UNC graduate

UNC alumnus Edward Kent Welch died Nov. 23 after sustaining serious injuries in an automobile accident in Prague, Czech

Welch, whom family and friends lovingly referred to as "Kent," grad-uated in June after double major-

ing in history and peace, war and defense. Welch, 23, traveled to

Prague to participate in a program in which he learned how to teach English abroad.

UNC graduate
Kent Welch

"His intention died Nov. 23 in was to (teach) Prague after a

for a year," said his sister Ashley Walker. "After being there for about six weeks, he realized he really missed the states and our Welch was scheduled to return

home Nov. 20, but less than a week before his departure, a car accident left him in the hospital. He died Walker said that after the inci-

dent, she sent an e-mail to family and friends asking for support. "The entire world was praying for him," she said. "The word just trav-

eled that quickly. It was amazing.

Welch participated in a Czech Republic organ-donor program,

an act of generosity not commonly practiced in the region.

"The people in Czech don't usu-ally donate organs," Walker said.
"I think that makes it even more special that they don't do it over there. The people in the ICU were just blown away with gratitude."

Welch's love for life could be seen in all aspects of his personality, family members said. Loved ones portrayed him as a caring brother, music

lover and UNC sports fanatic.
"He was an avid Carolina athletics fan," Walker said. "When Carolina beat Miami, he said it was almost enough to make him want to come home.

Welch also was a passionate musician. He developed a knack for playing the banjo and could be heard playing on campus Friday afternoons with his band, The Grindstone String Band.
"He really found his niche when

he picked up that banjo," said his brother Stuart Welch. "He loved

Kent Welch's twin sister, Katie, said she is unable to describe how much her brother meant to her.

"Kent was an outstanding brother," she said. "He was so loyal and loving. He wanted to come back and be closer to his family and friends."

Kent's friends described him as "despicably likeable."

"He loved life," said friend Catherine Davis. "He was absolutely amazing and cared for his family so much. He really is one of the few people you can say all this stuff about and it's really true."

Katie Welch said her brother's presence will be greatly missed. "The world is a better place when he was here. He'll be so dearly missed by all of us."

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. today at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Winston-Salem. Instead of flowers, the family is asking people to donate to Young Life, a Christian organi-zation, in the Czech Republic.

Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.

Monogrammed handbags

Welch, 23, '04 | TTA, town snag \$23M transit grant

Transportation in the Triangle will receive a face lift in the next few years thanks to a \$23 million grant from the federal government to be used specifically for area transportation improvements.

Last week, Rep. David Price, D-N.C., helped secure more than \$30 million in funding for state transportation initiative

Of the \$23 million, the Triangle Transit Authority was allotted \$21 million, while the remaining funds vere given to Chapel Hill Transit.

We would not be receiving these funds if it was not for Congressman David Price's efforts," said Kim Crawford, TTA government rela-

tions manager.
Crawford said \$20 million of the money allotted for TTA is marked specifically for the regional rail project, bringing total funding for

the project to \$85 million.

The rail system will connect Durham, Research Triangle Park, Cary and downtown Raleigh,

"The funding has allowed us to continue on the path that we've been going and follow the sched-ule that we've laid out," said Garold Smith, TTA's community relations

David Bonk, principal transportation planner for Chapel Hill, said the \$2 million Chapel Hill Transit will receive as part of the grant is earmarked through legislation for replacing buses.

Bonk said the town will not purchase any new buses but instead will "rehabilitate" 13 buses now in



Passengers wait for a bus Monday afternoon along South Road. About \$23 million in federal funding has been secured for local transportation initiatives that will include the regional rail project and bus replacements.

"Several of the buses right now are inoperable," he said.

"That is why these funds are important." The regional rail project is one

of the most prominent area trans-portation initiatives.

The TTA has been in the planning stages of creating a regional light rail system since 1992.

The project was created in hopes of providing a reliable rail service for residents while getting them off the area's already crowdInitially, the project was planned as a 35-mile, 16-station transit system, Smith said.

But factors such as the global rise in the cost of steel and concrete and the "flattening out" of one of its funding sources forced TTA to reassess the project and reduce it to a 28-mile system with 12 stations, Smith said.

Crawford said builders will start construction on the rail this summer, and the project is planned to be complete by 2008.

Smith said that depending on funding, the TTA's future goal is to

add stations in northern Raleigh, the Duke University area and Chapel Hill, as well as at Raleigh-Durham International Airport.

The TTA plans to use the

remaining \$1 million from the grants for bus replacement.

The group will begin replacing several besid over the next year,

Crawford said.

Bonk said Chapel Hill residents

should see the town's renovated buses by next fall.

> Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

Bills on domestic violence, drugs to become law

Existing penalites to be strengthened

BY KEVIN CHANDLER

People convicted of domestic violence or sexual assault, as well as producers of methamphetamine, will face harsher punishments when several state laws take effect

Wednesday.
The N.C. General Assembly made the crime of assault by stran-gulation, formerly a misdemeanor, makes an abuser guilty of a felony.

a felony punishable by as many as

two years in prison.

The N.C. Coalition Against
Domestic Violence worked hard with legislators to pass the bill, said Beth Froehling, public policy spe-cialist for the coalition. "This type of behavior often leads to homicide."

Froehling said strangulation is used as an intimidation method by assailants.

The new provision also lowers the threshold at which the assailant is labeled a "habitual misdemeanor

"The number of (meth) labs that've been discovered where people have been exposing their children ... has exploded."

WILLIAM MCKINNEY, SPOKESMAN FOR ATTORNEY GENERAL ROY COOPER

Froehling said she is hopeful that e package of laws will improve rights of men convicted of a rape or sexual assault in which the victim the package of laws will improve the state's domestic violence reputation. "We will not tolerate domestic violence in our state."

Similar laws will protect victims

of sexual assault.

One will terminate the parental

becomes pregnant. The law stems from a court case

in which a man accused of a sex offense refused to waive his parental rights unless the victim told authorities a lesser crime took place of lith

increase the use of civil no-contact orders.

Monika Johnson Hostler, executive director for the N.C. Coalition Against Sexual Assault, said the new laws are significant for the state.

"(Some) rape and stalking victims in North Carolina are not eligible for restraining orders because there is not a relationship between victims and assailants that fall within current specifications," she said.

Formerly, to be eligible for a restraining order, there had to be a defined relationship between victim and antagonist. Now, those guidelines will be loosened.

A related law also allows companies to file restraining orders on behalf of employees if the threat of workplace violence exists. In a step intended to stop the

spread of methamphetamine labs in the state, penalties for meth pro-duction will be dramatically stepped up when the laws take effect.

In 1999, nine meth labs were uncovered in the state, compared to 177 last year and 207 so far this

"It's a large problem in North Carolina," said William McKinney, spokesman for Attorney General Roy Cooper.

Meth manufacturing will be bumped up to a class C felony, punishable by up as many as 17 1/2 years in prison. Previously, the crime was a class H felony, likely carrying a punishment of probation for the first offense.

Meth producers also will face

harsher sentences if the drug wa produced in the presence of a child because of the dangers of the fumes and possible explosions involved. The number of labs that've been

discovered where people have been exposing their children to danger oded," McKinney said.

He added that Cooper and his staff are pleased with the more than 20 laws that will take effect Wednesday.

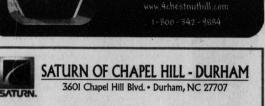
"They were laws we pushed for, and we worked hard with the General Assembly to create. And we hope they will be used effec-

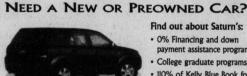
> Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

The Baily Tar Heel

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