

## News Briefs

Compiled by Trevor Metcalfe

### Gas prices soar, driving continues

AAA Carolinas reported gas prices locally and nationally have spiked as a result of Libyan unrest. Prices on Friday for a gallon averaged \$3.25 in Asheville and \$3.23 for the U.S. The automobile association blamed the shut-down of major oil production facilities in Libya for the price hike, where protesters and the government of Col. Muammar Gaddafi have battled for almost two weeks. AAA doubted the increases would have any major effect on consumer driving habits.

### Western Carolina feeling budget cuts

Western Carolina University began to feel the effects of the state budget crunch, notifying employees of pending job losses. The university is preparing for a 10 percent cut, but prepping for cuts above the expected amount. The 6.5 percent tuition and fees increase approved by the UNC Board of Governors hopes to curb the burden of the \$2.4 billion state budget shortfall.

### Ashevillians protest in support of unions

Around 300 protesters attended an Asheville rally in Pack Square Park on Saturday to support unions in Wisconsin under fire from the state's republican governor. The rally was part of a nationwide protest, which drew thousands of supporters. Attendees said they blamed corporate interests buying out politicians and praised the work of labor unions.

## Students file taxes for community

**Katherine Walker**

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Through the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, accounting and economics students at UNC Asheville receive hands-on experience while helping community members file their tax returns.

"It is one thing to read about the tax laws and procedures in textbooks, and it is a completely different experience when actually applying them. This has helped me understand how tax affects individuals in the community. Each return is as unique as each individual, which has helped me broaden my knowledge." **Lidiya Ropalo, a senior accounting student at UNCA,** said.



Joe Sulock

Ropalo said she became certified through the IRS to file tax returns after taking tax classes with **Betsy Mayes, an accounting and management lecturer at UNCA.**

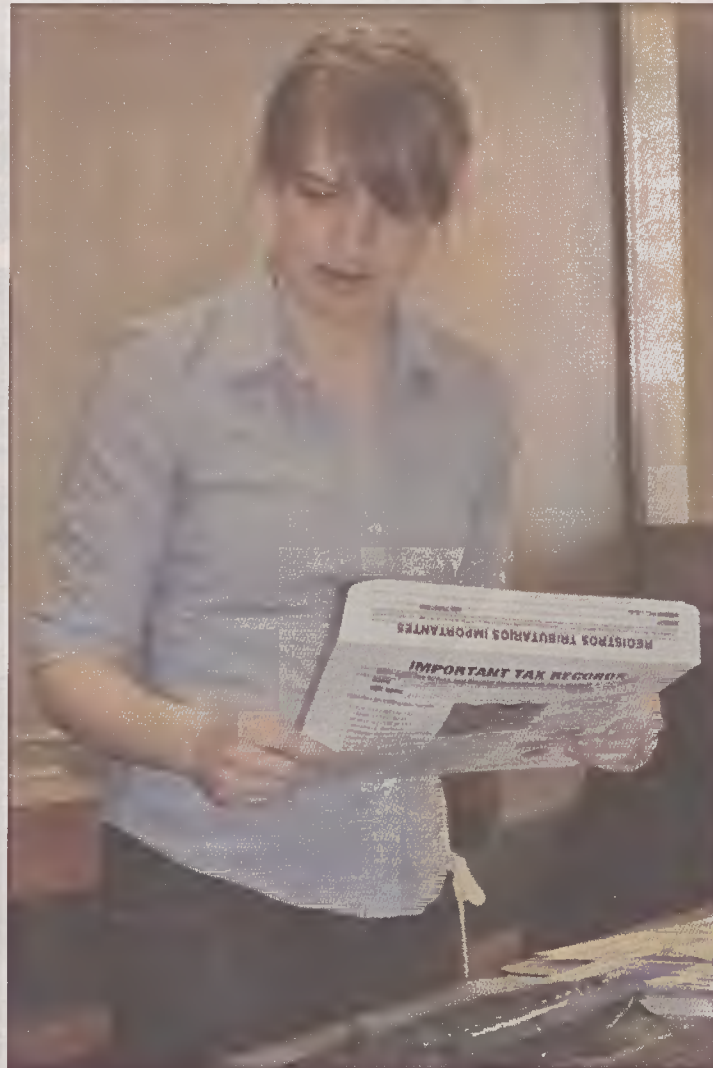
“(Mayes) announced at the end of our second tax course that we were qualified, if we wanted to, to volunteer for the IRS in preparing tax returns for individuals in a certain tax bracket. I really wanted to do something for the community,” Ropalo said.

The free tax assistance targets households with lower annual incomes. “Basically, what a VITA site is, is a mechanism to prepare free income taxes for low to moderate income tax fillers in the United States. They basically look for people who’s income is \$49,000 and less. We prepare federal as well as state income tax returns,” **Monique Taylor, director of the internal audit office at UNCA,** said.

According to **Joe Sulock, professor of economics at UNCA,** community members who come in to have their returns filed find the service very helpful. “It’s pretty clear that a number of them are confused about what is going on. They are all very appreciative of the help,” he said.

Ropalo said the experience helping people save on their tax returns is a win-win situation.

“I am certain that I will be



Katherine Walker - News Editor

**Lidiya Ropalo helps prepare a tax return at the Pack Memorial Library. Around 15 students participate on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

“Many people in this economy are still struggling and, therefore, if they are able to save \$60-70 on a tax preparation fee, then why not?” the senior said.

Sulock said the IRS contacted the Key Center on campus. Sulock responded to the Key Center’s e-mail about VITA and then partnered with Taylor, who is an IRS partner and the coordinator for the VITA site.

According to Mayes, students receive course credit for volunteering. She said her students enjoy the experience.

“I have had great comments. My students have been e-mailing me. They’ve been thrilled that they’ve been able to apply what they’ve learned from classroom assignments and problems,” she said.

Ropalo said volunteering has given her great experience for her future as an accountant.

“I am certain that I will be

preparing numerous tax returns and this gives me a head start at gaining current knowledge about laws, software and communicating with individuals regarding their income,” she said.

Taylor said the program also sponsored a UNCA day, in which they prepared returns on campus. They also went to Asheville’s Industries for the Blind to prepare returns for the blind.

So far, the students have completed 77 returns. They will be stationed on the bottom floor of the Pack Memorial Library until April 9. They are open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

“The response that we students received from the community members has been a positive one. I did not know what to expect on my first day there, but the gratitude that taxpayers expressed made me want to come back every single Saturday and help other taxpayers as well,” Ropalo said.

## Male students encouraged to break out of ‘man box’

**Jeremiah Reed**

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How can 15 percent of men committing domestic violence exist in the presence of 85 percent of those who don’t?

That is the question **Tony Porter** posed to a group of roughly 100 young men at the Western North Carolina Men’s Leadership Conference last Tuesday in Alumni Hall.

“For men, we fear the perceptions that other men have about us,” Porter said. “So, even though we may witness or be involved in behavior we know is morally wrong, we accept that behavior so our peers won’t view us in a less masculine light.”

Porter, a renowned speaker and activist in the field of social justice, is the co-founder of A CALL TO MEN: The National Association of Men and Women Committed to Ending Violence Against Women. He is also the author of two books discussing domestic violence.

The New York native encouraged young men to break out of what he calls the “man box,” which is where he said he believes many of the stereotypes regarding male-female interactions that lead down the road to domestic violence are born.

Porter developed an equation of three factors he said he feels contribute to violence against women. They include the low value placed on the female role by men, the view men hold of women as property and the objectification of women by men.

“I think the most harmful aspect of the equation is the low value placed on women in the eyes of men,” Porter said. “That’s something we’re taught from an early age. See-

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