

# AHEC REVIEW

NORTH CAROLINA AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTERS

FALL 2005

## NC AHEC-Supported Specialty Clinics Serve More Than 15,000

A child in Lumberton has seizures, headaches, or cerebral palsy. A patient from Henderson has arthritis, lupus, or vasculitis. Where can these individuals turn for help with problems such as these? They can take off time from work and drive up to two and a half hours away for specialized assistance at an academic medical center or they can visit an AHEC-supported outreach specialty clinic.

Michael Tennison, MD, is one of four pediatric neurologists from UNC Hospitals who travel to Lumberton twice a month to see children in need of such specialty care. Last year more than 800 patients received care as a result, including access to 24-hour ambulatory EEG service in Lumberton. The sessions are held at the Lumberton Children's Clinic and allow the specialists to work in close collaboration with area physicians, nurses, and other providers. "This has resulted in substantial improvements in the care of epilepsy in the area," noted Tennison. "In the past, patients would drive to Chapel Hill to have the (EEG) device placed, drive back home, then repeat the round-trip after 24-48 hours for further testing." The clinic also serves the Duke University Physician Assistant Training Program and provides occasional noon lectures for local pediatricians.

Wake AHEC patients in Roxboro, Oxford, and Henderson who require specialty care in rheumatology and immunology are seen by Duke University Medical Center's Nancy Allen, MD. "Most often, family physicians, internists, and orthopedists request our service," explained Allen. "Rheumatology fellows from Duke accompany me, see their own panel of patients, and we discuss their concerns."

Since the early 1970s, the NC AHEC Program has supported specialty clinics offered by all four medical schools throughout North Carolina as a means to increase the availability of specialty care and to offer educational experiences for students, residents, practicing physicians, and other local health care providers.

In 2003-2004, AHEC-supported faculty served 15,383 patients in 1,875 sessions at 48 locations across the state.

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# Up Close | Eric Nickens – Giving Back

Back in the summer of 1994, a rising eighth grader named Eric Nickens attended the Ventures Into Health Careers Institute, an AHEC summer program at East Carolina University. Ventures is a two-week supervised residential program that targets highly motivated minority youth and is designed to introduce students to careers in health care. Today, he is a Youth Tobacco Prevention Coordinator with Albemarle Regional Health Services covering the eastern NC counties of Bertie, Camden, and Pasquotank. He is responsible for the tobacco programming needs of the entire district.

"The most rewarding part of the job is having the opportunity to work with youth," Nickens said. Currently, his main challenge involves working with counties and school boards to become 100% Tobacco Free Schools counties.

A Gatesville native and Gates County High School 1999 graduate, Nickens initially attended UNC-Charlotte. He transferred to ECU where he received his

B.S. in health education and promotion with a community health concentration in May 2004.

"Undoubtedly, the Ventures program through Eastern AHEC helped me truly decide that I wanted to pursue a career in the medical field," he stated. "Having the opportunity to shadow medical professionals at Pitt County Memorial Hospital and the ECU Brody School of Medicine at age 14 was, at the time, the biggest thrill of my life."

The follow-up components such as SAT prep, time management skills workshops, and motivational speakers were also beneficial, Nickens said. "It helped us all to realize that following our aspirations to become medical professionals would not be

easy, but there was constant encouragement to keep pushing and not give up."

As part of a class project, Nickens took on the role of planning the 2002 Ventures reunion and workshop. "I felt that this was just one small way I could give back to a program that had done so much for me." That same year he served on the selection committee for the Ventures Class of 2002. "Since that time, I've been an advocate, promoting health care careers and talking with students one-on-one." While in the Charlotte area, he also worked with Charlotte AHEC and with a group of Anson County students. "Now that I'm back in the east, I look forward to again working with Eastern AHEC to give back even more."

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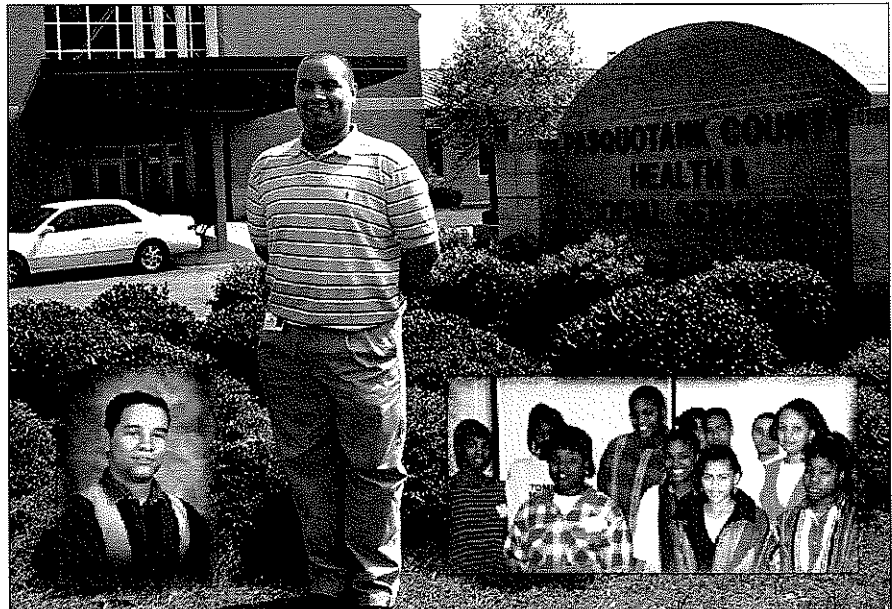
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**On the cover:** John Cotton, MD, examines a young patient at an AHEC-supported specialty clinic in Wilmington, NC. Cotton is associate professor of pediatrics and director of the Pediatric Echocardiography Laboratory at the UNC School of Medicine. Photo by Dan Sears, *Carolina Alumni Review*.



Eric Nickens, Youth Tobacco Prevention Coordinator with Albemarle Regional Health Services. Inset Left: 8th grade school photo. Inset Right: 1994 Ventures Class (Eric is partially hidden in the back row at the right).

## SEMS Grads Among Evacuees from New Orleans

Among those evacuating the gulf coast prior to Hurricane Katrina were Lakeshia and Laketa Entzminger, twin sisters from Greensboro who are in their third year at Xavier University in New Orleans. A friend drove them to safety in Dallas, following an evacuation map the school provided. The historically black college campus is closed while the city of New Orleans recovers. Both Lakeshia and Laketa are biology and pre-

med majors; they are currently attending Greensboro College. The sisters attended the Greensboro AHEC SEMS (Summer Enrichment in Mathematics and Science) and HCAP (Health Careers Access Program) summer programs and spent the summer of 2005 prior to Katrina in the Dominican Republic and Thailand, respectively. Look for more on their story in the winter issue of the *AHEC Review*.