

Web site eases collegiate laundry woes

BY ADAM RODMAN
STAFF WRITER

For students living near the top of megadorms such as Hinton James and Ehringhaus residence halls, the trek down to the laundry room can be painful — especially if it turns out all the washers are in use.

But thanks to a new Web site, LaundryView.com, the journey might become a little easier.

Launched a few weeks ago in the newly renovated Kenan Community (including Kenan, Alderman and McIver residence halls), the site allows students to check the status and time remaining on machines without ever leaving their rooms.

LaundryView issues alerts or e-mails cell phones when an occupied washer or dryer opens up. Students also can take a look at weekly usage statistics to determine the best time to lug down their dirty clothes.

"We think it's a terrific service, especially in the high rises," says Ira

Simon, director of food and vending services at UNC.

The LaundryView site was developed by Mac-Gray Corp., UNC's provider of washers and dryers. The University greenlighted the project last spring, but "Mac-Gray sold it faster than they were able to deliver it," he says.

The first residence halls came online at the end of the summer, with Baity Hill apartments and more soon to follow. All residence halls should be hooked up to the Web site within six to eight months, he says.

Besides the added convenience to students, the system also will speed repairs to broken washers and dryers.

"(LaundryView) is also looking for machines that are unaccountably idle," says Bob Tuttle, chief technology officer at Mac-Gray. "It should absolutely get problems reported to the service desk faster."

LaundryView currently is installed at 39 universities across the country, and Tuttle says the

response from test schools has been very enthusiastic.

The majority of people said they used the Web site, and half of them said they used it to check laundry every time they went down, he says.

But the test universities were all smaller engineering schools, where the "gee whiz" factor was sure to be higher, Tuttle says.

Katie Winders, a freshman who lives in Alderman, says she definitely won't use the site for that reason.

"I just don't keep my computer on all the time," she says, though she thinks the system will turn out to be very popular.

"So far, everyone I've met is a hard-core computer person."

The system is relatively easy to install, Tuttle says, only requiring an extra box in each laundry room.

"All the washers and dryers are already wired up," he says. "We just connect into the existing wires."

But Simon says the process is

more complicated than it sounds because wires have to be dropped and power supplies redirected — one of the main reasons for the slow campuswide spread of LaundryView.

Because of this slow progress, the school has adopted a fairly subdued advertising policy, only posting ads in residence halls where the system is online.

With only one week's worth of washing sweaty gym shorts and stained T-shirts, students in Kenan community are already excited.

Samantha Buckner, a sophomore living in McIver, says she'll definitely use the Web site.

"I always have to run up and down to the laundry room with my laundry," she says. "This'll make it a lot easier."

Her neighbor, sophomore Eric Lail, agrees. "It's a lot better than last year," he says.

"I'll definitely be using it."

Contact the Features Editor
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Hootenanny draws a crowd for do-si-dos

Dance celebrates Southern culture

BY LINDA SHEN
SENIOR WRITER

Saturday night a scraggly caravan of cars made its way down uneven roads beneath a dark, smooth sky of stars.

For miles, only the flash and occasional shimmer of taillights lit the road and the Milky Way, startlingly clear without the burnt orange of streetlights blurring the sky, beamed down from overhead.

Halfway between Siler City and Pittsboro, where population density drops like a rock, wheels crunched to a halt over gravel roads and dozens of University students tumbled out of cars. They made their way toward a treeline by the light of their cell phones.

Matthew Knisley, a second-year medical student at UNC, held his first hootenanny — defined by Merriam-Webster as a gathering at which folksingers entertain and audiences join in — to celebrate his acceptance into medical school. Due to popular demand, Knisley's party came back for a second year.

"It's a celebration of my culture. I am a Southern country boy," Knisley says. "You can experience really intensely different cultures going 20 miles down the road, and we should celebrate that."

This year, with dozens of students milling around, their lilting voices blending with the sound of the band, the Chinkapin Hunters, Knisley declares it's become a celebration of "life, love and libations."

Publicized through e-mail and popularized by word of mouth, people streamed in from the deserted street, picked through the woods, and ended up in a clearing under the warm yellow beam of spotlights.

Knisley, roasting corn and heating chili, welcomes everybody, friend or stranger, with a big smile and an invitation to try the venison.

"The parties started off as just being family and friends," he says. "Over time, it's just got bigger."

Lauren McAlee, a senior public policy and philosophy double major says, "I think it's a nice change from the typical night out, an opportunity to look at the stars, a reminder that we're still in North Carolina."

The band, set up in front of the Knisley family's garage, warms up, fingers strumming over the curved body of a fiddle and a Cajun accordion, down the taut string of a washtub bass.

Knisley's hootenanny, which he plans to make a once-a-year event, is more than a performance.

"There's no way I could do this more than once a year," he says.

Testing the microphone, caller Jaso Phillips, a computer programmer at UNC, asks the throng of partygoers if they're ready to learn to square dance, and the answering holler is bright with laughter.

"This is my first one," McAlee admits. She's not alone — most of the students are learning the steps for the first time. Phillips narrates each step with animated patience and exaggerated movement.

The chaos eventually organizes itself into an enormous ring of people. Bunched and knotted and holding hands, dancers promenade their partners and do-si-do, stretching their necks to hear Phillips' hollered instruction.

"Ladies on the inside, promenade," he calls, tapping his feet, hands wrapped around the microphone, a wild smile on his face.

Students fumble and spin from partner to partner, and McAlee laughs as she says, "This is dangerous," as people trip over the gnarled roots of trees, bits of gravel and their own feet.

On the sidelines, Knisley keeps the roast corn coming and the chili hot, rubbing the back of his hand across his flushed-red face.

"After (the square dancing)," he says, "there's going to be a Cajun dancing, and that just goes on all night."

The large ring of people breaks into smaller circles of eight and four, and Knisley's mother, Diane Knisley, circulates with a slim, white cigarette hanging from her lips and a black teacup poodle in her arms.

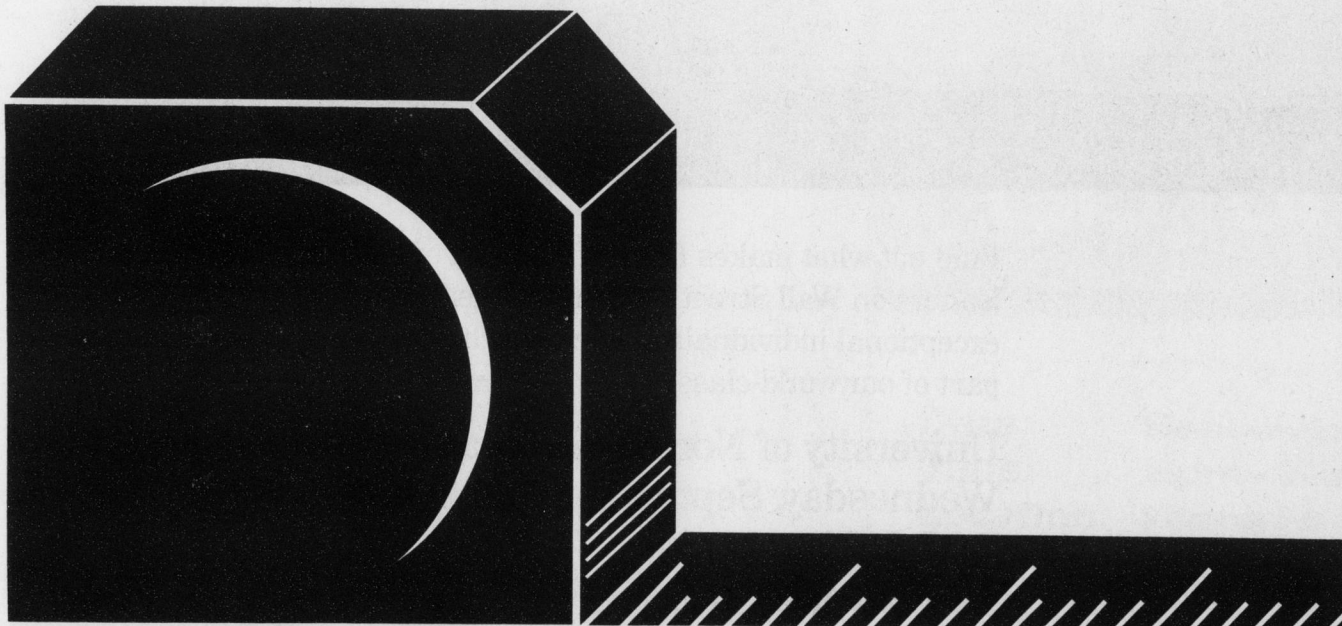
She poses for pictures and offers tours of the family house, just through the woods, which she and her husband built by hand.

As the music fades from Old Time to a reedy, ecstatic Zydeco, Phillips takes the opportunity for a break, stepping away from the microphone for a breather. Although not yet a professional caller, he has more than a dozen dances under his belt.

"There's a huge Old Time music scene in the Triangle," he says with a hoarse voice. "This is a fading tradition," he continues, looking at the dancers and musicians.

"People ignore it, but even though it's old and its fading, it's important. ... It's part of American history."

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