

El Centro sees silver lining University opens commuter lots

BY MEGHAN DAVIS
ASSISTANT CITY EDITOR

The summer proved tumultuous for one local nonprofit, but its partners foresee smoother sailing in the near future.

Since 2000, El Centro Latino has served as a resource center for Orange County's Latino population — estimated at 4.5 percent of the county's total population, according to U.S. Census data.

But in recent months, the center has scrambled to maintain its financial viability, lost its executive director and decided to move into a smaller space.

"It's one of those times of transition," said Ben Balderas, senior program director.

Since the departure of Tina Siragusa, El Centro's executive director of only 10 months, Balderas has stepped up to fulfill her duties, planning programs and being the center's ambassador to the community.

And those involved with El Centro are grateful for his leadership during the changeover.

Winkie La Force, chairwoman of the center's board of directors, said she is pleased with Balderas' management. "I feel great about the center right now," she said.

El Centro plans to move to 110

W. Main St. in Carrboro, just a few blocks from its current Lloyd Street location, by mid-November.

The Main Street building is owned by the Inter-Faith Council for Social Service, which will remain at that location.

"I think being with IFC is a really great partnership," La Force said. "I think the fact that often times we have similar clients, so we can help IFC with any language issues."

While El Centro's tight budget remains worrisome, the center is ready to solve its financial situation.

A mailing went out to the community Thursday, Balderas said.

"It's another way to raise a little money as well as to promote our membership drive," La Force said.

La Force said the center plans to meet with several of its other sponsors — the towns of Chapel Hill and Carrboro and Orange County — to discuss budget issues.

"We are inviting the county, both cities and Smart Start to update them on our funding and our finances," she said.

The county has not released its funding to El Centro, said Assistant County Manager Gwen Harvey.

"A meeting is being pulled together as quickly as possible," she said. "(The county) fully intends to work as closely as possible with them."

None of the center's other sponsors have held back funds.

Balderas said the Orange County Partnership for Young Children — the county's Smart Start agency — is "fully behind" the center, as are Carrboro and Chapel Hill.

"We didn't hold the funding," said Holly Grant, assistant community and economic development director in Carrboro. "That was one of the first checks I wrote."

Chapel Hill Finance Director Kay Johnson also said her department has not withheld any funding. "They have had a clean audit every year for four years," she said.

El Centro has not yet been forced to cut any of its programs.

Balderas added that El Centro plans to continue its after-school program at McDougale Elementary School and that there is interest in starting a kindergarten to fifth-grade program at Scroggs Elementary School.

"It's such a great service to the folks at those schools, continuing with their Spanish," La Force said.

El Centro's next large scale event will be a statewide soccer tournament Sept. 24 and Sept. 25 at Chapel Hill High School.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

BY KATHERINE HOLLANDER
STAFF WRITER

Four University commuter parking lots now are open to the public as University officials attempt to alleviate pressure from increased gas prices.

"North Carolina is going through a statewide belt-tightening in terms of fuel," said Randy Young, spokesman for the Department of Public Safety.

The new 550-space Chatham park-and-ride lot, located two miles south of Southern Village on N.C. 15-501, opened to the public Tuesday.

The Franklin Street lot near the Masonic Lodge, the Friday Center lot off N.C. 54 and the P lot on the corner of Estes Drive and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard opened for all to use Thursday.

Prior to the changes in accessibility, all of the lots required Commuter Alternative Program permits.

UNC officials said increasing the spots available to the general public will reduce the number available to students, faculty and staff — encouraging them to seek alternative means of transportation to

campus.

"Most people in the University community and the outside community understand that we're under constraints," Young said. "You just have to turn on the TV and see why."

Graduate and Professional Student Federation President Mike Brady said he believes these changes are the right move at this time.

"With the state facing critical fuel shortages we must make every effort to conserve what is available and to encourage more efficient modes of transportation," he said.

Although Brady said the opening of CAP lots will make parking more difficult for graduate students and University and hospital staff, he said he believes people will respond in a compassionate manner.

"I think people understand that this is a temporary solution to a very serious issue," he said. "Hopefully this will remind the entire campus community to be more aware of their energy consumption and to find creative solutions."

Young said he has not heard any complaints, but plans to respond to any feedback to the changes.

"We want to help as many people of the community as possible in this time of need," he said. "All opinions are welcome."

Young said there is not a confirmed date for the CAP lots to return to requiring permits.

In the meantime, UNC officials are encouraging commuters to take advantage of public transportation opportunities provided by the state and University — including Triangle Transit Authority, the Zipcar program and carpooling.

TTA Director of Community Resources John Tallmadge said that TTA and UNC have teamed up and created a discount opportunity for UNC students, faculty and staff to purchase a 30-day pass for \$10 per month. The passes can be bought at the DPS office on South Campus.

Tallmadge also said for this week only, TTA is offering free fare for express service from the downtown Raleigh or the North Carolina State Fairgrounds bus stops to the UNC Student Union.

Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.

Rapes defy general N.C. crime trends

BY SETH PEAVEY
STAFF WRITER

North Carolina has become a safer place to live in many ways, but the state still has room for improvement, according to the latest annual summary report from the N.C. attorney general's office.

Overall, the state crime rate decreased by 2.9 percent last year. Still, not all the statistics changed for the better.

Reported rapes were up by 7.5 percent, and arsons increased by 4.4 percent.

But property crimes, which include burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft, fell by 3.1 percent statewide. Robberies and aggravated assaults also decreased, while the murder rate remained unchanged.

"Our hard work to keep North Carolina safe is showing progress," said N.C. Attorney General Roy Cooper in a press release Tuesday.

The statewide trend in crime rates also can be seen in Chapel Hill.

"Robberies have decreased and aggravated assaults have decreased," said Jane Cousins, a spokeswoman for the Chapel Hill Police Department. "Total property crimes have decreased."

But 12 rapes already have been reported in Chapel Hill this year compared to seven during the same time period last year, Cousins said.

However, these numbers might be deceiving.

"I don't think the number of rapes has increased," said Monika Johnson Hostler, executive director of the N.C. Coalition Against Sexual Assault. "I think that reporting has increased."

There are more than 70 rape crisis centers throughout the state that provide information and counseling, but many women still are hesitant to step forward, she said. "I still think the vast majority don't report it."

Another problem is rapists often are not convicted or face minimal jail time and soon are back out on the streets, Hostler said.

Cooper said he is hoping to deal with this problem by pushing to expand the use of DNA technology in identifying sexual offenders.

But he also warned that North Carolina is facing more problems than were reflected in the report.

"Child predators are stalking our children on the Internet while methamphetamine production and use endangers our communities and families," Cooper said in the release.

While Cousins said meth use has not yet become a big problem in Chapel Hill, production is up elsewhere in the state. Police have busted 251 meth labs this year, up from just nine during all of 1999.

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

THE Daily Crossword

By Philip J. Anderson

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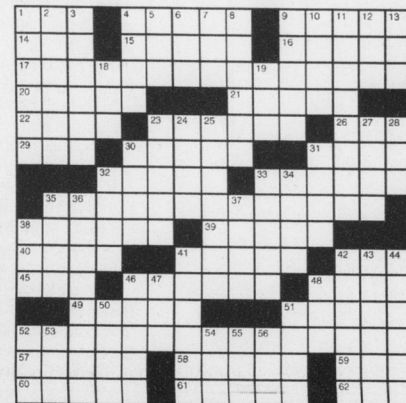
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