Commencement Address: Be Quick; Swing Slightly Upward

By James A. Wynn, Fr. Judge, North Carolina Court of Appeals

Collowing my narrow loss for a seat on the Supreme Court of North Carolina in 1998, many people asked me how I was able to grapple with the outcome of the election with such a good attitude.

Dr. Prezelle Robinson-former president of St. Augustine's College and an assistant ambassador to the United Nations—rhetorically asked: "Tell me, Judge, how it is that a young boy who grows up in the tobacco fields of eastern North Carolina aspires to sit on the Supreme Court?"

responded to Dr. Robinson that in that one question he had summed up the quest of my life: to be blessed by where I had come from, not limited by it. And blessed I have been. Within one year of losing my seat on the Supreme Court, the President of the United States nominated me to become the only North Carolinian to currently serve on United States Court of Appeals for the fourth circuit. If the United States Senate confirms me, I not only will be the first African American to ever sit on that court, but I would be the first native eastern North Carolinian born out of Wilmington to ever serve on that court.

But this testimony of my blessing portends more, because from it you can extrapolate inspiration for reaching your own aspirations. For Dr. Robinson's question of how it is that a young farm boy aspires to sit on the Supreme Court applies to your future too. Because when you grasp that you don't need to take another final exam, when you realize that choosing courses for the next semester is all over, when the tassels are all turned and you've marched in pomp and circumstance, when the full recognition that the degree is in the frame—what remains is "Life" and the more difficult choices that can lead to success or failure. And for you will remain enigmatic questions like:

How is it that a college dropout became CEO of Microsoft and the richest man in the world?

How is it that a boy from Wilmington who was cut from the junior varsity team became the greatest basketball player of the millennium?

How is it that East Carolina Teachers' College with an enrollment of 174 in 1909 became East Carolina University with a projected enrollment of over 27,000, a medical school that boasts top ranking in family medicine, a world leader in delivery of health care through telemedicine, doctoral programs in areas such as biophysics and coastal resource management and a music department that is the envy of the nation?

And, for that matter, how is it that a young boy from New Castle, Pennsylvania, grew up to become the chancellor of East Carolina University?

And so you ask yourselves: How do I fit in the great scheme of things? What can I aspire, achieve and offer back to society? How does a person with a beginning of improbable success go on to reach unassailable career heights?

Ralph Waldo Emerson put the answer this way: "Every man believes that he has a greater possibility."

So, like Bill Gates, Michael Jordan and Chancellor Eakin, the quest for you is not to just reduce life to its least common denominator and ask "Why?" Rather, it is to look further and deeper into your own genome and activate the gene for aspiration that lives in all of us.

Some say to reach your aspirations, you need to know important people, that the ladder of accomplishment is built by identifying the rungs of who's who and getting in good with them. They say you have to know somebody to get somewhere. But if how you get there is only by knowing somebody, what are you going to do when you have depended on somebody else for your future and that person fails you? Just knowing somebody may help to give you ideas on success, but depending on the good will of others will not unlock your own aspirations. It takes something more than the power of others to succeed. Indeed, you must depend upon your own ambition, desire and focus to lead you down the path of success and prosperity.

Secondly, some would say that to succeed, you need to get an education. But education alone is not enough to blossom your aspirations. Many brilliant persons have acquired degrees and never reached their life goals. Indeed, some college graduates never realize their full potential and never really succeed in anything.

Thirdly, other folks believe that the key to opening the doors to your aspirations is studying the past and knowing your history. Honoring and respecting your forefathers and looking back at the past is indeed a great motivator. But knowing your history is not enough to open the door of aspiration. It may motivate you, but you have to have something to be motivated for.

The key to opening the doors to our aspirations is not getting to know the right focus; it's not getting a degree; and it's not just knowing your history.

The best advice for how to reach your highest aspirations comes from a story involving baseball. In baseball, the most difficult task is hitting the ball. For us, in life, it is learning to be humble, to be giving, to be caring and to be honorable.

The story goes that a famous baseball player, in a mostly futile effort at teaching players how to hit a home run, gave them this advice: "Be quick! And swing slightly up!" That advice for hitting a baseball also applies to hitting home runs in life.

The first part—be quick—is obvious. It means be on time and ready to deal with the vicissitudes of life. Don't wait for the action to happen, but be quick to seize the opportunity. Be quick to recognize the difference between good and bad. It is hard to know right from wrong, but when you know what is right, it is wrong not to do it.

The ideals that you have learned at ECU have instilled in you the ability to recognize the path upon which you should travel. Graduates, be quick!

The second part—swing slightly up—means to elevate your outlook and behavior throughout life. Set your goals; aim high; exalt your esteem among your fellow human beings. Graduates, swing slightly upward!

Not too high, or you may miss your target by overreaching and setting unreasonable goals. But not too low either, for that can lead to underachieving and failing to hit the big one. Set your sights on the target and hit it at the slightly upper angle so that your life will sail over the fence of your aspirations.

Be quick in life! And swing slightly upward, graduates!

Because, just knowing important folks is going to help you only so much.

Because all the education in the world is not worth anything unless you get something out of it.

Because knowing all the historical events and who did what when, is not going to get you there if you don't have a grasp of where you are now and where you're going.

Being quick and swinging slightly upward requires personal commitment and discipline. It requires an embodiment of the capitalistic spirit—to work hard, invest wisely and be thrifty and honest. It means working together to form a consciousness of character, to retake the dignity of our glorious history and to make our future more brilliant than ever before.

Yes, we reach our greater heights and dreams through aspirations.

In just a few minutes, Dr. Eakin is going to hand you L your own degree, that you earned on your own ability. It will be the realization of your education aspirations. That degree empowers you to move toward actualizing economic and moral aspirations for this millennium.

Take it, and use that degree to be quick! And swing slightly upward! To do so may mean taking that poetic road less traveled by. It may mean saying a prayer like that old deacon at my childhood church used to pray: "Lord, I want you to come on down heah with a fan in one hand and a whup in the other; I want you to fan out all evil and whup out the ol' devil."

Be quick! And swing slightly upward! Do it with the humility of those tobacco-chewing, snuff-dipping, snaggled-toothed folks that inspired my values as a child growing up down the road from here.

They represented then, and they represent now, the hard-working-decent citizens of our country. They put on bib coveralls or uniforms and go out into the fields and factories. They had a wealth of common sense and a richness of human experience that gave them more education than you could ever get from a degree.

Be quick! And swing slightly upward, graduates, by being committed citizens, because in times like these, our world needs graduates with strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands.

Be quick! And swing slightly upward!

Don't let the lust for riches kill you nor let the spoils of office buy you.

Be quick! And swing slightly upward!

Possess opinions and a will; have honor; do not lie; be a strong citizen, a sun-crowned citizen, one who lives above the fog in your public duty and in your private thinking.

Should a flood of problems enter your life and wipe out all of your dreams, you'll be able to aspire to even greater heights, by remembering the words I told you today:

Be quick! And swing slightly upward!

~ a fortnightly newspaper for ECU faculty and staff

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\$3.1 Billion Campus Bonds Bill Passes; Fall Referendum Set

egislators and higher education supporters across the state joined Governor James B. Hunt yesterday at a State Capitol ceremony at which Hunt signed a recently-passed legislative bill providing \$3.1 billion for capital improvements and land acquisition for the state's campuses.

The Michael K. Hooker Higher Education Facilities Finance Act will place a higher-education bond referendum on North Carolina ballots in November. The bill provides for the issuance of bonds to pay for capital improvements at the 16 UNC campuses and the state's 59 community colleges.

ECU's portion of the proposed expenditures totals \$190,609,500 and includes these items.

· Construction of the Science and Technology Building to house programs now located in Flanagan Building - \$55,125,300

• Flanagan Building modernization and conversion to general classroom use - \$13,421,300

• Construction of a complex at the West Campus to house Nursing, Allied Health Sciences and the Developmental Evaluation Clinic, now located in the Rivers and Carol Belk Buildings - \$46,882,500

• Expansion/modernization of the Nursing wing of Rivers for general academic use - \$14,685,500

 Modernization and conversion of Carol Belk Building for general academic use - \$7,791,300

· Classroom improvements (technology upgrades and renovation) in Speight, Brewster, Rivers, GCB, Rawl and Austin - \$3,648,400

• Academic space requirements (teaching laboratory installation) in existing buildings - \$5,250,000

• Addition of 77,000 square feet of library and study space at the Health Sciences Library -\$12,600,000

· Comprehensive renovation of Old South Cafeteria office space for student services and academic use - \$4,442,100

• Infrastructure repairs and expansion (utilities improvements) - \$16,291,100

• Renovation of facilities in the former Daily Reflector building downtown for campus computing center operations, vacating currently-occupied space to meet academic needs - \$1,785,000

• Land acquisition for new construction – \$7,879,400

• Technology infrastructure expansion – \$807,600

The Hooker bill (named in honor of the recently deceased UNC-Chapel Hill chancellor) passed the General Assembly May 18 with a unanimous final vote of approval in both houses. Continued on page four



Photo by Cliff Hollis

DEVASTATION DEMO - Using a table model community, Chris Mack of the Army Corps of Engineers, Charleston, South Carolina, demonstrates the effects of high water on the environment. The display was on view Wednesday in Mendenhall, opening day of the interdisciplinary conference, In the Aftermath of Hurricane Floyd: Recovery in the Coastal Plain.

Public Forums Set In Search For New Chancellor

The ECU Chancellor Search Committee, meeting for the first time on May 11, scheduled five public forums to help draft a job description for the university's next leader.

The 15-member panel, headed by Phillip R. Dixon, chair of the ECU Board of Trustees, also decided to request proposals from executive recruiting firms to assist in the search.

Dixon said the public forums will allow interested individuals to suggest desirable qualities and experience in the new chancellor.

Chancellor Richard Eakin, who has held the post for 13 years, announced last month that he plans to retire next year.

The committee set forums for 2 P.M. and 7 P.M. on June 21, for 7 P.M. on July 12, and for noon and 7 P.M. on August 16. The forums will last up to two hours each and sites will be announced later. Sign-up lists will be available for persons who wish to speak.

Dixon said committee members will also write to many individuals and groups soliciting input for preparing a profile of the kind of person the panel will be looking for. "I'm happy to consider anybody from anywhere as long as we have an exceptional candidate," he said. University of North Carolina President Molly Corbett Broad will address the committee at its next meeting on June 2.

Once the search is completed, the Board of Trustees will forward the names of at least two finalists to Broad for consideration. The new chancellor, upon nomination by the president, must be elected by the UNC Board of Governors. - John Durham

Trustees Vote To Halt Eastward Expansion

The ECU Board of Trustees has voted against the eastward expansion of the campus that had been a key feature of the proposed new master plan.

On a 6-3 vote at the board's May 12 meeting, the trustees approved a motion by Charles Franklin, board vice-chair, "to remove from the proposed master plan the area of eastward expansion" bounded by the current campus border, Fifth Street, Elm Street and Tenth Street.

The latest draft of the plan called for acquisition of the property east of the current campus boundary to accommodate academic buildings and a parking deck.

Residents of the neighborhood had strongly objected to that aspect of the plan. A delegation from The University Neighborhood Association (TUNA)

had argued against the plan at a board committee meeting in March.

Franklin offered his motion near the end of the meeting, under the "New Business" item on the agenda. He said several members of the board had asked him to put the topic on the table for discussion.

Voting with Franklin on his motion were Betty Speir, H.E. "Gene" Rayfield, Jr., Thomas Bayliss, III, Dan Kinlaw and Brent Queen. Voting against were Jordan Whichard, III, Mike Kelly and James Talton.

Bob Thompson, director of planning and institutional research, told the trustees that because the eastward expansion was such a critical component of the plan, a revised plan might not be ready for presentation at their July 14 meeting. - John Durham