



**ECU football  
opts for  
more  
offense**  
SPORTS, C1

**Joyner  
uses music  
to spread  
happiness**  
LOOK, D1



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# The Daily Reflector



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## ECU furloughs total more than 200; more coming

BY GINGER LIVINGSTON  
Staff Writer

Data provided by ECU shows that more than 200 employees have now been identified for furloughs, and the university is finalizing plans for more.



**MITCHELSON**  
ECU interim Chancellor

on June 11 that it was issuing furloughs to trim about \$1 million from a budget deficit of at least \$20 million.

Ron Mitchelson said at the time that about 110 employees would see full or partial furloughs but did not identify where they worked. Athletics Director Jon Gilbert said all the employees in his department, more than 130 people, would see partial furloughs. It was not clear if the athlet-

ics furloughs overlapped with the furloughs mentioned by Mitchelson. Data provided by ECU this week offered some clarity.

A total of 50 employees in administration and finance will be furloughed for 90 days

See **FURLOUGH, A5**

**At a glance**

- A total of 50 employees in administration and finance will be furloughed for 90 days starting July 1. Another employee in the division will have a 50 percent furlough during that time.
- Another 24 employees in academic affairs will work reduced hours during the 90 days.
- In athletics, 142 employees will take five-day furloughs between June 22 and Sept. 22.

## Recovering from tragedy

Amid pandemic, Rocking Horse Ranch hit by mysterious illness

BY KIM GRIZZARD  
Staff Writer

In early March, when states across the country began encountering their first cases of what was then referred to as the novel coronavirus, Rocking Horse Ranch was facing a different kind of mysterious illness. Within 48 hours, it had killed two horses. Less than two weeks later, a third died.

Three months later, the therapeutic riding program, like many nonprofits, is trying to navigate the road to recovery. While there are no clear answers as to what happened, there is a plan to ride again before fall.

"Our loving horses are missing our riders and their families," a statement on the organization's website reads.

Many of the approximately 150 riders the program serves through equine-assisted therapy have medical conditions that make them at-risk for contracting COVID-19. Few, if any, have set foot on the ranch since early March when the virus was first reported in North Carolina.

On March 6, Greenville

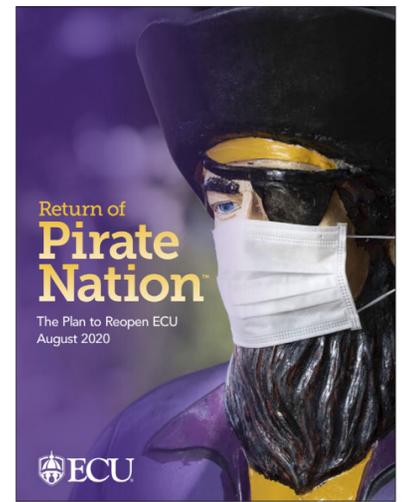
See **RANCH, A5**



PHOTOS BY DEBORAH GRIFFIN  
THE DAILY REFLECTOR

**Rocking Horse Ranch Executive Director Wanda Montano poses with Lexi Montano, who began work last month, does not have horsemanship experience. "I'm learning about the horses," she said. "At the end of the day if I walk up to them and they let me put my arms around them and hold them, they know I'm a good person."**

At left, Montano stands beside the grave of Cody, a horse that is buried on the property. She keeps the ashes of two other horses, Cisco and Beau, in her office.



BOBBY BURNS/THE DAILY REFLECTOR

East Carolina University on Monday released a plan to guide its efforts to reopen from a closure imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic in March.

## ECU's reopening raises concerns

Some faculty push administration for safety assurances, inclusion in planning

BY ELIZABETH JOHNSON  
Staff Writer

A petition signed by more than 240 people employed by East Carolina University raises concerns about the reopening process and seeks a variety safety assurances including that no instructor will be required to teach in person should they be concerned about their health.

The petition was circulated prior to Monday's release of ECU's reopening master plan, called Return of Pirate Nation, which sets the university on course

See **REOPENING, A6**

**Online**

Visit this story on reflector.com to read the Return of Pirate Nation reopening plan, a petition by members of the faculty regarding the reopening and a resolution from ECU's chapter of the American Association of University Professors.

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Lottery

Friday Pick 3: 1-7-5; Pick 4: 4-5-5-0 (day)  
Thursday night drawings:  
Pick 3: 2-8-9; Pick 4: 0-8-8-2  
Cash 5: 17-25-33-39-40  
Lucky for Life: 1-8-18-27-46 16

Weather

Today: 89, Mixed  
Tonight: 72, T-storms  
Monday: 90, Sunny



Forecast on A2

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## Summer hunger started early.

Help us provide **240,000 meals** for children and their families this summer.  
Visit [stopsummerhunger.org](http://stopsummerhunger.org).



# FROM PAGE ONE

## RANCH

Continued from A1

Mobile Equine Services received a call that Cody, one of nine horses at the ranch, was down. The condition of the 18-year-old horse declined quickly, and the decision was made to euthanize him. But shortly after the veterinarian had left, a second horse began exhibiting similar symptoms.

Veterinarian Linda Balot was on call that night. She made the decision to send Beau directly to the School of Veterinary Medicine at N.C. State University, where he later died.

Horses have been known to contract coronavirus, Balot said, but the equine virus differs from the one that affects people and is not considered a threat to humans. Equine coronavirus is associated with gastrointestinal symptoms rather than respiratory distress.

When Beau and Cisco, the ranch's third horse to die, were tested for coronavirus, the results were negative. The deaths of all three horses remain a mystery. Necropsies performed at the vet school on Beau and Cisco have produced little information on what may have killed them.

"Sometimes, you do a lot of testing and you come up negative," Balot said. "This is unfortunately what pretty much happened with all the tests we were running."

Balot, who has been practicing as a large-animal vet in eastern North Carolina for more than two decades, said she has never seen a case like this.

"It's been very frustrating," she said. "Everybody wants answers. You want to be able to point your finger and say 'This was the problem,' so this way you won't have it again."

"Everything's been cleaned, sanitized. We're trying to do everything possible to make sure this doesn't ever happen again."

Although one additional horse on the property, leased for use in therapeutic riding, became ill and recovered, the remainder of the herd showed no symptoms. Still, Rocking Horse Ranch tested the horses' hay and feed and changed their food source.

"They did everything they pos-



DEBORAH GRIFFIN/THE DAILY REFLECTOR

**Rocking Horse Ranch Executive Director Wanda Montano, a graduate of ECU, said her role at the nonprofit organization will be more about business than horsemanship. "My personal philosophy is that if you have the right attitude, the right motivation, good common sense and you're willing to learn, you can learn the content," she said.**

sibly could to get answers," Balot said. "Anything that was recommended to them, they did."

Agricultural Extension agents have examined the pastures to look for potential toxins. Executive Director Wanda Montano said the ranch is preparing the pastures for a chemical burn, plowing and replanting before the horses are allowed to return to graze there.

For Montano, the effort to break ground and plant something new is both literal and figurative. A Charlotte native and East Carolina University graduate, she had never set foot on the almost 30-year-old ranch before her interview. She has no horsemanship experience.

The fourth generation in her family to work at a textile mill, Montano folded blankets in the summer to help pay for her college. Her father, a warehouse manager, coached recreation league basketball and Little League at night and on weekends.

"I grew up watching my father

give back to the church, to the community in some way," Montano said. "That's really who I am. I like to have an impact on people."

A former social worker, Montano has three decades of management experience as well as a background in nonprofit boards. She serves on the ECU Board of Visitors and chairs the Health and Human Performance Advancement Council.

"They rewrote the job description when they hired me to make it more business focused, more fundraising, more community outreach, knowing that I could hire the right staff to run the barn," Montano said. "I have horses to manage and a barn, but at the end of the day, it is a business. It has to be run as a business."

Like nonprofits across the country, Rocking Horse Ranch is feeling the financial effects of pandemic-related closures. The cancellation of riding lessons and other programs has left the organization with no income since

March. In addition, its largest fundraiser of the year, the Derby Dash Bash, was canceled due to the postponement of the Kentucky Derby. Last year's event raised more than \$60,000.

This year, with the Kentucky Derby slated for Labor Day weekend, Rocking Horse Ranch decided not to host a fundraiser. Instead, a different event is being planned for mid-November.

For now, Montano is focusing her attention on preparing the pastures and building up the herd. Following the horses' deaths, three leased horses were moved from the facility, leaving the organization with one third the number of working horses it once had. In addition, staff changes have left Rocking Horse Ranch with no one to lead its interactive vaulting program.

Montano is looking to build back the herd; she believes six to eight horses are needed to run the program. She and her staff are working with Professional Asso-

ciation of Therapeutic Horsemanship International to determine safety procedures for reopening.

When riders return in late summer, one of their earliest lessons is likely to touch on grief. Cody is buried on the property. Cremated remains of Beau and Cisco are preserved in wooden boxes adorned with commemorative quotes.

The horses' photos remain on display in the lobby, along with notes of sympathy from students who heard about their deaths.

"Some of our riders who knew Cody, who knew Beau and Cisco, they need to have some way to come back to the property, I think, once we reopen and go through that (grieving) process," Montano said. "Right now the only way they've been able to reach closure is to write the notes that they've sent that we've posted."

"So many of our riders have special needs, so for them grief and closure processes are more critical. Especially those on the autism spectrum, it's just more difficult for them to process," she said. "I do think the horses in the barn have been grieving as well because they don't know where their friends went either."

Montano is spending time getting to know the ranch's three working horses: Lexi, Happy and Midnight. She plans to take riding lessons so she can better understand what students are experiencing.

"I was ready for another challenge because I don't feel like I'm ready to retire," said Montano, who will turn 68 in July. "I have so much still to do."

"My 37-year-old daughter said to me, 'Mom you like to fix things. Go fix it,'" she said, laughing. "I want to get it fixed and I'm going to. I'm absolutely convinced I can make this a better place for our riders, for our volunteers for our staff."

Rocking Horse Ranch, 1721 Blue Banks Farm Road, is closed for therapeutic riding until later this summer, but it is open by appointment for visits with horses and staff. Call 752-0153. For more information, visit rhmc.com.

Contact Kim Grizzard at [kgrizzard@reflector.com](mailto:kgrizzard@reflector.com) or call 329-9578.

## ECU Day of Giving raised \$3.1 million

### ECU News Services

East Carolina University's fourth annual Pirate Nation Gives raised more than \$3.1 million on Wednesday including a \$1.8 million commitment that will largely support the School of Business.

The university announced on Friday that the one-day, social media-driven effort surpassed last year's total of \$805,000 and exceeded its initial goal of \$1 million.

It brought alumni, faculty, staff, students, parents and friends together to support worthy university causes, a news release said. Fundraising priorities for this year's effort included Beacon scholarships, athletics scholarships and the Ledonia Wright Cultural Center.

"Thank you for caring so deeply and being an important part of Pirate Nation," Interim Chancellor Ron Mitchelson said in a news release. "Every gift supports our resilient students, faculty and researchers who are making a positive impact in North Carolina and beyond. It was a different day than we initially planned, but your generosity has made this the most successful Pirate Nation Gives yet."

The largest gift of the day was a \$1.8 million commitment from an anonymous faculty member. Nearly \$1.1 million will support accounting faculty recruitment and retention — among the largest gifts ever for the College of Business.

"Inspired, knowledgeable, caring faculty are the backbone of our college. The \$1.1 million anonymous planned gift will al-

low us to attract and retain top-notch faculty, influencing thousands of students throughout their careers," Dean Paul Schwager said.

The remaining \$720,000 of the gift will be directed to the Students' Treasure Chest, a student-led group that supports students' immediate needs, including financial hardships caused by COVID-19.

Other gifts made during Pirate Nation Gives included:

- More than \$41,000 for Beacon scholarships, with \$25,000 from the Harold H. Bate Foundation. The scholarships provide \$1,000 for up to 500 students each fall.

- Nearly \$74,000 for athletics scholarships, which this year will have to provide for an extra year of eligibility for student-athletes whose seasons ended prematurely due to the pandemic.

- An initial gift of \$25,000 from Dr. Jesse R. Peel to create a diversity and inclusion support program within the College of Education's Rural Education Institute.

Peel grew up in Martin County and is a supporter of numerous scholarships and the namesake of the Dr. Jesse R. Peel Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ) Center.

"The purpose of the new program is to provide rural educators across the state with professional development in areas of equity, social justice, diversity and inclusion," Peel said. "I feel the social upheaval in our country currently makes this an incredibly vital initiative."

For more information about ECU's Day of Giving and a full list of champion donors, visit [ecu.edu/piratenationgives](http://ecu.edu/piratenationgives).

## FURLOUGH

Continued from A1

starting July 1. Another employee in the division will have a 50 percent furlough during that time.

The employees work in printing and graphics the student store and parking, the university reported.

Another 24 employees in academic affairs will work reduced hours during the 90 days.

In athletics, 142 employees will take five-day furloughs between June 22 and Sept. 22.

Plans for implementing furloughs in the student affairs division are waiting for approval and implementation, said Jamie Smith, assistant director of news services.

"Once those final decisions and employee notifications take place, we can release the number and types of furloughs," she said.

Revenue losses are related in part

to the COVID-19 shutdown, officials said. Some furloughed employees had not been working but were receiving pay.

The financial losses were felt across the university, including the medical and dental schools, Smith said.

"We are still quantifying these losses," she said. "Housing, dining, and the clinics have all experienced significant losses."

University officials will know total losses in September once its fiscal year is closed, Smith said.

The current furloughs are expected to save \$296,000 in athletics, \$189,260 in administration and finance and \$191,711 in academic affairs for a total of \$676,971.

The furloughs have not affected students enrolled in summer courses, Smith said.

Earlier, outgoing UNC Interim President Bill Roper gave chancellors the authority to propose fur-

loughs for institutional auxiliary and receipt-supported enterprises only, the university announced.

These groups have seen their work completely or partially reduced and their funding sources affected by the coronavirus, the university reported.

Appalachian State University is the only other school in the UNC System to announce furloughs, according to a system office spokesman.

Business NC reported in mid-June that the university was furloughing 106 full-time employees in the athletics department. The plan consisted of most employees working reduced hours and a small number being on continuous furloughs for a shorter period of time, the magazine reported.

Contact Ginger Livingston at [glivingston@reflector.com](mailto:glivingston@reflector.com) or 252-329-9570.

## School board OKs budget amendment

The board also gave the go-ahead to purchase mobile units for Hope Middle School and Ridgewood Elementary School.

BY ELIZABETH JOHNSON  
Staff Writer

The Pitt County Board of Education last week approved a budget amendment to accommodate new state and federal funds and gave the go-ahead to purchase mobile units for Hope Middle School and Ridgewood Elementary School.

Chief Finance Officer Debra Baggett presented the board with the amendment during a special called meeting on Wednesday to adjust the system's budget to \$293,873,033.

COVID-19 relief funding is providing the system with \$1,314,388 for its child nutrition program,

which has been providing meals since schools were closed in March. The funds will cover \$532,000 spent so far. The remainder must be spent by December.

Federal CARES Act funding also gives the schools access to funds to purchase computer equipment. The district will receive \$549,971 for student devices, \$75,815 for personnel devices and \$169,935 for home and community WiFi.

The district has received a \$3,165,015 increase in state funding for the coming fiscal year and an additional \$45,000 in special revenue grant funding, Baggett said.

The system received a total increase of \$7,783,850 in federal funds, mainly through the CARES Act program, which goes through September 2021.

There also was an increase in capital funds of \$318,000 to be used for

maintenance projects and the purchase of a bus. The school nutrition fund received a \$400,000 transfer from a state fund.

"We needed to increase \$400,000 due to one of the state funds was actually a transfer, we didn't offset expenses, we actually had to record it as a revenue, in child nutrition, so that was mostly an accounting action to offset what you saw in the other fund," Baggett said.

Benjie Forrest moved to approve the amendment, Worth Forbes seconded the motion. The budget was approved unanimously.

Superintendent Ethan Lenker gave a presentation on House Bill 1225, a \$3.1 billion bond package under consideration by the General Assembly. He said the county could see up to \$15 million for capital expenditures.

"There's a ton of growth we need to look at, that's

going to challenge us in some other ways, but this way it will at least give us the opportunity to work on this \$15 million and start planning for other avenues," Lenker said.

Lenker said two mobile units need to be moved to Hope Middle School and Ridgewood Elementary School. The units would be installed within three months due to the increased growth at the schools.

Hope Middle School has had an increase of 125 students in two years, he said. The units at Hope Middle School would be installed behind the cafeteria cafeteria and the units at Ridgewood Elementary School would be installed near other units.

Melinda Fagundus made a motion, seconded by Anna Barrett Smith to allow Lenker to move forward in purchasing mobile units. The motion was approved unanimously.