

Domestic partners get benefits

By Tony Kluemper

News Editor

After more than a year of debate and planning, Tech administrators recently announced that the Institute would implement a new limited benefits program to employees' same-sex domestic partners.

Under the new policy, same-sex domestic partners of Tech employees' would be part of a limited benefits program. The program would allow access to dental insurance and accidental death and dismemberment insurance, which is now only available to employee spouses.

According to Danny Ingram, a staff member of the Office of Information Technology (OIT) the new policy will allow Tech to further compete for faculty members. "In the highly competitive environment to higher education, an institution that needs to maintain a competitive advantage must recruit and retain the best employees and students," Ingram told the Whistle. "We [Tech] cannot afford to lose gay and lesbian faculty, staff, researches or students to other universities that offer domestic benefits."

In fact, in a study conducted in 2000 it was found that of the top ten ranked universities in the nation, all had some type of same-sex domestic partner benefits. However, only three of the top ten public universities had such policies. In order to compete with the higher ranked universities, Tech decided to make a change.

The process began in the summer of 2001 when a small group of faculty and staff from schools throughout the University System of Georgia met to discuss the issue of offering domestic benefits to same-sex partners of System employees.

In the year since, numerous groups devised a plan to offer limited benefits to same-sex partners. Under the plan, the main difference between policies for same-sex partners and standard for spouses is the fact that under the same-sex program, Tech will not pay any of the premium for the insurance policies provided.

Though some consider the introduction of limited benefits as a step in the right direction, some wonder why Tech doesn't follow the lead of Emory, which has a policy that offers the same benefits to same-sex domestic partners as spouses.

However, according to Associate Vice President for Human Resources Chuck Donbaugh, Tech cannot offer to pay the premium for same-sex partners because of regulations from the Board of Regents.

"The University System's benefits program is regulated by the Board of Regents, and that program does not include domestic partner coverage," Donbaugh told the Whistle.

In order to receive the benefits, employees and partners would have to sign a “Declaration of Domestic Partnership” stating that they reside together, are neither married nor related by blood and are at least 18 years old. In addition, those wanting benefits would have to submit documentation substantiating the domestic partnership, such as evidence of a joint checking account.

Many are now hoping that the Board of Regents will adopt a policy towards same-sex partner benefits so that Tech would be able to offer the equal benefits.

“I believe that the benefits should be equal for both same-sex partners and married partners,” said David Prophitt, the Associate Program Director for Community Services. “The Board of Regents should follow the example of numerous other corporations and institutions in this area.”

Now that Tech has developed a policy for faculty and staff on this issue, many students are wondering if similar policies for the same-sex domestic partners of students will be adopted in the near future.

In fact, last semester SGA voted on a resolution that would give similar benefits to same-sex domestic partners of undergraduate and graduate students. The resolution failed, however, due greatly to the fact that Tech and the Board of Regents had no such policy for faculty and staff.

In the end, most agree that this is a great move by the institute. “It’s a great step in the right direction of Tech having a more diverse community,” said Jonathan Duke, co-organizer of GT Coming Out Week.

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RHA polls student opinion on smoking ban

By **Sriram Narasimhan**

Senior Staff Writer

The Residence Hall Association (RHA) will be conducting surveys next week in order to evaluate the smoking policy in every residence hall on campus. The current policy states that only if a resident allows his or her roommate to smoke in the room, may the smoker do so. Additionally, residents may not smoke in the hallways.

According to RHA, however, complaints by non-smokers have risen in the last two years regarding that smoke still leaks into the hallway from a room that permits smoking, especially in the traditional style dorms,.

"It is very rare where you can pass by a room and not smell smoke," said CA David Ewing.

The impetus to conduct an email-based survey became apparent at the beginning of the year, when the Harrison-Towers hall council, part of Freshman Experience (FE), unanimously voted to ban smoking in those two halls. The problem with this, however, is that a hall council cannot enforce such a decision according to Housing policy.

Although RHA took the vote by Harrison-Towers as a surprise and later informed the FE hall council that the decision could not be binding, it did move to draft a campus-wide survey that would help RHA ultimately decide whether a complete ban on smoking should exist. Smoking would still be permitted around designated entrances to the buildings.

"We are not looking to ban smoke, but just evaluate the current smoking policy," said Jason Hurley, RHA Vice President. "We are looking to protect the rights of both smokers and non-smokers."

In fact, the survey from RHA will be emailed to every Tech resident, including graduate students and those living in apartment style halls, to see if the ban would be appreciated by every resident. It is already known that an overwhelming majority of students in traditional-style halls would like to see the ban, but that apartment residents are less enthusiastic, since secondhand smoke does not readily affect those students.

The concern, therefore, is that if a smoke-free policy were implemented, it would have to be an all-around ban for all the residence halls, not just buildings where the majority of its residents agreed to a smoke-free environment. This is due to hesitation about tinkering with the housing priority system.

"It will be an all or nothing choice for the entire campus. If the majority of the students do not want the ban, we will stop here," said Hurley.

An email will be sent out next week providing a website link where students can fill out the survey online. The results will be tabulated automatically. If

they indicate that the residents prefer a change in the smoking policy, RHA will draft a resolution based upon those results. If the resolution passes in the RHA Legislative Council, it will be sent to the Department of Housing as a recommendation.

Housing will then attempt to address logistical issues such as damages to furniture incurred by smoke, a concern for apartments and traditional-style halls, as well as fines or judicial affairs relating to smoking in smoke-free designated areas.

Although a majority of non-smokers might agree to a campus-wide ban in the survey, there are still many smokers on campus who feel that the current policy remains fair for both groups.

“I don’t think the smoke in the hallways is detrimental,” said Brad Esclabon, a resident in an FE dorm and occasional smoker. “It’s not concentrated enough.”

Proponents of the survey hope that both smokers and non-smokers attend the groups so that both sides are represented at focus groups scheduled for the week of November 18.

“We have to find a balance between the rights of people who do not want to be affected by secondhand smoke and the rights of those who want to smoke where they can,” said Heather Surrency, Wellness Center director and one of the authors of the survey.

RHA also plans to discuss the surveys at a town hall meeting on Nov. 14 in Room 117 of the Student Services building.

Clough influential in new sewer improvements

By Daniel Amick

Senior Staff Writer

Atlanta's aging sewer system has been called an environmental disaster. Some parts of the system are over 130 years old and have just one pipe to transport both sewage and runoff water. When heavy rainfall hits the Atlanta area, as happened this week, the system overflows and spills millions of gallons of raw sewage into backyards, local streams, and rivers.

The Atlanta City Council formally endorsed elements of "Clean Water Atlanta," Mayor Shirley Franklin's plan to fix Atlanta's sewer system Monday. Georgia Tech President Wayne Clough played a major part in the development of the plan as Chair of the Mayor's Clean Water Advisory Panel.

"Most of Clean Water Atlanta is based on the Clough panel's recommendations," said Franklin.

The \$3 billion proposal calls for the gradual separation of key sewage and runoff pipes as well as the construction of two giant underground tunnels. Each of these tunnels will be capable of temporarily storing 300 million gallons of runoff. Once the rain stops, the runoff will slowly be filtered, cleaned, and released. The massive plan will be implemented over the next four years.

"If we are not careful, [the building program] could raise water and sewer rates so high our city will be unaffordable for most of us. That is why we are seeking the most effective, lowest cost alternatives," said Franklin.

Franklin's plan had a number of critics, including local residents and the Sierra Club, who had pushed for complete separation of the sewage and runoff systems.

Clough's role in the process began back in June. Franklin asked Clough to organize and lead an independent group of nine experts as they reviewed the city's plan. Clough selected civil engineers, wastewater management specialists and public health experts to serve on the panel. The group reviewed Franklin's plan and held a series of four public meetings over the course of several months this summer. The panel heard from experts, city officials and members of the community. In September, they offered a series of recommendations.

"In developing our recommendations to the mayor, we focused on three key issues: water quality, schedule and quality of life for residents," said Clough.

The panel proposed a way to reduce the number of bio-solids filtering stations from six to four and to eliminate a regulator plant. The measure will save the city about \$155 million. Other recommendations will result in fewer construction disruptions for residents and keep the project on schedule.

The schedule of the plan is critical because in 1998, the city of Atlanta settled a lawsuit with the Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper. The settlement requires that any cleanup plan be completed by 2007.

Clough's panel also looked at alternative plans, including the one put forward by residents. They determined that such a plan would cost \$200 million more and would never be completed by the 2007 deadline.

"This plan achieves the highest water quality at the lowest cost in the shortest amount of time," said Franklin.

This marks Clough's third foray into public policy in the last year. He also served on a committee set up by Georgia Governor Roy Barnes to study natural gas deregulation, and participated in President George W. Bush's economic forum in August that brought various experts, leaders and citizens together to offer economic advice. Since last December, Clough has also been a member of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology.

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Graduates approve two new charters

By Tony Kluemper

News Editor

After allocating nearly \$20,000 at last week's meeting, the Graduate senators sped through this week's session; the meeting lasted less than an hour. Most of the bills presented dealt with the approval of charters for Tech's newest student organizations, which resulted in little contention throughout the meeting.

The one allocation bill that sparked any debate among the senators was an allocation to the Office of International Education (OIE) to fund its annual Food Fair. According to senator Gaurav Asthana, who authored the bill, the fair is part of the Culture Fest event and will take place Nov. 18 on Skiles Walkway.

Asthana commented that the Food Fair had been very popular with students in past years. "This event has always been very popular among students with over 500 students being served last year alone," said Asthana.

In addition, the organization had suffered from a lack of corporate sponsorship that had been available in past years, and many senators wondered if any of the student organizations participating would be helping to fund the event. "We don't ask the student organizations participating to fund the event because they will be preparing the food and serving it to students," said Asthana.

During the debate, JFC chairman Chris Webb commented on why the bill had failed to gain JFC's recommendation. "In the end, in this bill we were going to end up paying five dollars of an eight dollar meal, and a majority of the members of JFC felt this was too much," said Webb.

Some senators suggested that OIE should increase ticket prices, which are currently three dollars a meal, in order to offset some of the costs. However, Asthana felt that if the cost for the meals was too high, students would be less likely to participate in the event.

Once the vote was called, even further confusion erupted as numerous senators, including coordinating officer Jennifer Matthews, questioned the calculation of the total money requested in the bill. In the end, senators came up with three to four different totals with little agreement on which total was correct.

Asthana then asked for a motion to go against JFC policy and include the funding of food in the allocation bringing the new total to just over \$2,900. When the votes were counted, the bill passed with the food funding included.

The senators also approved the charters of two new organizations: the Yellow Jackets Skeet Shooters and the Yellow Jackets Table Tennis team.

According to JCOC chair Tim Cailloux, both charters were approved under

JCOC policy as there are no other organizations currently serving the same purpose on campus.

The other chartering bill of the night, for the Glory Phi God organization, was tabled due to the fact that no representatives were present to defend their positions after JCOC recommended against approving the charter.

President Alan Michaels also announced the possible formation of a student Capital Campaign organized by members of SGA, which will be presented in a bill at next week's meeting.

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Undergrads vote to fund Food Fair



By Christopher Gooley / STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

House representatives discuss a bill for the allocation of funds to the Office of International Education to sponsor the Food Fair as part of the annual Culture Fest.

By Daniel Amick

Senior Staff Writer

SGA President Tiffany Massey kicked off Tuesday night's meeting of the Undergraduate House of Representatives with a lively game of SGA Trivia. She asked questions like "What does JCOC stand for?" (Joint Campus Organizations Committee), and, "How many members are on the Joint Finance Committee?" (10).

More entertaining than the trivia questions themselves was the spectacle of various SGA members attempting, often unsuccessfully, to accurately throw small plastic containers of candy to representatives who correctly answered a question. While Massey's aim was fairly accurate, Vice President of Administrative Affairs Eric Clopper nearly took someone's head off. SGA Executive Vice President Nate Watson, probably hoping to avoid hitting the overhead lights, aimed low and smashed a candy container into the first row of desks.

After trivia, and with sugar now pumping through their veins, representatives dove into the night's agenda. They first tabled an allocation bill to the Chess Club and then considered a slate made up of two bills: an allocation to the Women's Gymnastics Team, and an allocation to SAC One Night Stand. Members voted to remove the bill for SAC One Night Stand and consider it separately because the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) had cut portions of the bill requesting money for t-shirts. Without much discussion, representatives passed the bill with the t-shirt funding intact.

When an allocation to Fall Fest 2002's International Food Fair came to the floor, nobody seemed to be able to figure out exactly how much money to allocate. After sorting through incorrect calculations made by the JFC and an estimate made by the Graduate Student Senate, members finally settled on the correct allocation amount.

Then, representatives entered into a prolonged discussion over whether SGA should actually fund food for the Food Fair. JFC's policy is to cut out such funding and the House generally follows such recommendations.

Management Rep. Ben Lawder and MSE Rep Glenn Matthews both fought hard to adopt the JFC amendment cutting the food funding, citing a need to be consistent with every bill they consider. At first that seemed to be majority opinion.

Then, Public Policy Rep. Michael Handelman shot back, saying that JFC policies were only suggestions to the UHR.

"We still have minds to make an intelligent decision," said Handelman.

Biology Rep Srikanta Banerjee called food an "integral part" of a Food Fest.

"When my constituents come to me, I'm going to tell them it was you all who did this, and not me," said Management Rep Randi Truelove, addressing the fact that cutting food funding would raise the cost of a meal from three to six dollars. In the end the JFC amendment failed and the bill passed in its original form with food funding intact.

In other business, representatives approved by unanimous acclamation a bill appointing about twenty people to Institute-wide Committees. The three chartering bills up for consideration were all tabled because no organization representatives were present.

President Massey also addressed a bill in New Business. The bill would provide funding for an effort to launch a Capital Campaign. The idea is to sell bricks with names inscribed on them to alumni, students, faculty and anyone else who is interested. The bricks would then be laid in walkways somewhere on campus. Money raised in the campaign could reach 2.5 million dollars and would go directly to a Student Life Endowment that would fund student activities on campus.

Breaking the Bubble

Perdue upsets Barnes for governor

Sonny Perdue defeated incumbent Roy Barnes to become Georgia's first Republican governor since Reconstruction. He received a telephone concession from Barnes around midnight, and a congratulatory call from President Bush. Hailing from Bonaire, Perdue won the race with 52 percent of the total votes. Barnes commented that his defeat was likely linked to a nationwide Republican uprising and his push to change the Georgia state flag to exclude the Confederate symbol.

Chambliss defeats Cleland for Senate seat

With President George W. Bush's backing, Republican Saxby Chambliss upset Max Cleland in a bitter race for the Georgia seat in the United States Senate. Chambliss is a four-term Congressman from Moultrie and the current chair of the House Subcommittee on Terrorism and Homeland Security. He said that he will make restoring confidence in the economy a priority. The victory ends one of the most negative campaigns in recent Georgia history.

GOP takes U. S. Senate, keeps House

After Republican Norm Coleman's win in Minnesota, the Republican party will now have at least a 51-seat majority in the United States Senate. Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott attributed the victories to issues such as antiterrorism, homeland security and dealing with the economy. The GOP also won at least 226 seats in the House of Representatives (218 are needed for a majority).

U.S. gives Security Council Iraq resolution.

The United States took the final draft of its resolution on Iraq to the United Nations Security Council, hoping to win approval after eight weeks of negotiation. The revisions make concessions to allies who feared that the original draft could trigger a new war against Iraq. The main idea, however, remains the same, according to U. S. officials: a threat of serious consequences if Iraq does not comply with the stringent new weapons inspections imposed.

Sharon announces early elections

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced in a surprise move that Israel would hold elections eight months early. Sharon's opponents reacted quickly to the announcement, speaking out about Israel's shaky security, Palestinian conflicts, and a possible American war against Iraq. Former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that he would accept a previously made offer to become Sharon's new foreign minister. Sharon criticized his rivals as irresponsible or self-important, forcing him to choose early elections as the "least bad option."



NEWS BRIEFS

Ramblin' Nights to be held tonight

The next Ramblin' Nights event for the game against FSU will be held tonight from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. at the Student Center.

The event will feature the comedy of Chris Rock's brother, Tony, as well as a live jazz band, massage therapists and a PlayStation 2 tournament. Free food will be served at midnight.

Signups for alumni dinner almost over

The Georgia Tech Student Alumni Association is hosting an Alumni Dinner event Sunday, Nov. 17. Interested students can register online at cyberbuzz.gatech.edu/saa by 5 p.m. this Sunday. There will be an information session Monday at 6:15 p.m. at the Alumni house.

Biomedical device aids in bypass surgery

Ray Vito of the School of Biomedical Engineering and other engineers have developed a device that mechanically lengthens an artery in patients preparing for coronary artery bypass surgery.

Vito is CEO of Medanoia Medical Inc. which he founded to market the device.