

Police will concentrate efforts on downtown

Additional officers could boost safety

BY MEREDITH LEE MILLER
ASSISTANT CITY EDITOR

With several high-profile, violent crimes on Franklin Street during the last year, the Chapel Hill Police Department will continue its efforts to bring more officers to the downtown area.

The police department will not be getting the extra officers for which it petitioned the Chapel Hill Town Council during the last budget process, but the department will not be left shorthanded.

The department was able to fill all 10 officer vacancies by the end of July, thanks to recruitment incentives, Police Chief Gregg Jarvies said.

"We still need the additional officers, but we're in better shape," he said.

The approved council budget was able to increase salaries of starting officers by 8 percent, which helped with hiring, Jarvies said.

"This was a tight budget year," he said. "The council was very generous."

The need for additional officers was highlighted during the summer months, when several violent crimes occurred in the heart of downtown Chapel Hill.

In July, an elderly man was sexually assaulted by five unidentified men with a plastic object near an alley at 137 E. Franklin St., said Chapel Hill Police spokeswoman Jane Cousins. The attack occurred during daytime hours, according to police reports.

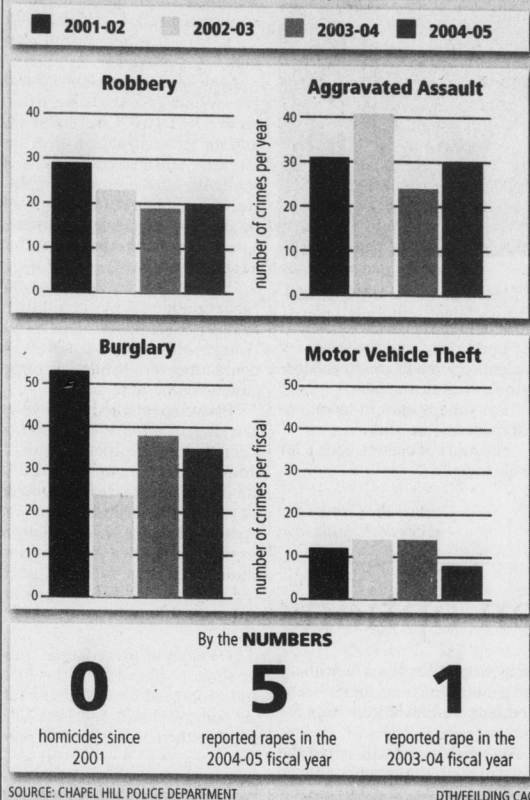
In May, a 22-year-old man was assaulted by an unknown assailant with a five- to six-foot-long metal pole in the parking lot on Church Street between West Franklin and West Rosemary streets, according to police reports.

The town's main commercial district also saw violence during the school year.

In March, a woman reported being raped on the 200 block of West Franklin Street, and in

Total crime downtown is decreasing

The total number of disturbances downtown is up from 73 in the 2003-04 fiscal year to 91 in the 2004-05, but the number of major crimes has decreased.



February, a UNC student was beaten by a group of attackers shouting about his sexual orientation.

Joe Numberger, operating partner of Qdoba Mexican Grill at the intersection of Columbia and Franklin streets, said more police presence is needed downtown because of poor lighting in some parts of the area and problems with panhandling.

He said his restaurant has had to contact the police several times to deal with beggars around the store.

"It's been an ongoing problem," he said. "It's just awful the amount of vagrancy."

Numberger said more officers might help downtown customers feel safer.

Jarvies said he will continue pushing to add four more officers to focus specifically on the downtown area. He said more patrols are needed downtown as business development increases and attracts more people to the area.

But Jarvies insists that violent events are rare and not the reason behind his request for the extra officers.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

New gymnasium to open next week

BY KATHERINE HOLLANDER
STAFF WRITER

The once-secluded region of the University known as South Campus soon will be taking a giant leap toward becoming the bustling hot spot on UNC's campus.

The new Ramshead Center, located on Ridge Road next to Kenan Stadium, plans to open its massive recreation facility next week.

Director of the Student Recreation Center Lauren Mangili said she is anticipating a successful opening with fitness classes starting Tuesday.

"We'll be holding a preview opening, we hope, within the second week of classes," she said.

The student recreation department is sponsoring a weeklong celebration from Sept. 18 to Sept. 23.

There will be events and activities at the center all week, including a dedication ceremony Sept. 21 and the grand opening of the fitness center Sept. 23.

The recreation center includes three full-length basketball courts, an indoor climbing wall and a multipurpose room that will host more than 30 fitness classes.

Students also will have access to a fitness area with more than 30 cardio

machines, a full weight circuit, free weights and a group cycling area.

Mangili said there will be opportunities at Ramshead that UNC has not offered until now.

"One of the three basketball courts has a dasher board system that allows students to play floor hockey and indoor soccer," she said.

Director of Intramural Sports, Dustin Van Sloten, said that while the intramural sports department often will not be using Ramshead for scheduled games, the department is planning on taking advantage of the new facility.

"We will use the Ramshead for special activities like dodgeball and floor hockey," he said.

Mangili said the campus's current Student Recreation Center, located on South Road, has about 2,000 people per day coming to work out.

"We expect this number to double, if not more, when the Ramshead Center reaches its regular hours," she said.

Mangili said that the novelty of the facility will attract more students at first but that the recreation department expects the number of students to even out after a few weeks.

Students on South Campus see the new Ramshead Center as a great convenience.

Sophomore Ashley McDaniel, who lives in Hinton James Residence Hall, said she has been waiting anxiously for a more accessible recreation option for South Campus residents.

"I took a fitness class on Tuesday nights, at the old SRC, last semester," she said.

"I felt unsafe walking back to South Campus at night, alone."

The opening of the recreation center comes about five months after the completion of the rest of the Ramshead Center.

The Ramshead Center arguably is the largest project completed thus far in the current trend of campus development.

The parking deck complex also offers a two-story dining facility and a fully stocked grocery store.

Ramshead's quadlike atmosphere will unite North and South Campus, Chancellor James Moeser said in an interview last week.

"I think student life will improve because of what it does."

Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.

Closing progress gap is priority for schools

BY LAURA OLENIACZ
STAFF WRITER

School leaders will continue their efforts this year to boost resources as progress gaps continue to cloud visions of educational perfection.

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro Board of Education will assess its priorities for the coming school year at its meeting tonight.

The school board will focus on its top goal — to staunch the widening achievement gap of its minority students in specific areas across the district's schools.

"The superintendent and staff are working on assessing why the achievement gap widened slightly this year and what steps can be taken to make sure that was a blip and not a trend," said school board chairwoman Lisa Stuckey.

Closing the gap has been a No. 1 priority for about 5 years.

District spokeswoman Stephanie Knott cited increased training for new staff as an important means to address the concern.

"Closing the gap is going to be

a high priority for the district this year," she said.

The board plans to strengthen its existing strategies and minority-focused task forces that work to curb the deficit in minority test scores.

Improving teachers' work environment is also a priority this year.

To allow for staff development and planning, elementary, middle and high schools will open late eight mornings of the school year each month.

Knott noted that collaboration between districts — such as the new Middle College High School — is important but that students are not taking advantage of the programs.

The board plans to increase resources for student transportation to allow for further fluidity between districts.

Other collaborative programs are currently underway, such as High Five: Regional Partnership for High School Excellence, which brings together teachers from five counties surrounding the Chapel Hill Carrboro district to share

teaching strategies.

Also under the board's umbrella of priorities is their work that will focus on adjusting the school system to a new block schedule.

"(The block schedule) will give students an opportunity to take courses in different formats and have the flexibility to take courses in different ways," Knott said.

The new arrangement will increase the number of classes students can take during their high-school career.

"Blocking courses give students an opportunity — for example in science classes — to really delve into a subject," Stuckey said.

"It also gives kids who are struggling an opportunity, if they need to take a course, to take it the following year."

The school board will meet at 7 p.m. at Chapel Hill Town Hall to discuss these priorities and other matters.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.



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