

A healthy wake up call for Cumberland

I looked through the new report with county-by-county health rankings, and Cumberland did not do so hot.

We rank 73rd of 100 counties in the state in terms of health outcomes, according to the report prepared by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

Health outcomes include length of life and quality of life. We ranked 73rd in the 2014 report, too.



Myron B. Pitts

The county and Fayetteville, the state's sixth largest city, are found to be punching below their weight, as usual. Of the 10 largest cities in the state, all but three are in counties ranked in the top 12. Onslow County (Jacksonville) and Forsyth County (Winston-Salem) rank in the top 30.

That the Jacksonville area, home of Camp LeJeune, does pretty well takes from us the excuse that our military presence leaves us with too low a tax base to be better. Cumberland is on the tier with many rural communities that do not have the resources, tax base or development to appreciably improve health outcomes.

But in crucial aspects, we're headed in the right direction, and the report's authors say that's the important thing.

For instance, in the category of "health factors" we improved from 45 to 43. That category measures the behavior of individuals regarding their health, as well as clinical care, socioeconomic factors and the physical environment.

These are things we have more control over. Among areas where we saw modest improvements were obesity rates, access to exercise opportunities, graduation rates, unemployment, and the ratio between mental health providers and patients.

The report shows the many influences that can affect a community's health. Medical care is only part of the story.

The authors note that having a job, for example, "provides income and other benefits that can support healthy lifestyle choices. Unemployment and under-employment limit these choices, and negatively effect quality of life and health overall."

I thought of the recent debate over the chicken plant, and its 1,000 jobs, now headed to Robeson County (which is 95th in health outcomes).

The report indicates we have too many people dying before they should. Cumberland had 8,995 "premature deaths," categorized as deaths "that occur before a person reaches ... age 75. Many of these deaths are considered to be preventable." The figure carries the most weight in its calculations. The state average is 7,212.

Infant deaths would be in that figure, and the report shows we have a higher number of low birth-weight babies than the state average. People who lose their lives to violence and lack of access to health care would be included, too. Our crime rate is down, but our rate of uninsured ticked up 1 percent.

"We're No. 73" is not what we want to put on banners at the gateways to our city and county.

But this report does what is intended — make us think about where we are and where we need to be.

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CAPE FEAR PROFILE



SECRET INGREDIENTS: PASSION & TRAINING



Staff photos by Johnny Horne

Top photo: Chef Gregg Hamm keeps an eye on one of his culinary students who slices prime rib for a lunch for a board meeting at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center in Sanford.

Above: Wearing colorful pants adorned with images of food, Hamm talks with his culinary students as they prepare a lunch for a board meeting.

By Steve DeVane
Staff writer

SANFORD — Education and food are Gregg Hamm's inspirations.

Combined, they give him a bustling daily life spent in four counties building strong, family-like bonds through the restaurants he owns, the college where he oversees culinary training and the generosity he shares with others.

He's a chef who owns restaurants in Sanford and Raleigh, along with a catering operation. He's also executive director of Central Carolina Community College's Culinary Institute.

And he uniquely provides assistance to charitable causes in Sanford through time, talent and resources.

"My interest is food, but my passion is education," he says.

Hamm wears typical chef's garb with a black hat, black shirt and colorful pants marked with images of food. Keys on a key chain made from a fork jingle as he

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RICK'S PLACE

Volunteers work to cultivate garden

By Brooke Carbo
Staff writer

A small army of volunteers gathered at the future site of Rick's Place on Saturday to haul dirt, build beds and lay soil that military families will soon be tending.

The Rick Herrema Foundation, which is made up of Fort Bragg families, is sponsoring the community garden known as Rick's Place in a western Fayetteville neighborhood. The garden is named af-

ter Rick Herrema, a Fort Bragg soldier killed in Baghdad eight years ago.

The garden is just the first phase of the proposed 26-acre retreat — in the Arran Lake subdivision off Bingham Drive — for members of the military service and their families.

About 40 people came out Saturday to help.

One of them, Diana Juergens, See **RICK'S PLACE**, Page 4B



Staff photo by Mischa Lopiano

Gabby Mullett, 7, sits on bags of soil at the Rick Herrema Foundation outdoor recreation area on Saturday. The foundation plans to create nature trails, community gardens and playgrounds for Fort Bragg families.

Medical marijuana advocates voice their concerns



Capitol Affairs
Paul Woolverton

RALEIGH — Medical marijuana advocates anticipated disappointment when a state House committee took up their bill to legalize the medicinal use of cannabis in North Carolina.

They weren't expecting to feel insulted.

"We knew that the bill was very broad and it was not likely going to pass," said Kristine Bacon of Hoke County. She is with N.C. Republicans Against Marijuana Prohibition.

"However, we went there to support the cause, and we were basically very

shocked at how it transpired at the end," Bacon said. "Cause it was our understanding there was going to be a Q&A or a little bit of a debate, and that did not happen. It just abruptly stopped."

Bacon, Jamie and David Hargitt of Cumberland County, Diana Klausner of Hope Mills and several dozen other medical marijuana advocates at the House Judiciary I Committee can argue they were denied a meaningful hearing on whether North Carolina should legalize cannabis use by people suffering ill-

ness or disease.

More than a dozen members of the public spoke in favor of the legislation as did the bill's four primary sponsors.

Lobbyists for three Christian conservative activist groups (two of which have also fought legal alcohol sales) spoke against it.

And then the House Judiciary I Committee summarily and unanimously killed House Bill 78, Enact Medical

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