

# TheRegion

A weekly look at news  
from around the Cape Fear region

## CENTRAL CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Staff photo by Johnny Horne

Instructor Gregg Hamm, left, talks about the food and service offered to students and faculty at the Central Carolina Community College Cougar Cafe. For a slide show, go to [fayobserver.com](http://fayobserver.com).

## Cafe serves up lessons for students, deals for diners

**SANFORD** — The sizzling sounds of chicken strips frying and the aroma of homemade potato chips filled the air last week at Central Carolina Community College. Along with the comforting clammer of youthful conversation, those things heralded the arrival of the lunch crowd at the school's Cougar Cafe.

By then, Gregg Hamm was already several hours into a workday that began at 4:30 that morning. That's when he left the restaurant he recently opened in Raleigh, arriving in time to teach students the basics of slicing and dicing and caring for customers.

Hamm is executive director of the school's Culinary Institute, where in addition to classroom studies his students perfect their craft first-hand by manning the fryers, the kitchen knives, the biscuit cutters, the cash register and everything else at the Cougar Cafe twice a day, four days a week.

"There's no other way to prepare people for work than through hands-on," he said. "The proof is in the pudding."

And the pudding is pretty darn tasty. Or at least the chicken club, the roasted veggie wrap and those popular homemade chips are tasty.



**Kim Hasty**

"They do a great job," regular customer Lisa Zibley said. "And it's very convenient."

Hamm, a graduate of Johnson & Wales University, came to Sanford as the culinary arts teacher at Lee County High School in 2000. He went on to open Cafe 121 on downtown Chatham Street in 2008, where he's known for both his chicken salad and for his generosity to charitable causes, and then to Central Carolina in 2011.

He juggles his time between the school's three campuses in Chatham, Harnett and Lee counties and at his two restaurants. His Raleigh restaurant, P.G. Werth's, is named in memory of the inspirational culinary arts teacher who was his mentor.

He couldn't do it all, he said, without the help of former students who are now loyal members of his staff. Regina Hargett, for instance, once a

student of Hamm's now keeps a watchful eye as the chef in charge of the Cougar Cafe's daily offerings. Her homemade honey mustard sauce and ranch dressing are must-haves for students and faculty members looking to dip chips and chicken fingers.

The cafe, based inside the student center, is a win-win for the college, much as it is on the Chatham County campus. Besides being self-sustaining, it's the only place on campus where hot lunches are served — at a bargain price of \$5. Breakfast offerings include the Sculetta, a scrambled egg and bacon sandwich named for one of the school's associate vice presidents. Marchant's Munchies Plate, named for Central Carolina president Bud Marchant, consists of two eggs cooked to order, bacon or sausage, biscuit and fresh fruit. All breakfast plates cost \$3.

All of it is served at a pace that can get hectic.

But that's part of the learning process, Hamm said.

"People ask me if we have online classes," he said. "You can't learn this online. Online culinary class is the Cooking Channel."

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## PWC charter: Parties to hold a private mediation meeting

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The charter contains the original provision that every expenditure over \$10,000 be approved by the council — a widely ignored threshold.

Among the council's suggestions that have been sent to the delegation, the four-member board would be expanded to five, and the terms halved to two years. The council wants the charter to be clear that the PWC can recommend a utility budget to the council but not approve it; nor can the PWC execute contracts without following council policies and state law.

The PWC board wants to make the utility a public authority under state law, granting the utility control over its budget. In addition, the PWC wants a new charter to state the commission "shall be free from control of city officers."

Historically, city and PWC officials have long sought to avoid any charter meddling by the legislature. That's because they generally have feared lawmakers might make unwanted changes.

But a growing divide between the council and the PWC board over the utility's \$350 million budget deepened last year, culminating in a lawsuit between the two entities that is still pending.

Both sides plan to hold a private mediation meeting Feb. 13 in Fayetteville with their lawyers.

The legal dispute is unusual, as the city owns the utility, and the council appoints the PWC board members.

While some council members have said recently they worry the delegation might favor the PWC's preferences over the council's desires for a charter overhaul, local lawmakers are being tight-lipped about their intentions.

State Sen. Wesley Meredith, a Republican and a former Fayetteville mayor pro tem, said the local delegation members would not begin the dialogue until they return to Raleigh.

Glazier said local lawmakers shouldn't declare their preferences, until city and PWC officials have a chance to mediate the issues.

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**'I think it would be very premature for any legislator to stake themselves out on any position, because that would undo the leverage one side would have in the negotiations.'**

— **State Rep. Rick Glazier**, a Fayetteville Democrat

to stake themselves out on any position, because that would undo the leverage one side would have in the negotiations," Glazier said.

The PWC board chairman, Mike Lallier, said he believes his board's proposal more closely mirrors the charter's original intent.

"We've been hopeful that a charter update would occur, because it is the least expensive and arguably the best way to settle the differences that currently exist," he said.

Mayor Nat Robertson has been sympathetic to the PWC's quest for more independence, and that kind of favoritism has annoyed some councilmen.

Robertson said he wants the PWC to remain an asset that is owned by the city, and he believes the council should exercise "some oversight" over the utility's finances.

As with any family squabble, Robertson said, one party is going to be less happy than the other when a charter bill is introduced.

"But as long as the General Assembly aims to keep the ratepayer and the taxpayer in mind, I think we'll be OK with the outcome," the mayor said.

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## COUNTY BY COUNTY

### BLADEN

The State Water Infrastructure Authority has awarded nearly \$2 million in loans and grants to three Bladen County towns, according to the N.C. Department of Energy and Natural Resources website.

Clarkton will receive almost \$1.1 million for three projects: an equalization basin project, a collection system project and water system improvements. Elizabethtown was awarded \$436,050 for water well replacement, and Dublin will get \$311,000 for replacement of its pump station on N.C. 410.

### COLUMBUS

Maria Cartrette has been chosen to manage the North Carolina Yam Festival in Tabor City by the event's board of directors.

She shepherded the St. Patrick's Day Parade and Festival in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, for nine years.

The town council will be asked to formally approve her hiring this month.

Cartrette will earn \$6,000 per year in her new role, half that from the festival, the other half from the town's budget.

### HARNETT

Leadership Harnett is accepting applications for the 2015 class.

Leadership Harnett is designed to identify potential community leaders and provide them with the information and encouragement needed to spur action and involvement. For more information, click on [leadershipharnett.com](http://leadershipharnett.com)

### HOKE

Hoke County Senior Services is sponsoring a seminar on Heart Health this month, featuring cardiologist Dr. Debbie Thomasson. Call 910-875-8588 to register for the event, scheduled Feb. 17 at 10 a.m. in the Hoke County Senior Services on East Central Avenue in Raeford.

### MOORE

Moore County could see an economic impact of millions of dollars when more than 20 softball teams come to Moore County in Aug. 7-13 for the Dixie Girls Softball World Series at Hillcrest Park in Carthage.

Areas that previously hosted the series saw an



economic impact of \$3.5 million to \$4 million, according to a statement released by the Pinehurst, Southern Pines, Aberdeen Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. Moore County hosted the 2011 Dixie Youth Boys Baseball World Series.

### ROBESON

"Particulates of Light: Artwork of Jim Hurst" will be on display through Feb. 26 at the Carolina Civic Center in downtown Lumberton. Admission is free and works are available for sale.

Hurst grew up in Merced, California, and began painting oils after a seven-year enlistment in the Navy. He has taught wet-on-wet painting and performed outdoor painting demonstrations.

### SAMPSON

A free car is up for grabs in a fundraiser staged by the boys basketball team at Clinton High School.

Tickets are \$10 each. When the winning ticket is drawn at the team's final regular-season home game Feb. 12, a shot from a designated spot on the floor could win a 2015 Ford Fusion. Ford of Clinton is joining the team in making the opportunity possible.

Consolation prize if missing the shot is \$300.

More information and tickets are available by calling the school at 592-2067 and asking to speak with basketball coach Randy Jordan. Tickets will also be sold at remaining home games.

### SCOTLAND

As a part of its Child Passenger Safety Program, the Laurinburg Fire Department offers residents to schedule appointments for child safety seat checks.

Checks can be scheduled at both fire stations, located at 501 N. Main St. and 1547 Hickory St. Questions and technical assistance can be given by the trained technicians at each station.

From staff reports

## Pitts

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visible from Southern Avenue, where his office and trucks are located. The symbol is associated with the old communist Soviet Union.

The tarp is Williams' one-man protest: The city sent him a letter saying that his sign violated Article 30-5, Section L, Subsection 4 (o) of the City Code and was "not in a state of good aesthetic condition." Williams, the letter said, could face "a civil penalty and/or criminal charges."

Williams' sign, which is on top of one of the buildings on his lot, was missing its face. He has another sign with the business name on a pole.

I could tell from talking with him that he is most incensed that this could be a criminal matter. He did, however, joke for most of the conversation, as when he noted that he was only representing the working man with the symbol on his tarp. Later, I thanked him for a copy of the letter that he had texted to me, and he replied, "You're welcome, comrade."

"This is typical progression of government," he said of the code violation.

"I thought I'd pretty it up for them."

Williams said the tarp was headed for the dump before he decided to repurpose it as protest art.

And pretty or not, the tarp complies with code, say city officials.

"Since the hammer and sickle sign is not advertising a commercial operation and has been placed there for political protest, it would not be a sign violation," city spokesman Nathan Walls wrote in an email, citing Development Services Director Scott Shuford.

Williams said the city had not sent him a letter about the sign before.

One might be tempted to blame the Unified Development Ordinance, which went into effect in 2011 and has sparked complaints from business owners large and small. But the city says while the ordinance is in the UDO, it carries over from an old Chapter 30 zoning ordinance.

Either way, Williams says the city "wants to get into my business when they can't even manage their own."

I ask the original tea partier if he will ever run again.

"Run to the next county, if anything," he answers.

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