"If you look at what she does and what it would cost otherwise to get those things done, there is no question in my mind that she is well worth what she's paid," he said.

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Grand jury wants UNC documents on Easley

BY JAY PRICE, Staff Writer

Subpoenas continue to fly in the wide-ranging federal investigation of former Gov. Mike Easley.

UNC system leaders revealed Friday that they had been ordered by the grand jury to produce documents related to Mary Easley's job at N.C. State University and fundraising she performed among private donors on behalf of the university.

Also, State Auditor Beth A. Wood has received a second subpoena related to the investigation.

UNC officials said they would obviously comply with the subpoena, and also would release the documents to the public once they're compiled.

"We're going to be clear, open and transparent," President Erskine Bowles said. "This is perfectly natural that they want to see what we have."

NCSU hired Mary Easley in 2005, and university leaders elevated her to a $170,000-a-year job last summer. She was later fired amidst a growing uproar over the role that political connections had played in her hiring and promotion. University officials said she was fired because of university budget cuts that are slashing more than 400 jobs.

More than half a dozen other state agencies and individuals are known to have gotten subpoenas or have been visited by federal investigators in the case.

NCSU has received subpoenas to produce documents, and two former administrators who resigned after become entangled in the case -- former Provost Larry Nielsen and former Chancellor James Oblinger -- were ordered to testify before the grand jury. Other state agencies ordered to hand over documents so far include the Division of Motor Vehicles, the Highway Patrol and the Ports Authority.

The auditor's office got its first subpoena in May seeking an "inquiry, audit, and/or investigation into the hiring of Mary Easley" as well as a report generated from that investigation. That investigation apparently isn't complete.

Dennis Patterson, a spokesman for the Auditor's Office, said Friday that the second subpoena sought correspondence related to Mary Easley's job between Wood or her chief deputy, Wesley Ray, and NCSU officials. It also sought information about contacts between Wood and Ray and the Easleys, as well as relevant video or audio recordings.

Staff writers Eric Ferreri and J. Andrew Curliss contributed to this story.

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Board slashes pay for Oblinger

Ex-chancellor put on faculty level

BY ERIC FERRERI AND JAY PRICE, Staff Writers

CHAPEL HILL - Former N.C. State University Chancellor James Oblinger took a big pay cut Friday.

Oblinger, who resigned in early June amid revelations over his role in hiring former First Lady Mary Easley, had been earning his full administrative salary: $420,000 annually, or $35,000 a month. Under an agreement forged with UNC system President Erskine Bowles when he resigned, he was to be paid at that rate for six months before returning to the faculty at a lower wage.

The UNC system's Board of Governors voted Friday to scale his pay back immediately. He will now earn $173,000 annually, a salary comparable to other members of the NCSU faculty. Oblinger will be a professor of food science.

The UNC system board's vote was split, with 17 members voting for the change and 10 voting against it. Many who opposed the change said they supported Bowles' initial decision.

The board's decision will cost Oblinger $82,000 in income over the next four months.

"I think the board acknowledged his enormous contributions but felt there needed to be consequences for some things that went terribly wrong," said Hannah Gage, the UNC system board's chairwoman. "I think everyone is glad to put this behind us."

Oblinger resigned after admitting to Bowles that he played a role in the university's hiring of Mary Easley in 2005. Oblinger had long maintained that he wasn't involved, and in his
resignation letter wrote that he had simply forgotten his involvement and hadn't intentionally done anything wrong.

Oblinger's indiscretion caught the eye of federal prosecutors. He was subpoenaed earlier this year and in June testified to a grand jury about the Easley situation.

Oblinger could not be reached Friday.

Interim Chancellor James Woodward said Friday Bowles' office had asked NCSU to come up with a rational, justifiable salary for Oblinger that would be comparable to those of other professors in his department.

The $173,000 salary Oblinger will earn is an average of the salaries of the five highest-paid professors in the department, the group most comparable to Oblinger, Woodward said.

"This is absolutely an appropriate salary, and after such a careful process I am completely comfortable with it," he said.

In the face of outrage

John Hood, president of the John Locke Foundation, a conservative think tank, said that while the amount of money saved isn't too significant, the salary change had symbolic importance.

"At the very least, it's a lapse in judgment that deserves some response," Hood said of Oblinger's actions. "If the board had gone with the original plan, I think there would have been another round of public outrage."

The board's vote followed a lengthy discussion in closed session. One member who opposed the salary change was Peaches Blank, a former chairwoman of the NCSU Board of Trustees.

"I thought the proposal recommended by President Bowles ... was appropriate, reasonable and not inconsistent with other packages given to chancellors in our system," Blank said Friday.

Oblinger had spent more than two decades in administration at NCSU. At the time of his resignation, he was within six months of qualifying for his full administrative salary for a year and a faculty appointment at 60 percent of that salary, or $252,000 a year.

The six-month pay at the chancellor's rate that Bowles brokered initially seemed reasonable, he said Friday, adding that he understood the decision his governing board made to change it.

"I felt what I offered him was fair," Bowles said. "It was judging him in full context of his career at the university. But the board members did what they felt was right."

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Related Content

- Grand jury wants UNC documents on Easley
'Pirate Trike' latest wheeled creation cruising campus

By
ECU News Services

Sunday, August 16, 2009

Around Greenville, a purple-and-gold vehicle with flames on the side and a skull-and-crossbones on the roof wouldn't be all that unusual.

But this one is.

Larry Remick, a plumber at the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University, spent about three years building this three-wheeled, two-seat motorcycle, or trike. He painted it this year, and that's when it really started drawing attention.

"People love the Pirates around here," he said. "It's just an eye-catcher going down the road."

The trike is powered by a 1,600-cubic-centimeter, air-cooled, four-cylinder engine and transaxle from a 1968 Volkswagen Beetle. The engine had been flooded during Hurricane Floyd, so Remick had to rebuild it after he acquired it.

In the process, he replaced the stock single-barrel carburetor with a two-barrel Weber carb to give the engine a little more power.

The trike's front fork is from a mid-1980s Honda Shadow. Remick traded a motorized bicycle for it. The rear wheels came off an old Ford Mustang. The rest Remick built himself.

"All this stuff is pretty much salvage material," he said, estimating he's spent $600 total on it, plus a lot of hours.

This trike is the third Remick has built during the past 30 years. On one he put cedar shingles and cut a moon-shaped window in it.

"It looked like an outhouse," he said. "Building these things is a lot easier than figuring out what you want it to look like."

Trikes aren't uncommon. Some riders are older and less able to balance a heavy two-wheeled motorcycle, but others just want something different, and trikes have grown into their own motorcycle subgroup.

Most keep the traditional single seat straddling the frame with a passenger seat behind. With Remick's, driver and passenger sit beside each other.

"My wife rides with me quite often," he said. "She's been on the back of every motorcycle I've owned. Now she's on the side in this one."

Instead of a throttle, brake and clutch on the handlebars like a traditional motorcycle, Remick's trike has three pedals on the floor.

"It's different from your normal trike," he said. "It's a completely different experience. You have to get used to something like this."

Getting used to it also means being exposed to the outside with no bodywork between you and the world and the odd sensation — compared to riding a motorcycle — of looking to the side and seeing the front wheel turning.

"It drives like a car, so most people who know how to drive a stick-shift could drive this thing," Remick said.
The trike has gained fans around the health sciences campus.

"It's kind of neat," Sammy Snead, an HVAC technician at Brody, said. "It gets a lot of attention."

New geography chair joins ECU faculty

Dr. Burrell E. Montz has joined the faculty at ECU as chair of the Department of Geography in the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences.

Montz comes to ECU from Binghamton University at the State University of New York, where she began her academic career nearly 30 years ago in the Department of Geography and the Environmental Studies Program. There she served as associate chairwoman of the department, director of environmental studies and director of geography graduate studies before becoming chair in 2008.

Throughout her academic career, Montz has taught courses in environmental policy and planning, flooding and flood management, weather and climate, resource management and natural hazards. She is the co-author of two books, "Natural Hazards: Explanation and Integration" (1997) and "The Great Midwestern Floods of 1993" (1994), and she has authored or co-authored more than 100 additional publications in her areas of research and study.

"I'm very excited about being part of this vibrant Geography Department and campus," Montz said. "The interests of the department fit very well with my own research and teaching, and ECU offers wonderful opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration that has been important throughout my career."

Montz received her doctorate in geography from the University of Colorado, Boulder; her master's degree in geography from Oklahoma State University; and her bachelor's degree in geography from Mary Washington College in Virginia.

Outreach scholars graduate first class

The first class of the ECU Student Engagement and Outreach Scholars Academy (SEOSA) received certificates of graduation recently in a ceremony at the Willis Building auditorium.

The 10 student scholars of the summer student academy were recognized by Vice Chancellor Deirdre Mageean, Associate Vice Chancellor of Engagement, Innovation and Economic Development Ted Morris, Provost Marilyn Sheerer and Dr. Phyllis Horns, vice chancellor of health sciences, for their work on research projects with faculty EOSA scholars and community partners.

The scholars with their faculty mentors and project titles are:

Caroline Berry, who worked with Dr. Jane Painter (occupational therapy); Understanding the Lived Experience and Meaning of Falls and Fear of Falling among Community-Dwelling Adults 65 Years and Older Living in Greenville.

Dale Harris and Annie Slye, who worked with Dr. Yaprak Savut and Hunt McKinnon (interior design); An Alternative Delivery System for Assisted Living Services for the Next Generation of Americans.

Alisha Flynn, who worked with Dr. Rebecca Dumlao (communications); Communication by ECU Student Tutors and Site Coordinators Working with Project HEART.

Sayward Harrison, who worked with Dr. Jeannie Golden (psychology); Partnering with Parents: The Development of a Community-Based Parent Training Program.

Keeley J. Pratt, who worked with Dr. David N. Collier of the Brody School of Medicine; East Carolina 4-Healthy Kids — Hertford County.

Maria Trull McDonald, who worked with Dr. Jim Mitchell (sociology); An Analysis of Gerontology Research and Community Engagement; and with Dr. Michael Harris (management); Understanding the Entrepreneurial Activities of Minority Small Business Owners.

Hannah Priest, John Rhodes and Alicia Moran, who worked with Dr. Sharon Rogers (health education and promotion); Identifying Meaningful and Feasible Measures of Well-Being for Persons with Alzheimer's Disease or Related Dementias.

"The students who participated in the summer 2009 SEOSA truly understood community engagement," Dr. Beth Velde, director of SEOSA, said. "They applied the research knowledge they gained in the SOESA workshops and
challenged our faculty scholars to move from outreach to engagement.”

For more information about the academy, visit http://www.ecu.edu/oeied.

Miles is president of hospice association

Jane Miles, clinical assistant professor in the College of Nursing, began her term July 1 as president of the board of directors for the Association for Home and Hospice Care of North Carolina.

The organization represents 700 agencies that serve 100,000 people in every county of the state.

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Willson named chairman of N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission

Monday, August 17, 2009

Dr. Chuck Willson of the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University was unanimously elected as the new chairman of the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund commission.

Gov. Bev Perdue held the position of chairwoman since the HWTF commission’s inception in 2001. Willson also has served since 2001 on the HWTF commission, where he has chaired the research, education and prevention task force and remains a member of the obesity and wellness task force.

"Dr. Chuck Willson has been a committed and highly valued member of the commission and a passionate advocate for the health of North Carolina's citizens," Perdue said. "I am confident that the commission will continue its critical mission with the benefit of his exceptional leadership."

A pediatric physician and dedicated child advocate, Willson joined the faculty at the Brody School of Medicine after 19 years in private practice. He is a clinical professor of pediatrics and serves as co-director for the Center for Children with Complex and Chronic Conditions.

Willson has served on the executive committee of the N.C. Pediatric Society since 1986. A former president of the North Carolina Medical Society, he is a member of the N.C. American Medical Association (AMA) delegation. Last year, the UNC-CH Medical Alumni Association awarded Willson a distinguished service award.

Willson has been involved in the development of a unique, physician-led primary care case management model for North Carolina Medicaid patients. He held the position of medical director for the Community Care Plan of Eastern Carolina for 12 years, serving more than 100,000 patients in 27 counties across eastern North Carolina.

The N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, the HWTF has invested $199 million to support preventive health initiatives and $102 million to fund prescription drug assistance programs. For more information, visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

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Aug. 17 — People in the News

Monday, August 17, 2009

Promotion

Everett K. Kelly Jr. has been promoted to assistant vice president at First South Bank. In his role as branch manager of the bank’s branch at 301 E. Arlington Blvd., Kelly is responsible for consumer lending, retail banking and overseeing branch operations.

Kelly joined First South Bank in August 2005 as a loan servicing specialist in the bank’s loan operations department. In September 2006, he was promoted credit analyst and in October 2007, he was promoted to branch manager and opened Greenville’s newest branch location on Greenville Boulevard.

In May 2008, Kelly moved to Greenville’s Arlington Boulevard branch location and still serves as branch manager.

Kelly, a native of Wilmington who now lives in Greenville, is a graduate of St. Andrews Presbyterian College, where he received his bachelor’s degree in business management. He is an ambassador for the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce and is involved with Communities in Schools of Pitt County.

First South Bank operates through its headquarters in Washington, N.C. It has 28 branch offices and a loan production office throughout central, eastern, northeastern and southeastern North Carolina.

Board election

Paul J. Gempertine, associate vice chancellor for research and graduate studies and the acting dean of graduate studies at East Carolina University, has been named to the North Carolina Association for Biomedical Research board of directors.

Also named were Naina Bhasin, the director of business and technology development at The Hamner Institutes for Health Sciences in Research Triangle Park; Stanley Faeth, head of the biology department and a professor of biology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro; and Mary G. Grant, deputy chief of the comparative medicine branch at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences in Research Triangle Park.

Each new director will serve a three-year term.

The NCABR is a statewide, science education nonprofit organization that promotes public understanding and support for bioscience research. The association’s members include academia, industry, government, hospitals, nonprofit research, voluntary health and other nonprofit organizations.

Moses Singh, gas planning engineer in the Gas Systems Department at Greenville Utilities, was recently elected president of the Engineers of North Carolina — East Carolina Chapter.

Awards

Henry McNeese, a former Greenville resident now with the Raleigh branch of AXA Advisors LLC, has earned the AXA Advisors NLC Superior Achievement Award for outstanding sales achievements.

The NLC Superior Achievement Award recognizes financial professionals for outstanding sales achievement, symbolizing excellence in the profession and a commitment to clients. McNeese will be presented the Superior Achievement at an awards ceremony during the AXA Advisors National Leaders Conference next year in Miami.
McNeese has 19 years of experience in the industry. He joined AXA Advisors as a financial professional in 1991.

McNeese focuses on helping individuals and business owners address their financial goals and provides an array of financial protection and investment products and services including life insurance, annuities and investments as well as college, estate, retirement and business planning strategies.

McNeese holds the LUTCF professional designation.

He is active in professional and community organizations including the Salvation Army Board, Carolina Kiwanis and United Way.

Certifications

Jeff Sutton, water resources systems supervisor at Greenville Utilities, recently passed the examination for his B Distribution certification from the North Carolina American Water Works Association and the North Carolina Water Environment Association.

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Perdue orders spending cut 5 percent

BY MARK JOHNSON, Staff Writer

RALEIGH - A little more than a week after the legislature passed a tardy state budget, Gov. Beverly Perdue ordered state agencies Friday to cut their spending by 5 percent.

Administration officials said the move, which takes effect Sept. 1, does not signal the budget is already out of balance. They call the cut temporary, a precautionary move until the tax increases in the new budget start pumping more money into the state's accounts.

"It's mostly for cash flow," said David Kochman, Perdue's communications director. "We're early in the new budget. A lot of the revenue streams don't kick in for a while."

The $19 billion budget passed last week and signed by Perdue included $1 billion in new taxes. Most of that will come from a 1-cent sales tax increase; but that won't take effect until Sept. 1, and businesses won't start paying it until October. An income-tax surcharge in the budget won't generate money until next spring.

"While the fiscal outlook is somewhat better, a high level of uncertainty still remains," State Budget Director Charlie Perusse said in a memo dispatched to state agencies late Friday.

School classrooms, law enforcement, health care and public safety are exempt from the cut.

Agency officials did not express alarm, noting that they were already operating on reduced budgets. They made cuts last year and, when the legislature failed to pass a budget on schedule by July 1, lawmakers authorized temporary spending at a 15 percent reduction from last year's budget.

"Even before the budget was passed, we had become accustomed to operating with a tight belt. It says we'll have to continue to do that," said Renee McCoy, a spokeswoman for the Department of Health and Human Services.

She said the agency does not expect to reduce or eliminate services beyond what the budget already called for.
Sen. Linda Garrou, a Winston-Salem Democrat and budget writer, said the cut was a prudent management move by Perdue.

"I appreciate her being cautious at the beginning of the fiscal year," Garrou said.

The order Perdue issued Friday thawed an earlier freeze on travel and pay raises. Agency heads can now approve those instead of sending them to the state budget office for consideration.

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Some sign up for a taste of H1N1

Duke puts swine flu vaccine to test

BY GABE STAROSTA, Staff Writer

DURHAM - While many North Carolinians battle H1N1 influenza against their will, some Triangle residents have volunteered to be injected with the disease, hoping to help themselves and others fight off more severe cases in coming months.

Doctors at Duke began testing two different kinds of H1N1 vaccines eight days ago in a study set to last six weeks. About 200 volunteers will participate in the trial, one of three of its kind nationwide.

Jean O'Briant, 80, is one of those volunteers. She was approached about the project by a colleague she had worked with at the Durham VA Medical Center, and she and her husband both signed up.

"We're anxious to not have the swine flu, and they think this might prevent us from getting it," she said. "We want to stay as healthy as we can for as long we can."

State and federal authorities have said they hope to make the vaccine available to the public in October and have predicted that the first wave of the disease will arrive in September.

H1N1 is a novel strain of influenza that was originally thought to be severe, but is now considered by health officials to be no more serious than the seasonal flu. The state Department of Health and Human Services no longer keeps count of how many people contract swine flu because symptoms and treatment options are comparable to seasonal flu. Instead, it tracks how many people are hospitalized or die of the disease. Eight people in North Carolina have died of H1N1.

Closely tracked

The study asks volunteers to make five visits. In the first, volunteers have their blood drawn and receive an H1N1 vaccine. They return eight days later to have blood drawn again to determine what kind of impact the flu strain has had on the body, Dr. Emmanuel "Chip" Walter, director of Duke's Clinical Vaccine Unit, said Friday.

Two weeks later, the volunteer returns to the office and repeats the process with an altered version of the vaccine. Monitoring continues after the six-week period by telephone to keep tabs on any changes or developments as a safety precaution, Walter said. The difference between the two types of vaccines being tested has to do with the dose. One shot contains a quantity of the disease equivalent to that given in a seasonal flu shot; the other contains double that amount.

And while a seasonal flu shot contains three different strains of the disease, the H1N1 vaccine contains only one strain, Walter said.

Deciding to help
Volunteers have heard about the trials in various ways. Jennifer Martinez, 30, who received her first H1N1 shot Friday, is a fourth-year graduate student in immunology at Duke. She said she has been paying attention to the development of the vaccine all summer because of her interest in medicine and heard about the trial through her participation in an unrelated study at Duke.

Media coverage of swine flu had attracted some volunteers, Walter said, and many couples, like the O'Briants, are taking part together. Walter said it's not clear whether the vaccine will be effective, and volunteers in the study are told that.

O'Briant decided to give it a shot anyway, saying she was willing to get the vaccine even though she knows it might not prevent her from getting ill in the fall.

"I think it's worth taking the chance," she said.

The study being conducted at Duke involves people 18 and older. A parallel study, also conducted at Duke, involves children. Duke is one of three testing sites for the vaccine, which is being manufactured by pharmaceutical company Sanofi Pasteur. The others are Vanderbilt University in Nashville and the University of Maryland in College Park.

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Volunteers needed

Doctors are still looking for people over 65 and, even more needed, children to volunteer for the H1N1 vaccine study.

To volunteer, call the Duke Clinical Vaccine Unit at 620-5350. Volunteers are compensated $200. Office visits are at 4020 N. Roxboro Road in Durham.

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ECU Merchants Fair scheduled for Sept. 3

Monday, August 17, 2009

The annual ECU Merchants Fair will be held from 1-4 p.m. on Sept. 3 on the ECU campus mall.

The merchant fair is part of "Get a Clue" featuring hundreds of campus organizations and thousands of students and gives local businesses a chance to showcase their products and services.

All merchants will be provided a table and three chairs. Parking passes will be provided. The deadline for registration is Aug. 26 at 5 p.m. For more information contact Amanda Meyer at amanda@greenvillenc.org.

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Those pickaxes are part of UNCC branding campaign

The Associated Press

Sunday, August 16, 2009

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The University of North Carolina at Charlotte is branding itself.

The school has installed larger-than-life pickax sculptures at three locations to reinforce its “Stake Your Claim” brand campaign that officially debuts Monday. The sculptures are located at the campus’ Dickson Gate entrance; in the atrium of Charlotte Douglas International Airport; and at the First Citizen’s Plaza in Center City Charlotte.

The pickaxes refer to the school’s nickname, the 49ers, named for the discovery of gold in the area in the mid-19th century.

The school says it plans ads that will highlight UNCC’s strengths in scholarship, research, arts and culture and athletics.

No state dollars are being used for the campaign.

Aug 16, 2009 - 04:00 a.m. EDT

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