

The Blue Banner

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Features



Modernized MacBeth opens in Carol Belk Theatre Oct. 28

See page 4

Sports



Volleyball places third in Bulldog Invitational

See page 7

Opinions



Tolerance is a viewpoint, not an act, by Kevin Rollins

See page 3

Harassment concerns students

Forum held in response to complaints



PHOTO BY JUSTIN MECKES

Chancellor Jim Mullen opens the forum Sept. 25 in Lipinsky Hall. Around 150 students sit in the audience.

Rachel Crumpler
Staff Writer
Keith Cromwell
Guest Writer

UNCA held a Diversity Forum on Sept. 25 as a reaction to nine harassment cases that have occurred on campus this semester. However, several individuals said they do not believe harassment is a problem at UNCA.

"The focus (of the forum) was to re-emphasize the importance of diversification, and that we at UNCA are a

community," said Ryan Southern, president of the Student Government Association. "I do not think harassment is a problem on campus. From what I can tell, the incidences that occurred this semester are relatively rare."

Matt Witbrodt, organizer of the event and a junior history and political science major, worked with Terhan McDaniel, a senior drama major, and Jeanine Ammirati, a junior business management and administration major, to put together the forum. Witbrodt said he planned the forum to educate students and open their

eyes to the harassment that has taken place.

Students "either see what is going on around campus, or they are blind to (the problems)," said Witbrodt. "I just want to raise student awareness and let them know that (harassment) will not be tolerated."

Meg Dutnell, assistant director of student development, said she would not see harassment as a problem if she decided purely on the statistics, but some incidents may not have involved public safety.

"I really cannot say whether harassment is a problem on this campus or not," said Dutnell. "You know, there could have been many more incidents, but students may not have reported them."

Witbrodt said he felt obligated to create the forum to prevent further incidents and to react to the racial and ethnic slurs, verbal harassment and physical assault that has been occurring on campus.

"To stand by and say nothing is just as bad as being a part of the problem," said Witbrodt.

Witbrodt directed the forum at the freshman class because he said freshmen are to blame for a lot of the harassment.

Harassment "became a problem at the beginning of this semester," said Witbrodt. "There was not a whole lot that had changed (on campus), except for the addition of 500 new students. In all complaints that I have been made aware of, freshmen have initiated the action."

Several freshman students

See FORUM page 11

Two basketball players accused of harassment

Rachel Crumpler
Staff Writer
Keith Cromwell
Guest Writer

Two freshman basketball players were accused of harassment on three different occasions by two members of UNCA-OUT, according to a public safety incident report.

"Being gay is accepted, and that is not right. I know I am going to offend some people by saying that," said Allan Lovett, an undeclared freshman and one of the accused basketball players. "It is their choice, and they can do what they want (to do). But they do not need to act it out, like the boys who walk around swinging their arms."

The two UNCA-OUT members, Keith Wyatt, a sophomore cultural psychology major, and Josh Lunsford, a junior French major, said they feel they have been harassed for being openly gay, according to the report. They said Lovett and Allen have harassed them a total of three times within the span of 10 days.

"The first incident occurred outside of Founders Hall," said Wyatt. "I heard a guy say 'faggot,' and I turned around. I just blew it off."

Lovett said that he denied all allegations, and Billy Allen, an undeclared freshman and the other accused basketball player, had no comment to make regarding the accusation.

"I have not disrespected any group on campus," said

Lovett. "I do not know why all this is going on."

According to the report, the second incident happened outside the cafeteria, where the two students were called "faggot" again.

"I heard 'faggot,'" said Wyatt. "When I turned around, the guy had his head down. He said, 'oh my God, he heard me.' I said, 'faggots come with ears too.' They started laughing, so I walked off."

According to the incident report, Wyatt and Lunsford requested for the case to be sent to student conduct.

"I am not scared, but I am afraid that it will escalate," said Lunsford. "I am afraid that somebody will get hurt."

Joni Comstock, director of the athletic program, said she remains unsure what action, if any, she will take against the players if the allegations are proven.

"We will discuss the outcome of any and all decisions by the student conduct board," said Comstock. Then we will "determine any action we would take at that time."

Lunsford and Wyatt were also harassed in the parking lot of Founders Hall, according to the report.

"I saw (Lovett) and this other guy in their car," said Lunsford. "I heard one say, 'look, he will not even look at me.' I just blew that off, because I had no reason to look at him. So I kept walking."

"I heard him say, 'hey,' several times, each time louder and more vicious," said

See PLAYER page 11

Former student found with gun

Kay Alton
Staff Writer

A former UNCA freshman was charged with a felony possession of a weapon on school grounds after threatening suicide on Sept. 24 at 11:50 p.m., according to the department of public safety.

"Our concern is that this individual, (who) had a loaded shotgun on campus (and was) threatening to hurt himself, could come back," said Eric Iovacchini, vice chancellor of student affairs.

Public safety received a phone call from an unidentified student that alerted them to the situation.

"A distraught person with a loaded shotgun is very much considered a danger to the campus community," said an e-mail from the office of public information.

"Should he be released and return to campus in a similar state of mind, it is of the utmost importance that those on campus know of the possible danger."

The caller reported that Weston had written a suicide note, which was in his car, along with a loaded 20-gauge shotgun and a box full of shotgun shells, according to Adams.

"This person felt uneasy about the situation and talked Weston into giving her his car keys," said Adams. "She was pretty nervous and concerned

about him. Before she got to the car with him, she came back and called us."

At that time, Officers Vicki Harris and Bruce Martin responded by calling for additional help from Adams and Dennis Gregory, director of public safety. When the patrol car approached from Founders Hall to Weston's car, he immediately fled into the woods below, according to Adams.

"From his car, we recovered a loaded 20-gauge shotgun, a full box of shotgun shells and a letter indicating to us he was possibly planning to commit suicide," said Adams.

Weston was taken into custody, and officers called the Housing Office, Counseling Center and Iovacchini, as well as the parents of Weston and the caller. Weston was later admitted at a local hospital unit, according to Adams.

Some students said they believe a campus-wide e-mail sent on Sept. 24 that contained Weston's name and details about the incident was inappropriate.

"I was naturally disturbed about (the incident) because I liked him very much as a person, and I was also surprised by the distasteful matter in which the e-mail was distributed," said Audrey Hope Rinehart, an undeclared freshman and friend of Weston.

See WESTON page 11

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-Audrey Hope Rinehart, an undeclared freshman and friend of Weston.

Students help clean rivers with Quality Forward

Sanna Raza
Staff Writer

Around 20 UNCA students participated in the "Big Sweep 2000," a river clean-up along the French Broad and Swannanoa rivers, on Sept. 16.

"Everybody was getting wet, dirty and nasty, and we were really tired by the end of the day, but you know you have done something really great," said Ben Erlandson, a senior multimedia arts and science major.

After participating in a river sweep, people are often astounded and disappointed in the amounts of trash that they find in the rivers, according to Gretchen Brooks, river improvement coordinator of

Quality Forward. "It awakens a lot of people to the fact that litter is such a huge problem," said Brooks. "People (realize) that they need to try and help correct our problems. They realize that is the water they will eventually drink."

Quality Forward, a local non-profit environmental group, has been in Asheville for 25 years. Apart from water quality, they also address environmental education, tree plantings, garden plantings, recycling and composting promotions, according to Brooks.

"The disappointing thing is that the sites along the French Broad that we (cleaned) are sites that were done almost each of the previous 20 years, and we still find the same amounts of trash in there," said Brooks.

During the big sweep, 608

volunteers cleaned up 16 sites along the two rivers and gathered an estimated total weight of 46,000 pounds of trash. Apart from 390 tires, they found a microwave, a VCR, a dishwasher, cash registers, newspaper boxes, TVs, a shotgun and many other unusual items, according to Brooks.

"We found a lot of 55-gallon chemical drums, which is very sad, because we do not know what was in them, and it has already gotten into the water supply," said Brooks.

The sweep was a lot of fun, and it was also interesting to see what people would throw into a river, according to Lauren Penix, an undeclared sophomore.

"We got six or seven tires and a parking meter that was interesting trying to pull up," said Penix. "I had no idea how dirty these rivers were. It is

amazing to see how stupid people are."

"Until you actually go and see how dirty it is, you have no idea," said Penix. "It is an eye-opener."

While it was necessary to remove the trash, it was even more important to raise awareness, according to Lyn French, UNCA's representative board member of Quality Forward and director of planned giving on campus.

"It was fun to watch the students," said French. "Some of them were pretty angry that it looked that bad, others were just digging and doing it, not so much agonizing over it as being action-oriented."

"I felt like we did a good job," said Bethany Bostrom, a senior environmental science major. "We took out so much trash, but I think what needs to be done is make people

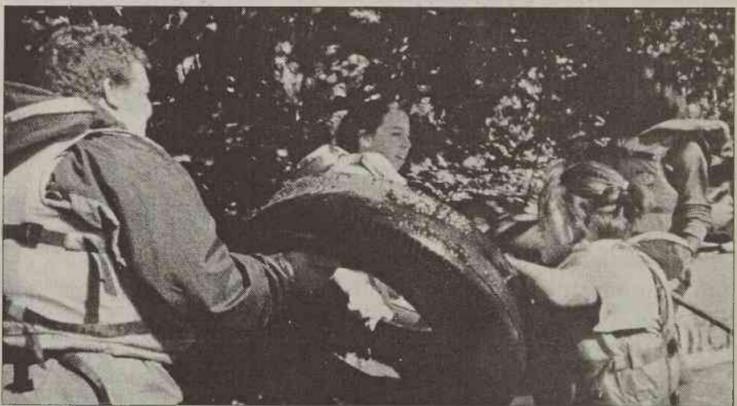


PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY GRETCHEN BROOKS

The river clean-up volunteers pull several of the 390 tires found in the French Broad and Swannanoa rivers.

aware of their actions and consequences."

Water quality is a problem in the mountains of N.C., and it is unfortunate that the

French Broad is one of the most polluted rivers, according to Summer Starling, an undeclared sophomore.

"It made me sad, (and) it

made me angry there was trash," said Starling. "But it

See RIVERS page 10