



# POLICE ROUNDUP

## University

Sunday, Feb. 24

■ A UNC student reported at 7:50 p.m. that his laptop computer, valued at \$2,500, was stolen from his room in Winston Residence Hall.

Reports state that a friend of the student saw a man coming out of the student's room and talked to him but did not realize until after the theft was discovered that the man did not know the student whose laptop was stolen.

The suspect was described as a black male, 5 feet 8 inches tall, 150 pounds, about 19 years old, with a medium complexion, short hair and possible acne scars.

The investigation is ongoing.

Friday, Feb. 22

■ Vonnie Stinnett Smith, 47, of 2417 U.S. 70 East in Mebane, was arrested at 8:15 a.m. and charged with malicious conduct by a prisoner, second-degree trespassing, communicating threats, resisting a public officer and assault on an officer.

Reports state that one party threatened another with a knife while riding on a bus to the Ambulatory Care Center on Old Mason Farm Road.

The threatened party told police that a woman said she had eight knives and would use them, according to reports.

An care center employee talked to the woman, who threatened to hit him and brandished her fist, reports state.

Reports state that when the employee discovered the woman did not have an appointment, he asked her to leave and called police when she did not.

When police arrived, officers informed the woman that she was under arrest for second-degree trespassing.

She told officers that she would kill them, and when two officers tried to remove her, she fought with the officers and bit one of them on the hand, reports state.

According to reports, police officers handcuffed the woman while she struggled, cursed and threatened to kill the officers and their whole families except their dogs.

Smith was transported to the magistrate, where she was released on \$500 unsecured bond and an involuntary commitment. She was then taken to the UNC Hospitals emergency room.

## City

Sunday, Feb. 24

■ Chapel Hill police arrested Henri Claude Mercius, 31, of the streets of Chapel Hill for felony breaking and entering at 5:01 a.m. in the North Alley behind 109 E. Franklin St.

Reports state that police responded to an alarm at 109 E. Franklin St. The suspect ran out the back door of the business and was caught shortly thereafter.

Mercius is being charged with one felony count of breaking and entering with larceny, one misdemeanor count of vandalism to real property and one misdemeanor count of resisting arrest, reports state.

Mercius was confined to the Orange County Jail on a \$9,000 secured bond.

He was scheduled to appear in the Orange County District Court in Hillsborough on Monday.

■ Chapel Hill police arrested Chester Earl Moody, 48, of 100 W. Rosemary St. for failing to appear on felony cocaine charges.

Moody is being charged with one misdemeanor count of order for arrest. Reports state that Moody was arrested at 9:30 a.m. at 102 E. Franklin St. Moody failed to appear on one felony count of cocaine possession and drug paraphernalia and misdemeanor counts of larceny charges, reports state.

Moody was confined to the Orange County Jail on a \$1,500 unsecured bond. He is scheduled to appear in the Orange County District Court in Hillsborough on March 18.

Saturday, Feb. 23

■ Carrboro police arrested Darren Dante Townes, 32, of 5004 Valley View Drive in Sanford at 4:21 a.m. on East Main Street near Lloyd Street for possession of a stolen automobile.

Reports state that officers observed a suspicious vehicle in the parking lot of 300 E. Main St. in Carrboro.

Officers checked the tag and found that the vehicle had been reported stolen Feb. 2 by the Chapel Hill Police Department.

Townes was arrested and charged with one felony count of possession of a stolen vehicle and one misdemeanor count of driving with a revoked license, reports state.

Townes was released under a written promise to appear in the Orange County District Court in Hillsborough on Monday.

# Public Meeting to Address Carrboro's Budget

This year, Carrboro faces a loss of \$299,284 in funding from the state, which has a deficit of up to \$900 million.

By DANIEL CHO  
Staff Writer

The Carrboro Board of Aldermen is encouraging residents to come out and voice their opinions about this year's and next year's budget cuts.

On Feb. 5, Gov. Mike Easley announced a projected \$900 million state budget shortfall for the 2001-02 fiscal year. In order to deal with the deficit,

Easley announced several measures, including possibly withholding money from municipalities statewide.

Carrboro will lose \$299,284 in funding from the state this year, prompting the need to focus on next year's financial situation. The town's budget is \$12.5 million. The aldermen will continue to discuss the budget cuts for the town at 7:30 p.m. today at the Carrboro Town Hall.

The meeting also will address topics such as the sale of surplus town property and the active projects report.

Alderman Joal Broun said the focus of the meeting would be what kind of cuts to make and where.

But even with the weight of the budget issue, the aldermen are worried peo-

ple will not come to discuss the cuts.

Alderman Jacquelyn Gist said she has been disappointed by the turnout of residents in the past. "I would be delighted if the room was packed," she said.

But Gist predicted that only about three people would come to Tuesday's meeting. "There are only about 20 people in



Carrboro Board of Aldermen member Jacquelyn Gist urges residents to turn out and voice their concerns.

the town you can generally count on," she said. "People will only care when they have an ax to grind or they want money for themselves."

But Broun said she thinks the aldermen do a successful job of informing the public. "People come when they want to raise an issue," she said. "They'll come when there is something to talk about. People will come to talk about almost anything."

Gist said that the aldermen used to send notices to residents about public hearings but that because of the budget crisis, they can no longer afford to do mass mailings.

But Broun and Gist both said residents can access the aldermen through

the Carrboro Web site, public access television and by phone.

The Carrboro aldermen meetings are aired at 7:30 p.m. every Tuesday on public access television channel 18, and the board's Web site can be found at <http://www.carrboro.com>.

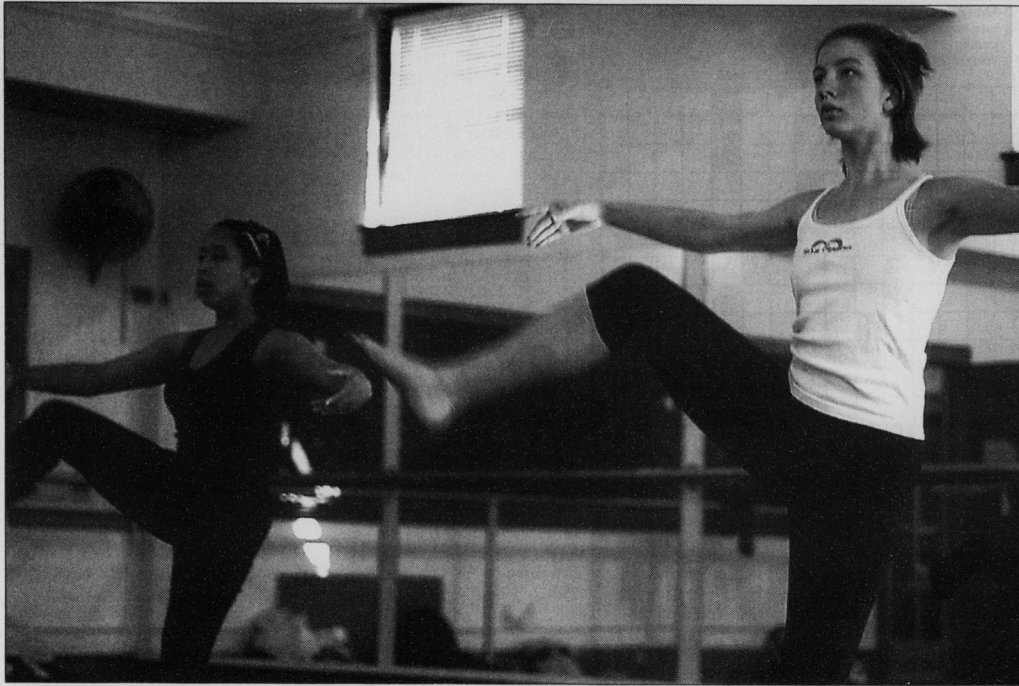
Alderman Diana McDuffee said Carrboro's Web site, which has details about tonight's meeting, including ways to contact state legislators, is a great way to get information out.

"Our Web site is improving all the time, and it reaches people that newspapers can't," she said.

Town Clerk Sarah Williamson said

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## VOLUME OF MOVEMENT



Pia Days (left) and Stephanie Watts concentrate while practicing a combination during the advanced modern dance class Monday afternoon. The teacher, Marian Hopkins, combines a number of different styles of modern dance to ensure the students will have a varied repertoire when completing the class.

DTH/KATIE RIGGAN

# 2 Durham Men Charged With Armed Robbery

The suspects allegedly are responsible for robberies at Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar and McDonald's of Chapel Hill.

By SCOTT WARFIELD  
Staff Writer

Two Durham men were served warrants by the Chapel Hill Police Department last week in connection with two armed robberies that occurred in December and January.

Jerry Kareem Tatum, 32, of 4001 Meriwether Drive in Durham and Ronnie Lee Jones, 30, of 718 Felicia St. in Durham were served warrants while being held in the Alamance County Jail, according to a Chapel Hill Police Department press release.

Chapel Hill police charged each man with eight felony counts of robbery with a dangerous weapon, six felony counts of second-degree kidnapping, three felony counts of first-degree kidnapping and one felony count of assault with a dangerous weapon inflicting serious injury, reports state.

Tatum and Ronnie Lee Jones allegedly robbed the Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar, located at 1508 E. Franklin St., at 11:32 p.m. Jan. 14. They also allegedly robbed the McDonald's, located at 1748 Fordham Blvd., at 10:19 p.m. Dec. 16, the press release states.

An Applebee's employee was seriously injured during the armed robbery after a suspect struck him in the head with the butt of a pistol, the press release states. Two McDonald's employees were forced into a freezer during the armed robbery, reports state. The total value of the stolen goods from the Applebee's robbery was \$4,107, reports state. An undisclosed amount of cash was stolen from the McDonald's.

Burlington Police Maj. Randy Jones said Tatum and Ronnie Lee Jones already were being held in the Alamance County Jail for armed robbery of a McDonald's on Huffman Mill Road in Burlington on Feb. 5.

Maj. Jones said Graham police arrested Tatum, Ronnie Lee Jones and a third man, Cyril Sililo Scanlan, 23, of Durham, on Interstate-40/85, between three and five minutes after the Feb. 5 armed robbery.

Maj. Jones said Tatum and Ronnie Lee Jones were charged with felony counts of armed robbery and kidnapping. Tatum also was charged with a felony count of possession of a concealed weapon, and Ronnie Lee Jones was charged with a felony count of possession of stolen property, Maj. Jones said.

Scanlan was arrested and charged with felony counts of armed robbery, kidnapping, possession of stolen property, possession of a concealed weapon and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, Maj. Jones said.

Chapel Hill and Burlington police departments collaborated to connect Ronnie Lee Jones and Tatum to the armed robberies in Chapel Hill.

Maj. Jones said he heard of the robberies of the Applebee's and McDonald's in Chapel Hill from his son, who is a police officer in Chapel Hill. "The men fit the general descriptions, target-

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# County Officials Delay Bond Sales

By JENNIFER JOHNSON  
Staff Writer

Orange County officials are debating whether to delay the sale of \$75 million in bonds - which voters approved in November - because of the recent economic downturn and state's seizure of county funds.

Orange County Financial Director Ken Chavious said past bond sales are responsible for \$90 million of the \$140 million debt the county faced at the end of the last fiscal year. The debt, coupled with economic uncertainty, has made the Orange County Board of Commissioners hesitant to issue the bonds this year.

Officials say their hesitation is compounded by Gov. Mike Easley's announcement earlier this month that he would withhold funds from county and municipal governments - about \$712,000 from Orange County.

The bonds were scheduled to be sold in July, but officials have decided to save money by

delaying the process until January 2003.

Orange County Budget Director Donna Dean said the six-month delay will save the county \$600,000 in interest payments. "If we sold the bonds in July as planned, the county would owe half a year's interest," Dean said. "This way we save \$600,000 in bond interest next year."

Dean said county officials are taking a conservative stance by postponing the sale of the bonds until they are more certain about the future of the economy. "With the fiscal situation being what it is, we are uncertain what kind of losses to expect in the county budget," Dean said. "This year losses are \$712,000, but next year we could lose \$3.1 million."

When bonds are approved by voters, the county has seven years to sell or issue those bonds and does not have to start paying interest on them until after they are sold.

The bond package that was approved in November will allocate \$47 million to schools in Orange County, \$20 million to parks and

recreation and \$4 million each to affordable housing and the senior center.

Dean said the delay likely won't affect bond-funded projects. "The school renovations will receive funding to continue construction, and affordable housing has funds left over from 1997," she said. Dean also said the delay will not disrupt the timeline for any construction primarily because the entire bond amount wouldn't be distributed in one year. "This delay will not affect construction timetables, and all projects can go ahead," she said.

The bonds are sold over a four-year period with a specific amount allocated for each year. But officials have not yet decided which projects will receive funding in a particular year. "Within the next month, (the county) will develop a priority list to decide which projects to fund first," Chavious said. "It's just like a family budget."

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# State Could Lose AAA Bond Rating

Moody's is watching how the state deficit is handled in order to determine if the rating will be downgraded.

By NATHAN PEREZ  
Staff Writer

An official with Moody's Investors Service said Monday that North Carolina is in jeopardy of losing its AAA bond rating because of the state's mounting budget deficit.

Bond ratings determine how much money a state has to pay when it borrows money. The AAA rating, which is the highest possible, represents a low-risk investment.

If the state's bond rating drops, North Carolina could have to pay millions of dollars more in interest payments.

Ray Murphy, vice president of Moody's, the most influential of three services that determine bond rating, said the service placed North Carolina on "negative outlook" status in December because of the state's poor economic projections.

"A negative outlook doesn't necessarily indicate a near-term change (in the bond rating), but it does give an indi-

cation that there are certain stresses facing the state," Murphy said.

But he noted that Moody's is not necessarily considering downgrading the state. "We think (the state) will adequately address the problems and develop a plan for long-term structural balance."

He added that Moody's is considering implementing a "watchlist" classification that would establish a 60-90 day window before a potential downgrade.

Part of the reason North Carolina's rating might not be downgraded is because the state's governmental structure allows Gov. Mike Easley to bypass the state legislature when making some budgetary decisions.

"The governor does have the ability to make budgetary adjustments if there are problems, like a projected shortfall," he said. "Legislative debate wastes valuable time, as we see in other states."

Katherine Kirkman, director of public affairs for the N.C. Department of State Treasurer, said department officials remain in constant contact with rating agencies. "If anything would happen to jeopardize our rating, we would be in touch," Kirkman said.

She said North Carolina has pre-

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# Masala Auctions Dates for Charity

By JAMIE DOUGHER  
Staff Writer

Student leaders sauntered down the aisles of 209 Manning Hall on Monday night, billing themselves creatively as dream dates in efforts to raise money as part of Masala's annual date auction.

Masala, an umbrella group for cultural organizations on campus, oversees the operations of groups such as Sangam, the Black Student Movement and Carolina Hispanic Association.

All the money raised will be donated to Kiran, a local nonprofit organization that provides counseling for battered women, organizers said.

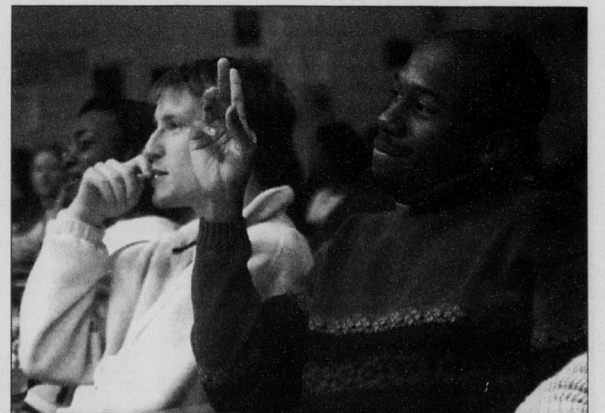
Local restaurants and movie theaters donated gift certificates to Masala for all the people auctioned off and their dates.

In front of a group of about 70 people, Sangam President Sachin Patel billed himself as "a taste of some sweet brown sugar" and said he would be "your Prince Ali."

He then sold for \$40.

Student Body President-elect Jen Daum also participated in the event. Daum bid \$65 on a two-for-one date with Ferzaan Ali and Alkesh Sura from the dance group Bhangra Elite, a member organization of Masala.

When it came Daum's turn to go on the auction block, co-host Juan Antonio Webster announced that Daum said the song that best describes her is Britney Spears' "I'm a Slave 4 U."



DTH/VICTORIA FRANGOULIS

Brad Picot (right), vice president of BSM, bids \$20 for a date at the Masala date auction Monday evening. Masala raised \$745.

As she stood on stage, Daum urged Ali and Sura to match the amount she paid for a date with the two of them.

"I paid \$65 for y'all!" Daum said after the two paused at \$60. Ali and Sura then upped the bid to \$65 to win another date with Daum.

Besides campus leaders, other students also participated in the event.

Freshman Rebecca Alban sold for the most money - \$75. She said she was flattered that someone would pay that

much for a date with her. Neera Makwana, one of Masala's co-presidents, co-hosted the event with Webster. She said she thought the event was a success.

"It's a good way to raise money and bring together a group for the same cause," she said.

The date auction kicked off Masala Week, a series of events over the next

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