

ADOPTION

FROM PAGE 3

confidential intermediaries sometimes cannot put people together," Smith said. "We are not restricted by state laws."

The North Carolina Coalition for Adoption Reform sponsored ISRR's annual "Reg Day" on Oct. 4 to answer questions and provide information about the registry.

"We do support this. ISSR is the oldest and largest mutual consent registry," NCCAR chairwoman Roberta MacDonald said.

In many states adoption records were not sealed until after World War II. "The adoption records have not always been sealed. They have been only to the general public," MacDonald said. "Nosy Neighbor" laws started to tighten to protect the adopted, the birth mother and the adoptive parent."

NCCAR is crafting legislation it hopes to introduce by 2005 that potentially would unseal those records for adult adoptees — those who are older than 18 — and parents of minor adoptees.

Similar bills have been introduced in the N.C. General Assembly in the past and have failed.

North Carolina law grants adoptees access to nonidentifying information, specifically their date of birth, weight at birth, the age and education status of their birth parents at the time of adoption, ethnic background and any medical information taken at birth.

"Most people don't even realize adult adoptees can't have access to a birth certificate, that they have an amended one," MacDonald said.

An original birth certificate has value that nonadopted persons do not realize. MacDonald, an adult adoptee, described the trouble she had when trying to obtain a U.S. passport with her altered birth certificate, which doesn't contain the

names of birth parents or the county of birth.

"I sent my birth certificate to the federal government, and they questioned my citizenship," she said.

Nevertheless, there are many who oppose opening records, even for medical reasons.

The National Council For Adoption, founded in 1981, is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit advocacy and education organization comprised of member agencies and adoption lawyers. Although supportive of mutual consent registries, the NCA opposes the opening of records in North Carolina.

"We believe that records should be opened as a result of mutual consent. ... For many reasons people want to keep their confidentiality, it's not worth opening records," said Lee Allen, the director of communications for NCA.

He acknowledged that there is concern about adult adoptees who need access to their medical records.

"We think that's not a valid argument. Medical science can learn more from a blood test than a medical history. Medical information reasoning just falls short," Allen said.

NCA has provided testimony as well as letters of opposition to the opening of records in several states.

Allen said they wouldn't want confidentiality to be a barrier for a woman who is considering giving her child up for adoption. "Nobody should be thrust upon them without their consent."

As state law reads, a mutually consented reunion does not necessarily mean access to adoption records — that requires petitioning a court. The success rate of being awarded access to records varies from court to court, and the process can be costly.

"The statute allows an adopted

person to petition the court. ... That can be a fairly expensive process and generally kind of complicated without an attorney," said Edith Votta, director of post-adoption services at the Children's Home Society of North Carolina Inc., in Greensboro.

Although records are not open, in November 2001 open adoptions became an option in North Carolina. This gives birth parents and adoptive parents the opportunity to sign agreements allowing varying degrees of communication and information exchange.

"Our experience is that it is much healthier to have that contact. There are times that contact can be really helpful," Votta said.

Out-of-state registries such as ISRR also remain an option for parties involved in North Carolina adoptions. North Carolina is one of two states without a registry.

There are two options for registries: a passive registry such as the ISRR, through which parties can register and be put in touch if there is a match; and an active registry, in which typically one party searches for the other and the found party is asked if he would like to be contacted.

"Active registries work better," MacDonald said. "If an adoptee registers, states have to make every effort to contact the birth parent."

Carolyn Hoard, legislative director for the American Adoption Congress, said that a passive registry provides only a remote chance of a match but that people are wary of someone knocking on their door.

"There are two arguments: that birth parents were promised confidentiality and that if you allow more access to records you will see a rise in abortions," Hoard said.

Votta said she favors a more active registry. "The reality is, right now, people are knocking on doors without an agency involved, but people are knocking on the wrong doors."

But many birth parents, like Schlotfeldt, said they hope North Carolinians won't have to rely on registries in the future.

"I think within the next five

years there could be hope that adoptees would have access to at least medical information and a copy of their original birth certificate."

Contact the Features Editor at features@unc.edu.

GRAD STUDENT

FROM PAGE 3

"You look ahead into the future, but you can't look too far ahead. It's easy to look ahead and panic," MacDonald said. "You can't think, 'Everything has to be done by April,' because you have so many drafts before the final one."

Now, he's spending most of his time writing case studies, which he hopes to finish by Thanksgiving. Because the data analysis is coming to an end, he said, it is becoming easier to connect the data back to his original goals.

"It's interesting ... because you start to see the results of what you're doing," MacDonald said. "You have to be rigorous with your methods, track your design and keep going back to the original questions so you don't drift off on some irrelevant tangent."

He added, "This is the time when things start to come together."

In addition to turning his research into a finished product, MacDonald also is beginning to look for jobs. This is important, but his research will keep him busy for the time being, he said.

His work on the first full draft will keep him in town for Thanksgiving, but he plans to go home to Detroit for three days during Winter Break. MacDonald said that he normally would want to take more time off but that time during Winter Break will be crucial to finishing the first full draft.

"Yeah, my parents are not happy, but they also know I need to graduate, so they understand," MacDonald said. "To graduate in May will make it all worthwhile, and that's what I look forward to."

Contact the Features Editor at features@unc.edu.

KNITTING UP A STORM



DTH/JOANIE TOBIN

Mandy Foster participates in the WW II re-enactment held Saturday in Hillsborough. Merchants and community members gathered to commemorate the veterans of World War II. The event was held inside because of rain. For the full story, visit dailytarheel.com.

ARRESTS

FROM PAGE 3

Martin Vargas Rodriguez, 25; Fernando Hernandez Martinez, 20; Ishmael Rodriguez-Chavez, 17; and Marcelino Vega Hernandez, 27.

Each man was placed under a \$100,000 bond at Orange County Jail in Hillsborough and appeared in Orange County District Court in Hillsborough on Friday.

Although none have been

charged with breaking and entering, police said, they might be able to link the off-campus thefts with the stolen goods.

Police are requesting that anyone who has had goods stolen in the past month, especially electronics, go to the police station and speak with an investigator.

To speed the process, police ask that people bring receipts.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

KINSTON

FROM PAGE 3

director for the Phoenix Society, said she began to recover emotionally from her burns after she attended her first World Burn Congress.

"We can fake it if we want to," she said. "You can limit relationships and how you interact with people. Restoration came when I was ready."

Darlene Miller, a nurse who

worked at the burn center for two years, said she debated coming to the event after a fire destroyed her son's house Thursday. But she said the celebration was a positive reminder that life continues.

"It's a privilege to be here," she said during an open-microphone portion of the event. "It's a privilege to hear your stories."

Contact the University Editor at uodesk@unc.edu.

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Dey Hall, Room 307, 6:00 pm

An Evening with Film Director Alex Rivera
Hanes Art Center, 7:00 pm

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