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NEWS AND VIEWS

Week's end

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By now it's civic dogma: An economically viable downtown Durham depends on the success elected officials and boosters have promoting its potential as an arts-entertainment-restaurant district. The General Assembly's passage of a bill allowing Durham to increase the hotel tax to help pay for a proposed downtown theater could help make that vision a reality.

Durham has in recent history tried to make the Bull City arts-friendly, as witnessed by two items in Durham Morning Herald editions from September 1974. That year, Durham civic leaders tried in vain to get the N.C. Symphony to consider using Baldwin Auditorium on Duke's campus for its home. An editorial that same month encouraged converting the old Durham County Courthouse into an arts and cultural center. Although not in the courthouse, Durham in 1988 opened an arts center, the Royall Center for the Arts, located in the Durham Arts Council's renovated building. The Carolina Theatre renovation soon followed.

The proposed theater and American Tobacco could help build on those more recent efforts. Durham is not, as H.L. Mencken once called the South, a "Sahara of the Bozart."

* DeWarren Langley, a 17-year-old senior at Jordan High School, has big plans. First, Langley wants to become mayor of Durham, then the nation's first black president.

Langley's interest in civic leadership is refreshing, considering that a large percentage of the city's youth probably can't even name Durham's new mayor. Langley, however, has learned that civic involvement is the key to being heard. That's a lesson he learned at the knee of his cousin Angela Langley, a former city councilwoman. She urged him to attend a city forum to discuss youth and gang-related problems in Durham. DeWarren was alarmed that the only people doing the talking were adults.

That forum led DeWarren to found Teenagers Politically Active (TPA), an organization that focuses on youth issues. DeWarren is also chapter leader of the National Student Advocacy Alliance, and a member of Jordan's site-based decision-making team.

For his commitment to improving the lives of Durham youth, DeWarren Langley receives this week's Durham Grit Award with Oak Gavel Device. We'll look for him on the stump.

* And while we're on the subject of impressive 17-year-olds. Ty Tryon has known for most of his life that he wanted to someday play on the PGA Tour. Well, the high school junior's dream came true last week when he finished among the leaders in the PGA qualifying tournament to earn his player's card.

Strangely enough, there has been little negative commentary about Tryon's decision to skip college to play professional golf. High school basketball stars lured to the NBA by multi-million dollar contracts aren't so lucky, and neither are their parents.

Could it be that because college golf doesn't generate big revenues for universities, or multi-million dollar sneaker contracts for coaches, no one cares when a high school golf star skips college to go straight to the pro tour?

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