

POLICE LOG

FROM STAFF REPORTS

■ An N.C. State University engineering master's student was arrested about 11:50 p.m. Saturday and charged with assault on a government official, damage to property and being drunk and disruptive — all misdemeanors — Chapel Hill police reports state.

According to reports, Jonathan Brodnax Bell, 23, of 3004 Brennan Drive in Raleigh, was being detained by a Players security guard in Amber Alley beneath the nightclub at 179 E. Franklin St.

Bell was extremely intoxicated and broke The Rathskeller's front glass display case, reports state.

When officers tried to detain him, he kicked one of them in the upper leg, reports state.

He was released and is scheduled to appear April 11 in Orange County District Criminal Court in Hillsborough.

■ A UNC Hospitals nurse's aide was arrested at 9 p.m. Saturday and charged with 20 counts of felony forgery of a prescription and one count of felony credit card fraud, Chapel Hill police reports state.

According to reports, LaShawn Marshall, 34, of 103 Gunston Court, was arrested at her home on warrants issued for 20 forged prescriptions for a total of 1,870 tablets over a two-month period.

She also was charged with unauthorized use of a credit card in excess of \$500, reports state.

She was released on a written promise to appear at the first opportunity in Orange County District Criminal Court in Hillsborough.

■ A Chapel Hill man was arrested at 8 p.m. Saturday on Conner Drive and charged with two counts of felonious indecent liberties, Chapel Hill police reports state.

According to reports, Brian Tucker, 35, of the streets of Chapel Hill, was a passenger of a red 1989 Honda Accord stopped for a seat belt violation.

Officers arrested him on warrants taken out Jan. 13, reports state.

He was taken to Orange County Jail to be held on a \$2,000 secured bond. He is set to appear Tuesday in Orange County District Criminal Court in Hillsborough.

■ A UNC student was arrested

at 3 a.m. Saturday at his residence at 110 Mistywood Circle U and charged with assault on a female, Chapel Hill police reports state.

According to reports, Calvin Sylvester Churchill, 27, a junior economics major, struck his girlfriend in the face, causing minor injuries.

Drugs or alcohol were involved in the incident, reports state.

Churchill was taken to Orange County Jail and was not given bail. He will appear today in Orange County District Criminal Court in Hillsborough.

■ A UNC student was arrested at 1:36 a.m. Saturday and charged with driving while intoxicated, Chapel Hill police reports state.

According to reports, David Michael Cowan, 21, of 1742 Southpointe Drive in Morganton, was involved in a collision on Church Street in a gray 1998 Honda.

He refused to submit a breath sample, reports state.

He was released on a written promise to appear March 29 in Orange County District Criminal Court in Chapel Hill.

■ A UNC graduate student was arrested at 4:17 a.m. Saturday and charged with driving while intoxicated at 2321 N.C. 54 East, Chapel Hill police reports state.

According to reports, Matthew Myers Griffith, 24, of 605 Airport Road Apt. 4, was arrested because he was in control of a suspicious blue 2004 Honda Civic parked at a Citgo station on Barbee Chapel Road.

His blood alcohol content was measured at 0.11 percent, reports state.

He was released on a written promise to appear March 29 in Administrative Traffic Court in Chapel Hill.

■ An red 1992 Isuzu Rodeo was reported stolen at 6:14 p.m. Saturday from 326 Brooks St., Chapel Hill police reports state.

According to reports, the auto, valued at \$1,500, was last known to be secure at 7 p.m. Tuesday.

■ A green 1994 Toyota Tercel was reported stolen at 12:13 a.m. Sunday from a parking lot at University Mall, at 201 S. Estes Drive, Chapel Hill police reports state. The car was valued at \$1,000, reports state.

Health plan would spark change

Would help alter state's ailing system

BY LUCY BRYAN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When Cathy Knight thinks of the state health plan, she thinks of the \$427 that gets taken out of her paycheck every month.

That adds up to about \$5,130 a year — 15 percent of her salary.

She thinks of the thick manual she received when she signed up for the only health insurance plan she's ever had.

She tried reading it once but quickly got lost in the terms and numbers.

She thinks of her 17-year-old daughter and her husband, a self-employed brick mason, and says, "I just pay it. It's better to have something than nothing."

Knight, a housekeeping administrator for South Campus residence halls at UNC-Chapel Hill, is one of the 560,000 members of the State Health Plan, the only health insurance option that is offered to North Carolina teachers and state employees and their families.

About 36,000 of those people work within the UNC system.

They are educators, maintenance staff, office personnel and hospital workers — and some of them are paying up to one-third of their earnings to keep their families covered.

It doesn't cost anything for a state employee to be insured under the plan, but the price tag is \$178 a month for each child and soars to \$427 a month for family coverage.

Those premiums have increased by 17 percent between 2002 and 2003, leaving many employees wondering when the next increase will come and whether or not they will continue being able to afford family coverage.

It is a system with high prices and no options, a system that leaves Knight and many of her fellow employees feeling trapped.

But there are people on all levels of the state health plan's complex system who know there is a problem and who are working for change.

Sparking change

Last fall, the UNC-system Office of the President commissioned a health care satisfaction survey, which was administered to employees by Hewitt Associates LLC.

Laurie Charest, associate vice chancellor for human resources at UNC-Chapel Hill, said the survey was designed to provide hard evidence for employees' dissatisfaction with health care benefits so the Office of the President could begin investigating an alternative health plan or "pilot project."

Of the 12,380 employees who responded, 65 percent were dissatisfied with employee contribution costs, and 74 percent were dissatisfied with out-of-pocket costs.

"For us to get permission to move ahead with the pilot project, we will have to go first to the Board of Governors and then to the legislature for approval," Charest said.

"So it seemed important for us to have some data to back up whatever our request (will) be."

Charest is part of a task force commissioned by the Office of the President to research alternative health insurance plans for the pilot project.

She said the task force hopes to design a plan that will subsidize the cost of dependent care, reduce out-of-pocket costs and provide a variety of coverage options.

But she also said the pilot project would have to work within the same limited budget that the General Assembly allots to the State Health Plan every year.

"The idea is that we would use the same amount of money but restructure the program in a way that (would make) people happier with the benefits," Charest said.

During the Board of Governors' Budget and Finance Committee meeting in February, a preliminary draft outlining 12 possible objectives for the plan came to light.

A new plan based on these objectives could emerge by 2006 — but its feasibility hinges on the approval of the N.C. General Assembly.

And unless the UNC system's plan as a whole, the legislature is unlikely to pass it, said N.C. Sen. Tony Rand, chairman of the BOG's Oversight Committee on the N.C. Teachers and State Employees Health Plan.

"They (shouldn't) just look at,

"How can we make a better deal for us?" said Rand, a Cumberland County Democrat and the Senate majority leader.

"Because in the long term, that will not fly."

Chronic costs

Dr. Jack Walker, executive administrator of the state health plan, said the solution lies not in who delivers health care, but in how it is delivered.

Walker said the management end of a health care plan, which includes issuing user cards and processing claims, accounts for about 2.5 percent of the cost of the plan — so finding a more efficient administrator is likely to have a minimal impact.

The other 97.5 percent of health care costs comes from members' doctor visits, surgeries and prescription drugs. And these costs are increasing exponentially as the number of chronically ill people rises.

Walker said that in 2003, more than 164,000 members of the state health plan were treated for chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and cancer.

On average, each of these members costs the plan \$7,400 a year, whereas a member who does not have a chronic disease costs the plan an average of \$800 a year.

This system punishes healthy members, who essentially pay the bills of unhealthy members.

Though a healthy family of four costs the system an average of \$3,200 a year, that family pays almost \$2,000 more in money that goes to pay for care for the chronically ill.

Since 2000, the percentage of healthy members in the plan has dropped from 64 percent to 58 percent.

Plan administrators predict that another 7 percent of members will be reclassified as unhealthy during the next five years, a switch that Walker estimates will cost \$476 million.

"I think it's a crisis coming to a head very shortly," Walker said.

A radical solution is needed, Walker said, and it must be one that can shift the responsibility of health care from providers to members.

Focus on health

Walker said that during the next four years, he hopes the state health plan will focus on helping people remain healthy.

A program called North Carolina HealthSmart, which is

"Does a collective political will exist to pass (a new health plan)? I don't know."

TONY RAND, SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

part of the plan's budget proposal to the General Assembly this session, might help.

The program will include fitness and dietary programs, smoking cessation programs, medical case management and screenings to identify and track health risks.

Rand said he hopes the General Assembly will take the concept of a wellness benefit even further.

"We are considering making the employee pay part of the premium, but giving them back that money if they will lead a healthy lifestyle," Rand said.

Rand said this plan would allow employees to earn back part of a mandatory monthly premium by concentrating on improving their own health.

Employees could participate in fitness programs, decrease their cholesterol levels or give up cigarettes to reduce the cost of their health care.

This type of plan would reward healthy members through an incentive system rather than exploit them, Rand said.

"We have to give people an incentive to take better care of themselves, which is a benefit to the employee — but it's also a benefit to the plan."

A political push

Even with backing from officials within the UNC-system and with support from current users of the health plan, such a measure would have to survive the political process, Rand cautioned.

To pass, it would need the support of 26 members of the Senate, 61 members of the House and Gov. Mike Easley.

"Does a collective political will exist to pass that?" Rand asked.

"I don't know. But if you don't pass that, the cost (of health care) continues to escalate dramatically."

If the measure succeeds, Knight and hundreds of thousands of people across North Carolina will find themselves in a very different relationship with their health care provider.

Officials say the only people who can permanently reduce the cost of health care are the plan's members.

But for that to happen, many people will have to drastically change their lifestyles.

"I think with some people, it doesn't really matter what you offer — if that's what they're used to doing, that's what they're going to keep doing," Knight said.

"But offer it to me? I'll take you up on it."

Contact the State and National Editor at statnat@unc.edu.

CORRECTIONS

■ Due to a reporting error, the Feb. 18 article "Council to eye developers" states that the Town Council's committee on parking lots 2 and 5 was to receive a short list for potential developers on both lots.

It actually was set to receive a short list of developers for lot 5 and the downtown Wallace Deck; a decision on lot 2 will come later.

To report corrections, contact Managing Editor Chris Coletta at cocoletta@email.unc.edu.

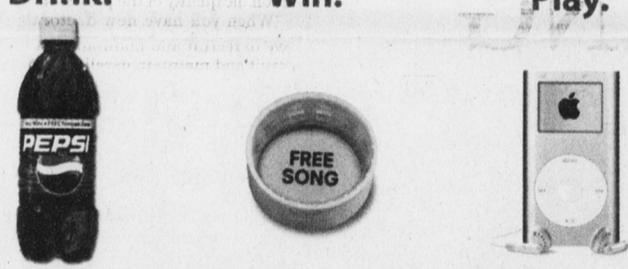
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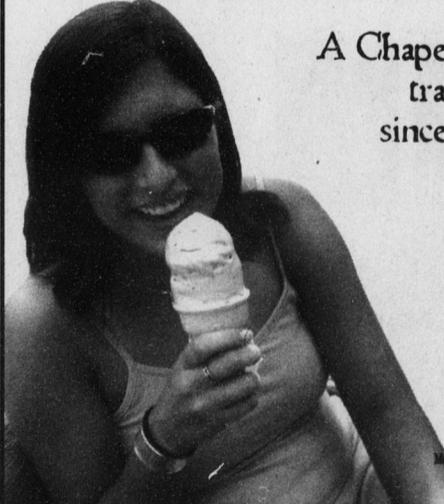
These grants usually support travel abroad to collect relevant materials.

Application Deadline: February 25

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