

Weekend Full of Celebration Easley To Improve Public Schools

Graduating students stayed out late saying goodbye to friends, despite the early ceremony on Sunday.

KATHLEEN HUNTER
Senior Writer

It was too hot to breathe, too crowded to move.

Revelers tried in vain to make their way through the dense crowd.

They faced protruding tree roots, hidden mud puddles and precariously full Blue Cups. And that was assuming they managed to get into the bar.

"Good luck getting a beer," one bouncer told those who entered. But few, if any, seemed to care.

That was the scene at He's Not Here, shortly after midnight Sunday, just hours before the graduates of the Class of 2001 would file into Keenan Stadium to officially complete their time in Blue Heaven.

The mood was celebratory as the soon-to-be graduates and the sparse number of underclassmen remaining in Chapel Hill took advantage of the warm night and the fact that class was out for summer — or, for some, forever.

Groups of students, alumni and par-

ents chatted and laughed — fondly remembering the past, eagerly anticipating the future.

The popular Franklin Street bar was at the center of the uptown festivities Saturday night. There were long lines all over uptown, though.

Nicholas Richitt, an assistant manager who has worked at He's Not for four years, said Saturday's crowd was possibly the largest he had seen on the night before graduation.

Just after 12:30 a.m., Richitt estimated that the bar served close to 3,000 of its signature Blue Cups that day, nearly 500 of them prior to 4 p.m.

Richitt said he was disappointed that a supply mix-up meant the bar had to serve its 32-ounce beers in plain white plastic cups instead of its regular blue glasses featuring the He's Not Here logo.

"I feel bad for everybody because everyone wants Blue Cups before they leave," he said.

But the plain cups did not seem to put a damper on the mood of many graduating seniors, who seemed happy just to be out celebrating their completion of college.

Senior Journalism Major Sean Busher said he had spent the day with family before heading uptown to celebrate with friends.

"I had to do family stuff for awhile," Busher said. "But once I got here, it was time to party. I've had lots of pineapple rum so far."

Despite the fun of the evening, Busher said he had mixed emotions about graduating.

"It's great that now I am going to be putting cash in my wallet, meeting new friends, going where I want to go," he said. "But it is bad that I am leaving old friends, and I might not go where I want to go."

Elizabeth Dyer, a senior math major, said around 12:30 a.m. that she intended to stay until closing time. "So far the night is young," she said. "It's only 12:30."

Chris Konstantinos, a senior business major, said he and his friends had come out looking for a fun night on the town before graduation.

"We'll hang out here," he said. "We'll see which way the wind takes us. We're just trying to stretch this night out as long as we can."

Despite the good time he said he was having, Konstantinos, who plans to move to Richmond and work as an investment banker, said he was ready for college to be over. "I think I'm ready to go out into the real world," he said. "But I don't think the real world is ready for me."

Kathleen Hunter can be reached at krhunter@email.unc.edu.

The state is appealing a recent ruling in a 1994 lawsuit brought by several of the poorest school districts.

The Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Gov. Mike Easley announced Tuesday that a 30-member task force will help develop a long-range plan to improve the state's public schools, addressing issues like teacher recruitment and school financing.

The task force also could play a role in developing a response to a court ruling, now under appeal, that ordered the state to improve educational opportunities for children at risk of failure.

That ruling was temporarily stayed last week by the state Court of Appeals pending the outcome of a hearing, and Easley didn't cite the court order in his decision to appoint the group.

Instead, Easley said he wants the group to examine issues that move beyond those considered in the court decision.

"We have an opportunity during these tough economic times to make some lemonade out of lemons," Easley said.

"Other states can choose the course they want to take, but in North Carolina we are going forward."

The task force will be headed by state Superintendent of Public

Instruction Mike Ward, Halifax County Schools Superintendent Willie Gilchrist and Bell South NC President Krista Tillman.

Gilchrist said he envisions pulling a lot of successful classroom strategies together.

"Many wonderful things are going on in our schools ... but we've been working in isolation," he said.

Easley said the group also will examine how to meet a growing teacher shortage that is expected to require the state to hire 9,000 teachers a year over the next decade.

In addition, he wants the group to examine ways to make better use of the money available to improve education.

He also wants the group to address the achievement gap between whites and minorities.

"Our schools are not what they should be and we cannot be satisfied with mediocrity," Easley said.

"I've asked this group to tell us what constitutes a superior education."

Despite downplaying the connection, Easley said the group's work will be shared with the courts should the state lose its appeal in a lawsuit brought by poor school districts.

The governor also said the group will explore innovative programs that have helped poor children, as recommended in the court order.

The lawsuit, brought in 1994 by five of North Carolina's poorer school systems, stems from complaints that the state's school funding formula is unfair.

Superior Court Judge Howard Manning Jr. had given the state and the schools that sued 12 months to develop a strategy to improve educational opportunities for poor students.

Last month, Manning ordered the state to go ahead with the plan while the appeal is pending.

The Court of Appeals, though, issued a temporary stay that could delay or eventually lead to an order blocking its enforcement.

Easley has been an advocate of many of the requirements ordered by Manning.

Some of those requirements include lowering class size and preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds.

However, Easley has said college prep offerings and other programs for high achievers shouldn't be sacrificed — as some have claimed Manning's ruling would do — to help poor children.

"Our schools are not what they should be and we cannot be satisfied with mediocrity."

MIKE EASLEY
North Carolina Governor



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Bear Burden: Rangers To Keep Watchful Eye

Last year's fatal mauling of a Tenn. man by a black bear was the first in National Park Service history.

The Associated Press

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — Field crews in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park will be watching more carefully for signs of aggressive bears during the upcoming summer.

Park officials, acting in the wake of last year's fatal mauling of a hiker, have told maintenance crews and other field workers there must be no delay in relaying information when visitors report problems. Additional training on reporting procedures is taking place.

"We have always reacted quickly to the reports," said Smokies spokeswoman Nancy Gray. "We are just tightening the reporting procedures from field personnel."

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park, on the border of Tennessee and North Carolina, is the most-visited national park in the nation. Memorial Day weekend marks the unofficial start of the summer tourist season — and the potential for more conflict between bears and people.

Glenda Ann Bradley, 50, was killed May 21, 2000, near Elkmont campground in Tennessee. A 112-pound female bear and its 40-pound yearling

attacked the experienced hiker, an elementary school teacher from Cosby, Tenn. It was the first time in National Park Service history that a black bear had killed a person.

Bradley's family filed a \$3.5 million claim this month with the U.S. Department of Interior, saying the park knew the bears were aggressive before the mauling.

Gray declined to speak specifically about the claim but said the park's black bear policy was revised because of Bradley's death.

The park also has changed warning signs in the backcountry, added training on black bears for seasonal and full-time park staff, and put more emphasis on educating visitors, including handing out more information on what to do if a bear appears aggressive.

Though such attacks are rare, rising populations of humans and bears mean encounters are increasing.

There are about 1,800 black bears in the Smokies and 5,000 to 6,000 in the Southern Appalachians. Mike Carraway, a Waynesville-based biologist for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, said the black bear population appears to be growing larger.

Last weekend, wildlife biologists were forced to kill a black bear that was breaking into cars and tents near the Pisgah campground off the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Last year, there were 19 incidents involving nuisance bears.

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GRADUATION
From Page 1

ers would be."

Graduating senior Brandon Briscoe agreed. "Scott did a brilliant job of balancing humor and entertainment with serious comments demanded by the occasion."

The loudest cheers seemed to come during Cowley's speech, or rather, toast. While attempting to do some research on North Carolina, Cowley said, he came across the official Tar Heel toast. He then raised a He's Not Here blue cup. The students roared in approval.

What followed was a humorous adaptation of the Old North State toast. "He was wonderful," Wolford said. "I was really glad I voted for him."

Cowley began his speech by asking the group for one last group photo for his mother. He pulled out a disposable camera and instructed the crowd to yell "Thanks, mom," on three.

"And Vince, push in a little on your left," added Cowley.

After the ceremony, students were allowed to walk around to the south side of the field, where they danced, played catch and hugged their friends.

Said Briscoe, "I thought the new policy brought an appropriate amount of dignity and speed to the ceremony, but still allowed seniors to celebrate on the field."

Brian Frederick can be reached at brifred@yahoo.com.

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P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, NC 27515
Matt Dees, Editor, 962-4086
Advertising & Business, 962-1163
News, Features, Sports, 962-0245