

More Rain Predicted On the Hill

The near-record number of rainy days in Chapel Hill has stalled construction and could lead to more flooding.

By COURTNEY MABEUS
Assistant City Editor

As meteorologists predict three more days of rain, Chapel Hill could match the state record set in 1982 for 11 consecutive days of precipitation.

And the town could face more flooding problems in coming months, with an active hurricane season in the forecast.

Bruce Heflin, director of Chapel Hill's Department of Public Works said the rain has caused town officials to divert their attention from day-to-day tasks and forced them to focus on weather-related problems.

Heflin said the rain has stalled construction on Franklin Street sidewalks, a job he said officials hoped to complete before the beginning of the school year. "The town has lost a few weeks," he said.

Officials with the National Weather Service said local rain measurements are already 3.67 inches above average for this time of year. So far, 33.31 inches of rain have fallen at Raleigh-Durham International Airport this year, weather service officials said.

Chapel Hill's average rainfall stands at 45.1 inches per year, according to reports found on the Web site <http://www.WorldClimate.com>.

Fred Royal, Chapel Hill's stormwater engineer, said it has been difficult for local officials to repair roadways damaged by heavy rainfall this summer.

"We've had continued nuisance flooding problems," Royal said. "These rains don't allow us to solve those problems as soon as possible."

He said with ground saturation and the state's history of hurricanes, the area could be looking at future flooding problems. "It's the same potential set up as last year," Royal said. "We had a lot of rain, then we had (Hurricane) Dennis. Then we had (Hurricane) Floyd. Luckily, the rains we've been having are not as severe. As long as we don't get any significance storm damage, it won't make much difference."

Gordon Edwards, a manager at Play It Again Sports in Eastgate Shopping Center, said he is relieved the rain has not been torrential.

"We still get the usual puddles out there in the parking lot," he said.

Eastgate was ravaged in July by storms, which flooded some stores with up to 4 feet of water and left an estimated \$6 million to \$8 million in damage.

Edwards added that the store's new flood insurance policy kicked in Sept. 1. The plan protects the store in the event that future flooding should occur.

"It was just too expensive (before)."

The City Editor can be reached at citydesk@unc.edu.

Voting Stations Open 3 Weeks Early

By MARK THOMAS
Assistant University Editor

Students who say they are too busy to cast a ballot on Election Day are running out of excuses.

Following a four-year cooperative effort, UNC's External Relations Committee, which acts as a liaison between the University and its surrounding community, has found a new way students can vote.

With the implementation of one-stop, or "satellite," voting, registered Orange County voters will be able to cast their ballot up to three weeks in advance.

"It's the same as absentee voting but more convenient for voters," said Jessica Triche, External Relations Committee chairwoman.

Beginning Oct. 16, voters can visit new polling stations in UNC's Morehead Planetarium from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The doors will stay open until Nov. 3.

Triche said this allows even students with hectic schedules ample time to vote.

"A lot of students are busy," she said.

"But now there is a place close to everyone and it's open for nearly three



Student Body President Brad Matthews says satellite voting stations are ideal for busy students.

weeks."

Triche said the N.C. General Assembly approved satellite voting in passing the One-Stop Voting bill in March, which the External Relations Committee had been pushing for four years.

Student Body President Brad Matthews said Triche was instrumental in bringing satellite voting to UNC.

"She deserves the bulk of the credit for seeing this thing through," he said. "The size of the bureaucratic mountains she had to move is amazing."

Triche, who began working on the issue over three years ago, said inconvenient polling locations and practices motivated her to push for satellite voting.

There are six different places for stu-

dents to vote, and many students aren't aware of where they are supposed to go, she said.

"A lot of students don't know that moving from Hinton James (Residence Hall) to Ehringhaus means you have a different polling spot," she said.

"I was mad I had to go to all these different places to vote."

Matthews said the arrival of satellite voting came at a critical time, as the fate of a \$3.1 billion bond package rests in the hands of N.C. voters this November.

The package will be used to fund capital improvements at all 16 UNC schools and N.C. community colleges if approved.

"We need this bond to pass," he said.

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Grade Reform Will Require Team Effort

ANNE FAWCETT

Last semester when the Faculty Council and economics Professor Boone Turchi examined whether grade inflation is a problem at UNC, they seemed to approach it from a micro-perspective (one university in isolation) instead of a macro-perspective (our university as it interacts with others).

Grade inflation is the idea that professors assign the same grades for lower quality work, so an A means less than it did when our parents were in school.

I don't think the committee can reach a good solution without addressing the way our policies might give a competitive advantage to graduates of other top public universities with unadjusted grade inflation.

U.S. News & World Report made it easy to pinpoint our competition, known in the academic community as UNC's "peer institutions."

Rankings released last week showed UNC tied with the University of Michigan and the University of California-Los Angeles for third among the best public universities in the nation. Ahead were only the University of Virginia and the University of California-Berkeley.

UNC students have the lowest average grade point average of any of these schools, a 3.0 as of the 1999 spring semester. UNC's peers range from a low of 3.093 at UCLA to a high of 3.14 at UC-Berkeley. Thus students at these schools have at least a 10th of a point advantage over the average UNC graduate, even with alleged grade inflation here.

But don't be too quick to assume that our peers have bigger problems with grade inflation than we do. Of the four, only UVA. admits that its average GPA of 3.13 should be addressed. UVA. classics Professor Jon Mikalson said the university's dean of faculty placed halting grade inflation high on his priority list.

In contrast, faculty and staff at UC-Berkeley and UCLA said individual professors might acknowledge grade inflation, but it's not a pressing institutional issue. "Professors are pretty good about giving grades and the like," said UC-Berkeley registrar Suzanne Castillo-Robson. "It's always a concern because grades are the coin of the realm, so to speak; the faculty feel an A really should be an A."

And then there's the philosophy that talking about grade inflation might make it real, as at Michigan. A press officer there warned me that grade inflation was a non-issue and that most likely, no one would talk about it. He was right.

Because most of UNC's peers seem content to leave their grades alone, a comparison of average GPAs can easily be gut-wrenching for pre-med and pre-law students. If UNC lowers the average GPA to a 2.7 as Turchi proposes, students from these other universities could be significantly ahead of UNC graduates. "There's a difficulty in attacking grade inflation at one institution because it puts our students at a disadvantage when they're applying to (graduate schools)," Mikalson said.

Likewise, Turchi considers this the one valid argument against his efforts.

Why go it alone? Although UNC's and UVA. are rivals, the schools do have a bond; they want to institute grade reform but are concerned at the policy's potential side effects.

Grade reform is inevitable. UNC should team up with like-minded universities to enact new policies together. This would force other universities to examine their grades. Some of them really might not have a problem, but others could just be in denial.

Such a plan thrills Turchi. "It would give us the competitive advantage if we got together with the good, big state universities and formed an association for accuracy in grading," he gushed. "It would have a major impact ... and make other schools want to join this movement."

The Faculty Council has embarked on a mission that's unpopular with students here and the powers that be at schools across the country. Nevertheless, UNC should embrace its status as one of the nation's premier public universities and work with UVA. to show its peers how to do the right thing.

Columnist Anne Fawcett can be reached at fawcetta@hotmail.com.



DIAGRAM COURTESY OF ORANGE COMMUNITY HOUSING CORP.

Town Offers Affordable Housing

\$1.6 Billion Project Has April Finish Date

By MATT MANSFIELD
Staff Writer

Dawn Stephens, an employee at a local law firm, finally has the chance to live in the town limits despite earning an income that falls below the local average.

"I'm actually excited about owning something instead of throwing out (rent) money every month," she said.

With the median price of housing in Chapel Hill reaching \$250,000, two local nonprofit organizations collaborated to provide more affordable housing. The Community Land Trust in Orange County and the Orange Community Housing Corp. obtained land from the Town Council in 1998 to begin building Legion Road Townhomes for people with lower incomes.

Rep. David Price, D-N.C., and Chapel Hill Mayor Rosemary Waldorf participated in a groundbreaking ceremony Tuesday for the dwellings, initiating a project providing affordable housing for area residents. The new homes are located on the corner of Scarlett Drive and Legion Road. "Price supports the land trust and, in general, wants to provide affordable housing for people in Orange County," said Thomas Bates, Price's press secretary. "They're getting priced out of the market, and he wants to fix that."

The housing corporation and the land trust have already sold seven of the townhomes to people who meet its requirements. That criteria includes working in the town of Chapel Hill and earning an income below the town median of \$59,000. Buyers include a schoolteacher and three UNC Hospitals employees.

Price, a member of the House Appropriations Committee that decides how federal funds are allocat-



DTH/KATE MELLNIK

Key players in the fight for affordable housing join future homeowners at a groundbreaking Tuesday for 14 subsidized townhomes in Chapel Hill.

ed, helped the cause by securing \$230,000 for the project.

The housing corporation and the land trust acquired \$400,000 total in subsidies, receiving some money from both the town and Orange County. The organizations obtained additional private contributions. "The whole project is going to cost \$1.6 million," said Robert Dowling, executive director of the housing corporation.

"Building should be done by April."

Dowling said the housing corporation and the land trust overcame numerous obstacles, such as financial constraints, a long approval process and criticism by residents near the project who thought the term "affordable housing" carried negative connotations.

"At first, neighbors were skeptical

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Fate of Presidential Debates at WFU in Limbo

By JENNIFER HAGIN
Staff Writer

After investing \$550,000 and preparing for nearly a year, Wake Forest University's opportunity to host a presidential debate on Oct. 11 could be in jeopardy.

Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush is hesitant to participate in debates at

two of the three sites chosen by the Presidential Debate Commission, a bipartisan group that has selected presidential debate sites since 1988.

A spokesman from the Presidential Debate Commission said the commission is trying to meet with both parties in the next week to resolve the situation.

The commission announced in January that WFU would host one of the three presidential debates. The school hosted a debate between George Bush and Michael Dukakis in 1988.

UNC political science Professor

George Rabinowitz predicted a 40 to 50 percent chance the debate will occur at Wake Forest. "It depends on how the polling goes or how the media covers this," Rabinowitz said. "If they pick up on the idea of (Bush) avoiding a serious debate, it'll force a debate."

WDU spokesman Kevin Cox said delegates from the commission and national television networks will tour the WFU campus today to iron out logistical details for the debate, despite Bush's alternative plans. "Everybody is still preparing (for the debate) - us, the com-

mission and the networks," he said.

But Bush announced this week he would only debate Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore on NBC's Meet the Press, CNN's Larry King Live and at Washington University in St. Louis - one of the sites selected by the commission.

Rabinowitz said Bush is challenging the other two commission sites because he is not comfortable with the rigid debate format and would rather have one that allows him to talk openly with the audience. "He wants a format that

gives him an opportunity to show off his personality," Rabinowitz said.

But Rabinowitz added that the debate scheduled for the University of Massachusetts is on even shakier ground than Wake Forest's because Bush would likely shun an appearance in liberal Massachusetts. "North Carolina is traditionally a Republican presidential state and (Wake Forest University) is conservative," he said.

Cox said he does not know how

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Seminar Speaker Sparkles With Words on Writing

By ROBERT ALBRIGHT
Staff Writer

Joking that she learned to read out of "comic pages and the Bible," novelist and Professor Doris Betts traded laughs Tuesday with students and old friend Bill Friday.

Betts kicked off this year's "Tuesdays with Friday" seminar series, fielding questions and describing her love for teaching and writing.

The monthly seminar series, started last year by UNC-system President Emeritus Bill Friday and held at the James M. Johnston Center for Undergraduate Excellence, brings interested students and faculty into contact with "individuals dedicated to promoting the public good."

Betts, who has taught at UNC since 1966, offered humorous accounts of Southern literature

and stressed the value of reading and writing.

"Nothing could be better than to spend your life with words," Betts said. "Peanuts (character) Linus has his security blanket, and I have my pen."

Betts has written nine novels and short story collections. Several of Betts' works have also been adapted for stage performances by acting troupes, including PlayMakers Repertory Company.

Although she has been at UNC for more than 30 years, Betts said she will stop teaching at the end of this school year to focus on family and her writing.

Friday, who earned his law degree from UNC and served as the UNC-system president for 30 years, said Betts was an excellent choice to open this year's seminar season.

"When I read (Betts') books, I get the feeling

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DTH/SEFTON IPOCK

UNC English Professor Doris Betts answers questions about her experience as a novelist during this year's first installment of the "Tuesdays with Friday" series.