

WCHL forum addresses wide range of issues

Arts, crime among discussion topics

Key players from the University, Chapel Hill, Carrboro and the County met Thursday to discuss community issues at WCHL 1360 annual Chapel Hill-Carrboro-Orange County Forum.

'On parallel tracks'

Collaborative accomplishments between the town and University were lauded Thursday as worries about future changes in leadership persisted. Because there have been many opportunities for joint work, leaders are comfortable with cooperation.

"What the town does well and what the University does well are on parallel tracks now, and we're a growing community, a vibrant community," Chapel Hill Town

Council member Bill Strom said.

But with Chancellor James Moeser's retirement this year, regular turnover in the council and the University's Board of Trustees, trustee Roger Perry said he hopes new leaders will be able to sustain the vision, especially for Carolina North.

"This conversation to me is so important because we will never see in our lifetime a development the scale of Carolina North," Orange Water and Sewer Authority board member Gene Pease said.

"If it's not done right it's going to significantly change the character of this town and not for the better."

— COMPILED BY SARAH FRIER

'Buying locally'

Local business leaders said Orange County, Chapel Hill and Carrboro are not very sustain-

able. Members of the panel worried that residents aren't supporting local business.

"Each dollar spent at a local store has three to four times the impact than bought at a nonlocal store," Carrboro Alderman Dan Coleman said.

Greg Overbeck, of the Chapel Hill Restaurant Group, said residents should want to support local businesses because of what they give back to the community.

"Local restaurants give back to the community three times more than chain restaurants," he said.

"A big part of sustainability is buying locally."

— COMPILED BY TRICIA THOMPSON

'Peace of mind'

A discussion on crime and public safety began with a question: How does something such as former Student Body President Eve Carson's death happen here?

Because people think it's so safe, they're less likely to be careful, officials said.

Chapel Hill Police Chief Brian Curran said the area attracts crimes because of the night life, the vibrant atmosphere and the large population of 18- to 22-year-olds.

"I'm not sure we ever have a

peace of mind," Curran said.

Curran said that the rate of personal crimes has actually gone down in Chapel Hill but that to maintain that status the officers and public have to be very diligent about safety.

"We want to have a reputation as a place you don't want to go if you're up to no good," Curran said, adding that despite that, some home-grown gangs exist in Chapel Hill.

"Even Pleasantville has its neighborhoods."

— COMPILED BY TRICIA THOMPSON

Education

The state of education in Orange County is currently determined by the achievement gap, discipline, resource allocation, school growth and diversity and community, education leaders said Thursday.

Officials said the achievement gap poses an obstacle to school improvement.

"We have made very strong progress in terms of the achievement gap," said Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools Superintendent Neil Pederson.

"But as standards have risen, the achievement gap has widened again."

Pederson tied the gap in educa-



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Jeff McCracken (right), director and chief of police of UNC's Department of Public Safety, discusses campus crime during the WCHL community forum.

tion to the socioeconomic poles of the Chapel Hill area.

"We're becoming a very expensive place for people to live," he said.

— COMPILED BY JACKI HUNTINGTON

'Supporting the arts'

After a commercial break, Jon Wilner, executive director of the ArtsCenter in Carrboro, jokingly reintroduced the rest of the arts panel as a group of "whiny artists."

The description wasn't completely unfair — there were more than a few gripes about the local art scene as panelists discussed

how to improve the viability of those scenes.

"There's a big disconnect between our leaders and us about what constitutes supporting the arts," said local artist Kirk Ross, who also is editor of The Carrboro Citizen.

Wilner and the other panelists agreed it's the general sense of identity that needs to be restored in order to return Chapel Hill and Carrboro's artistic scenes to their maximum potential.

"We're losing, in a sense, our local art identity," Wilner said.

"It's being co-opted somewhere else."

— COMPILED BY BENNETT CAMPBELL

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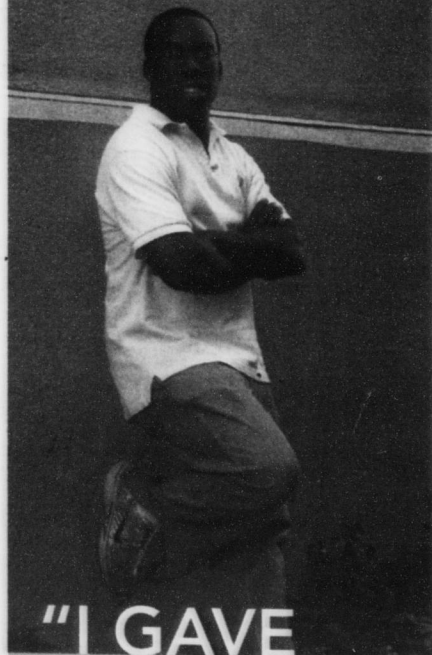
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