

# The Blue Banner



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## NEWS BRIEFS

by Justin Wagner  
Staff Reporter

**Local**  
Residents of WNC attended a forum to discuss the Regional Water Authority agreement. Developments over water rates and distribution, including city council's announcement last year of its intention to charge higher water rates in the county, caused clashes over how city and county officials will manage water distribution.

**State**  
UNC President Molly Broad plans to leave her position in spring 2006. Her eight-year tenure as head of UNC's 16 campuses occurred amid sharp tuition increases, budget cuts and swelling student enrollment.

Broad helped push the case for increasing tuition within the UNC system during a time when UNC officials wondered how to deal with increased enrollment as state funding began to diminish.

State House members voted 41 to 59 in favor of a bill that would bring a state lottery to North Carolina. A lottery could increase funds for WNC school districts by as much as \$14 million a year. The bill must still pass in the state Senate and gain approval of the governor later this year.

**National**  
Authorities in Tucson, Ariz., concluded that three volunteers from a civilian-based group created to monitor illegal border crossing played a prank on an illegal immigrant.

The volunteers located the immigrant along the Arizona/Mexican border. They will face no criminal charges because they did not detain the man.

President Bush recently referred to the Minutemen, a group of civilians who began a month-long campaign this April to independently monitor the U.S./Mexico border, as "vigilantes." Domestic groups in the country have voiced concern over possible violent excesses that may occur as a result of the group's efforts.

A federal judge sentenced Matthew Hale, leader of a white supremacy group known as Creativity, to 40 years in prison for soliciting an F.B.I. informant to murder Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkowitz, who at the time presided over a case involving the group.

Lefkowitz's interaction with the group gained national attention Feb. 28 when police found her mother and husband murdered in their home, and police suspected members of Hale's group responsible.

Bart A. Ross, a man possessing no connection to the group, later confessed to the killings before committing suicide.

**International**  
Thousands of protesters in Beijing and southern China staged anti-Japanese demonstra-

## UNCA alumnus recounts military tour in Iraq

by Justin Wagner  
Staff Reporter

A UNCA history graduate returned after a 10-month tour in Iraq and gave a presentation in the Laurel Forum on April 6, revealing daily aspects of life in post-Saddam Iraq.

"For the most part, the people there—most of them Kurdish—were very receptive to the United States," said Louis Toms, UNCA history graduate and current staff member. "We attempted to minimize our presence as much as possible."

After receiving word in Oct. 2003 that the North Carolina National Guard 30th Brigade would assume active duty in Iraq, Toms spent the winter training before his duties brought him to the predominantly Kurdish town of Balad Ruz, located northeast of Baghdad and 20 miles from the Iranian border.

Kurds, long repressed under Sunni Arab-dominated Iraqi governments, led a more peaceful coexistence with U.S. soldiers under the occupation than their counterparts in Fallujah or Ramadi, but local incidents of friction and misunderstanding persisted at times, according to Toms.

"When we got there, the Kurds started going through towns and kicking the Arabs out of their homes," said Toms. "Ten years ago, 20 years ago, their families were kicked out, so they thought this was the thing to do."

"We had to go back in and tell them that they couldn't do that." Ethnic animosity also created problems in the 30th Brigade's effort to train members of the Iraqi national guard, who resided on the base with the Americans.

This caused greater tension between the groups than differences of religion or any other single factor, according to Toms.

"The faith itself is not as problematic as the ethnic portion of it," said Toms.

"If they have Kurds in their mil-

itary, the Arabs won't do anything, and vice versa."

Images of American affluence also persisted in the minds of most Iraqis in Balad Ruz and created a misconception of the extent and ability of American soldiers and nongovernmental organization to issue aid, according to Toms.

"They see visions of New York City," said Toms. "They see plumbing, and they want that now. And it takes a while to get to that point."

Assistance to the community did, however, encompass efforts to allow children from the town to attend school, although many of the children focus on work rather than education, according to Toms.

"They have a school there, and we were in the process of rebuilding it," said Toms. "But, for the most part, children around there do not go to school."

"Females definitely don't get a full education. If they do, it is to go work to produce a product to help the family."

Aside from insurgent attacks, which were sparse around Balad Ruz, much of the chaos in the area was due to transportation issues and unexploded munitions in the countryside, according to Toms.

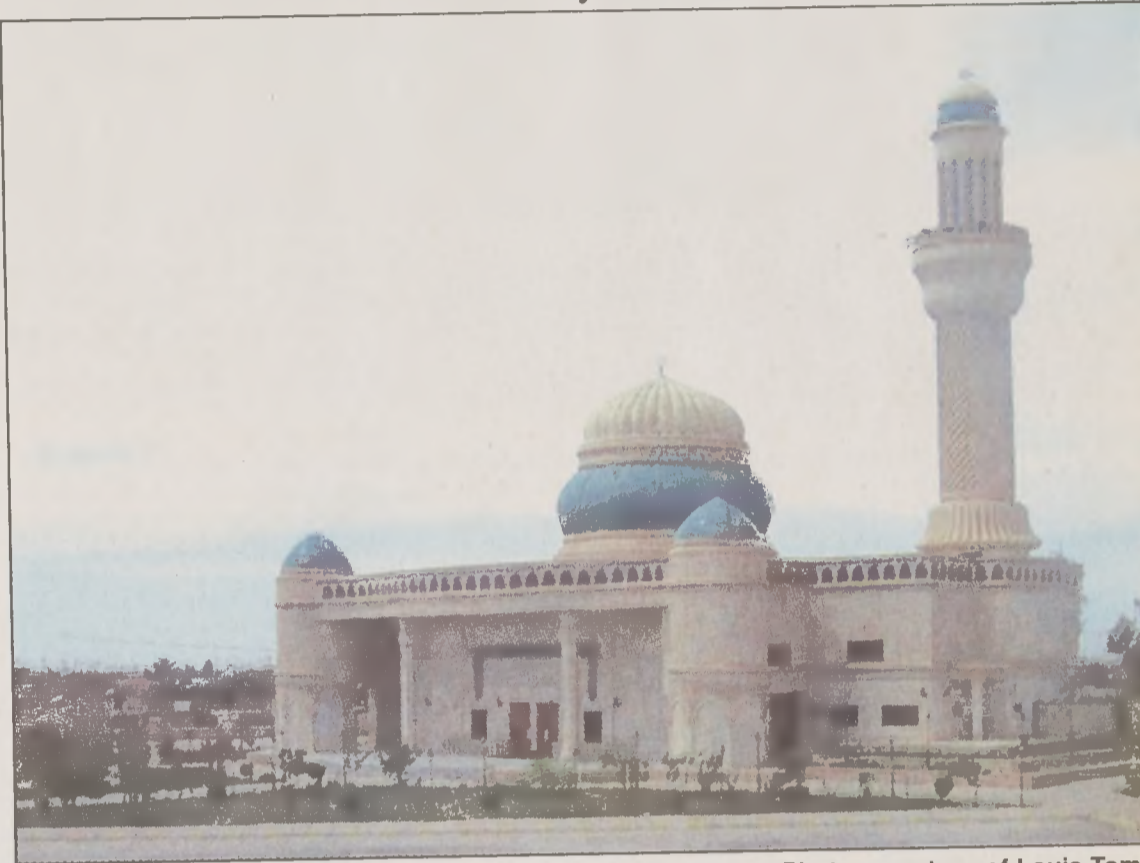
"In Iraq, there are no policemen or highway patrol officers to govern the road," said Toms. "So, therefore, you wind up going on the right side of traffic like you're supposed to, and you have people coming down your right."

"You've got people coming your way and not much you can do about it."

Toms said Soldiers also had to navigate Iraq's anarchic roads while simultaneously avoiding roadside bombs insurgents have used to target American soldiers.

The countryside around Balad Ruz is also riddled with unexploded ordnance left over from decades of war, according to Toms.

"We had our engineers go out and blow them all up," said Toms. "It wasn't just one area. It was within a five-square-mile radius that this stuff was just hanging out underneath the sun."



Photos courtesy of Louis Toms

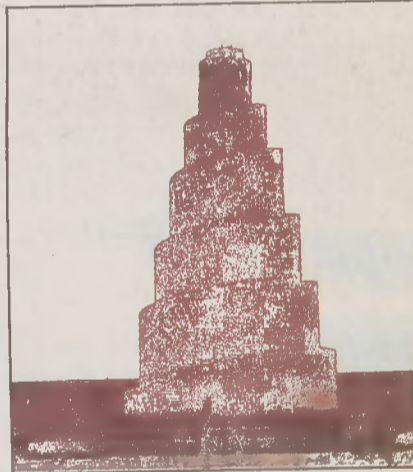
Louis Toms visited this mosque in Tuz during his tour in Iraq (above). A local Iraqi boy transports goods through his village (bottom left). This famous Spiral Minaret was built in Summara around 500-600 C.E. (bottom right).



One of the factors that prompted U.S. military engineers to take action was the local response to the problem. "There's good reason for it," said Toms. "We had an elder sheik in

our town who would hire kids to clean this stuff up and bring it to our front gates."

Architecture photographed by Toms included structures spanning the length of Iraq's history, from



the contemporary period to Iraq's entry into Islamic civilization. The presidential palaces constructed by Saddam in Tikrit high-

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## Students and faculty raise awareness of Darfur conflicts

by Sarah Schmidt  
Staff Reporter

Responding to violent conflict and suspected genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan, UNCA students and faculty distributed bracelets, held public talks and signed petitions in an effort to raise awareness about the issue.

Conflict broke out in the Darfur region between the Janjaweed, a government-supported Arabic militia, and the non-Arabic people. Rebel groups from Darfur, claiming discrimination against non-Arabs, mounted attacks against government forces in 2003. In response, the government sent in the Janjaweed, who have since targeted civilians on the basis of ethnicity, according to reports from refugees. Though casualty lists from the region list both Arabic and non-Arabic people, the majority of refugees are non-Arabs fleeing from the Janjaweed.

"It's one of the world's hellholes," said Mark Gibney, political science professor. "In this area of Sudan called the Darfur, the numbers are about 300,000 people dead. What you have here is the killing being done by the Sudanese government and the Janjaweed, and the victims here are overwhelmingly African. I think it's genocide."

Gibney gave a series of lectures on the Darfur conflict across WNC in conjunction with the World Affairs Council. Gibney said that he was surprised at the level of awareness of the lecture attendees on the subject of Darfur.

"In some respects, it's surprising that they are so aware of this," said Gibney. "The reason I say that is, something like the Congo, where almost four million people have died since 1998, most people know about that. I would say that Darfur is very much in the public consciousness."

"On the other hand, I can't imagine that there's a steady stream of letters going to Congress saying that we must do something about this."

UNCA students also joined in attempts to raise awareness

about the conflict in Darfur and to find ways to help stop it. Caryn Gibson, senior creative writing student, subscribed to the Web site SaveDarfur.org and has since given talks on the subject and passed out green bracelets from the organization.

"You can give talks about the situation, which I have done, and I have another one scheduled in April," said Gibson.

"Wearing the bracelets encourages people to ask questions, and even if you don't know a whole lot, each bracelet has the Web address for SaveDarfur.org, and then you can go and get a broad range of news articles and make your decision on how things stand."

Other students at UNCA signed petitions to take the issue of Darfur to Congress and attended lectures to learn more about the conflict.

"I signed a petition to go to Congress about it, but I don't really know that much," said Nikki Davis, undeclared freshman. "I know that it's an ethnic thing, and I know that thousands of people are being killed off. I just think it's really sad when our government isn't doing anything about it."

Central to the lectures, talks and petitions is the question of United States and United Nations involvement in Darfur and whether the conflict actually constitutes "genocide." Former Secretary of State Colin Powell traveled to Darfur in 2004 and described the conflict as "genocide."

A U.N. commission that traveled to Darfur in January 2005 reported that although the Sudanese government and the Janjaweed committed serious violations of human rights, the actions did not constitute genocide.

"What you have that's surprising was the U.N. commission that came back in January that said it was genocide. What is also surprising is that last year the U.S. government said that it was," said Gibney.

"It's the first time that a U.S. president has said that something at that moment actually constituted genocide. We're much better at saying that something 10 years previous, in

hindsight, was genocide.

"When the United States has tried to initiate certain measures about this in the U.N. Security Council, they were effectively blocked, so in some respects, the Bush administration can say they at least tried to do something."

The United Nations also gave the names of 51 people that their commission reported in connection with genocidal activities to the International Criminal Court. President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan said that he would never hand over a Sudanese national to a foreign court.

"It's a step. It's better than nothing," said Gibson. "I'm not as familiar with African politics as I could be, but if Sudan is pressured by outsiders like the United Nations, the European Union and the United States, how they respond to what Sudan does will determine whether or not those people are brought to justice."

Gibney also pointed to international pressure as a possible method through which the conflict in Darfur could be halted.

"Genocide has a very technical reading in international law, but, for most people, this standard had been met, and most people thought the world community needed to respond," said Gibney. "I think that most people, if not the overwhelming majority, think that we have failed the people of Darfur."

A recent British Parliamentary report estimated that 300,000 Sudanese people from Darfur died as a result of starvation, disease, and violence.

"At this point, things look bad," said Gibney. "The number of people dead has increased substantially. The UN commission estimated 70,000, the latest numbers I think have estimated 300,000."

"I don't know how many villages have been burned down, I don't know how many people have been raped, and at least for some period, it seemed as if that the world attention did seem to prevent the killings for some period of time. I'm not as confident of that anymore."