

Area Schools Consider New Japanese Curricula

By GINNY SCIABBARRASI
Assistant City Editor

An increasing Asian population in Chapel Hill and Carrboro has ignited a growing interest in Asian languages and cultures as part of school curricula.

Three schools, Chapel Hill High School, East Chapel Hill High School and Guy B. Phillips Middle School, have expressed interest in integrating Japanese into foreign language programs.

"We will have between 58 to 62 language groups in the (Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools) system," said Josephine Harris, director of special programs and the world languages program. "Of those, the top five languages are Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Portuguese and then on. That's probably one reason why there is a call to increase the world language program."

Alton Cheek, principal at Phillips Middle School, said his school became interested in including Japanese in the foreign language program after the school received a grant to acquaint the faculty with Asian cultures.

"About 11 percent of the student population that's coming to Phillips has an Asian background," he said.

Cheek said the middle school offered Japanese as a possible course when students registered for the 1999-2000 school year, but they were forced to scrap the program after a faculty shortage.

"About 50 students were interested

and signed up for Japanese," he said. "Unfortunately, there were some shortages with teachers so we had to reorganize them within the school."

Harris said Chapel Hill High School offered Japanese language courses via satellite for approximately three years until a cut in funding halted teaching.

She said funding for teachers would come partially from a three-year grant and from local funds built into the school board's budget.

"We'll know by March if (the program) is funded by the grant," she said. "The rest must go through the school board, who will be meeting in February for their budget retreat."

Ryuko Kubota, an assistant professor in both UNC's School of Education and the Department of Asian Studies who assisted in the grant application, said three grants were given annually by the Japan Foundation. The foundation receives 40 to 50 applications a year for the grants, she said.

"The grant itself is very competitive, so we don't know if we're going to get it," Kubota said.

Maryanne Rosenman, a member of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Board of Education, said the board would consider the proposal by the schools at Thursday's meeting.

"It's definitely worthwhile to try it," she said.

"People will speak by registering or not registering for it."

Kubota said Japanese was the fifth most commonly taught language in the United States. It was behind Spanish, French, German and Latin.

"It's the most commonly taught 'least commonly taught' language," she said. "Because of Japan's economic strength, resources such as online information are available more readily."

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RYUKO KUBOTA
UNC School of Education

Instructors would come from UNC, where the language department and the School of Education offers licensing in Japanese teaching, Harris said.

Kubota said that when the School of Education started the master of arts program in teaching, there were some participants who enrolled in kindergarten through 12th-grade Japanese teaching lessons.

"We desperately need schools to place our teachers to teach here," she said.

"There are schools far away where they can teach, but they are in Raleigh or in Greensboro, and it would be much easier for our teachers to teach here."

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Wicked Restaurant Packs Up

Corporate officials say they will not release any details about the Jan. 4 closing of the Wicked Burrito.

By SARAH BRIER
Staff Writer

Even with a prime location, the Wicked Burrito Mexican restaurant could not stay open once the Lone Star Corporation decided to close 25 of its restaurants effective Jan. 4.

One of a score of local Mexican eateries, The Wicked Burrito, located at 214 W. Franklin St., originally opened about five years ago in Chapel Hill as a concept restaurant, said Robert Humphreys, executive director of the Downtown Commission.

"It is the only Wicked Burrito anywhere," he said. "If it worked, it would become a new chain."

Shortly after the restaurant opened, a new group of investors purchased the Lone Star Steakhouse chain and they did not build any additional Wicked Burrito restaurants, Humphreys said.

"The investors were only interested in the steak house part of it," he said. "So after the beginning of the concept, new owners came in who didn't have any interest in it."

In a press release earlier this month the Lone Star corporation announced the closing of 24 domestic Lone Star Steakhouse & Saloon restaurants and one Mexican restaurant, the Wicked Burrito, supposedly for financial reasons.

The report stated, "Restaurants to be closed had sales of approximately \$2.1 million and combined restaurant level loss of approximately \$2.8 million."

The press release also stated the closing of these restaurants would provide resources for other programs within the corporation.

"Closing the underperforming restaurants will allow the company to continue focusing on its existing program of additional staffing and operation improvements in the remaining restaurants," the release stated.

Joel Harper, president of Chapel Hill's Chamber of Commerce, said he had heard no official word on why the restaurant had closed but was not sur-

prised by a lack of notification. "Nine times out of 10, when businesses close, there is no official word," Harper said. "It was a good location and business was strong. Speculation is that it was a corporate decision."

The Lone Star corporation contact John White was not available for comment. But Paula Hules, White's secretary, said no further comment would be available until after the corporation's earnings release on Feb. 3. "We are sort of at a quiet period," she said.

The property is a valuable piece of real estate as far as Humphreys is concerned.

"I speculate that people are interested in the space but there are no plans at this moment," he said.

Harper said he anticipated a new business at the site, but was not sure how long it would take.

"There is no word yet of anything taking its place but there is no lack of interest at that site," Harper said.

"It will take a while but sooner or later the property will be filled."

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HEALTH

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for students to develop full immunity.

Covington also said the vaccine was only good for one year because Influenza A has proteins on its coat that change as the virus travels around the world.

The vaccine gives students a partial immunity to Influenza B, however, because the proteins do not change.

Laura Cockrell, a freshman from West Jefferson, was infected by the virus even though she had been vaccinated.

"I threw up more times in one night than I have in my entire life," Cockrell

said. She said she probably caught the bug from another student because her symptoms arose immediately after the fall semester ended.

Students continue to rely upon the vaccine to help them escape the bug.

"Students are still wanting to be vaccinated, but better late than never," Covington said.

"Living on campus is like living in a fish bowl. (The virus) really spreads."

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BOARD

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waiver itself still had to pass through UNC-system officials before it could take effect. "The waiver is being brought to this board so that it can be forwarded on to the University system," he said.

The UNC system has the final decision because it formulates all college admissions requirements throughout the

state.

Although some have questioned the validity of dropping class rank, UNC-system Information Services Director Robert Hill said he knew of several successful private and public out-of-state high schools that did not use class rank.

He said, "Those schools find other ways (to show their students abilities)."

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FLU

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Durrett said the company's facilities did not experience overcrowding or a shortage of physicians, but visitors were cautioned when entering treatment centers due to an unusually high risk of infection.

"If you don't absolutely have to come, don't," she said. But Durrett remained fairly optimistic.

"We're probably two-thirds of the way through the worst part, and within 10 days to two weeks we should return to a more 'normal' flu season," Durrett said.

Officials continue to recommend traditional remedies such as flu shots, rest and plenty of water to keep the immune system healthy and even to avoid large crowds if necessary.

The CDC also reminded the public

that influenza was not a harmless ailment, like the common cold, but a serious respiratory disease that leads to "approximately 20,000 deaths and (more than) 110,000 hospitalizations each year" nationwide.

Those most at risk include the very young, the elderly and especially those who already suffer from respiratory problems.

But Furney stressed that the outcome depended heavily on precautions taken by the public.

"There is still time for people to get flu shots," he said.

CDC officials at the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services issued statements claiming that flu shots covered all the predominant strains.

Furney said, "What will happen in North Carolina remains to be seen."

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Architects Look Up, Not Out in Carrboro

By WALTER HERZ
Staff Writer

Local architects have released a plan to revamp downtown Carrboro in hopes of convincing residents, businesses and town officials to control urban sprawl over the next 20 years.

The independent plan calls for buildings as tall as six stories in the downtown district, more green space and less reliance on automobile transportation, among other things.

Chatham County architect James Carnahan led the planning effort.

"When talk of sprawl began here about three years ago, I thought it was important for designers to get involved and discover what kind of solutions are needed," he said.

Carnahan said the plan involved growing upward instead of out, in the form of taller buildings that would provide spaces for housing and businesses.

The plan also suggests reducing the dependence on cars by encouraging public transportation, bicycle paths and walking. There is even a proposed electric train.

Carnahan and fellow architect Giles Blunden came up with a rough plan last June and invited other area architects to join them. Their team now numbers five. "In a way, it's a fantasy, not a projected product," he said. "It's a projection of what could possibly happen."

Alderman Allen Spalt said Carnahan's plan was not the kind that could be easily implemented. "The idea has not been formally discussed by the board," Spalt said. "This is not a development proposal with specific legal requests. This is a very broad thing."

Spalt said parts of the plan would be discussed by growth committees such as the Vision 2020 task force, which is

independent of Carnahan's growth project.

Carnahan said the town of Carrboro could use his team's proposals as a "menu," and pick and choose the ideas that best benefited the town.

Blunden said most residents have responded well to the proposals, which were unveiled to the public last week. "It's a positive plan, with something in it for everybody," he said. "It's a vision of a different Carrboro with the same positive features, but more of them."

Blunden said no one should feel threatened because the plan would only work with the cooperation of businesses. "We have no intention of removing people or forcing them out," he said. "It's their choice."


Alderman Diana McDuffee said she was pleased with the efforts of Carnahan's team. "I think it's a terrific, original idea," she said. "It shows what a creative, talented team can achieve when envisioning what Carrboro could do without any restraints."

Though the plan was designed with a 20-year time frame, Carnahan said his proposals could take action earlier than that. "It's just a question of having the will of the community and the interest of the property owners," he said.

Both McDuffee and Spalt said the concepts and suggestions made by Carnahan's team would help Carrboro plan for the future. "It will be part of the raw material for the Vision 2020 process," Spalt said. "It will be discussed, and some elements of the plan will almost definitely be adopted."

"We are going to grow," he said. "The question is whether we will grow smart or grow stupid."

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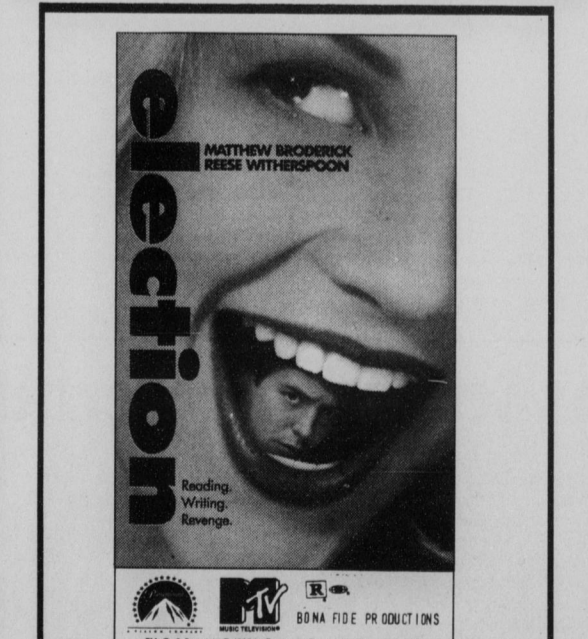
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