

Wake Forest University seeks to remove scholarship restriction

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WINSTON SALEM — Wake Forest University lawyers have asked a court to strike a "whites-only" clause from a scholarship established in 1961 to benefit medical students.

"This is certainly an anachronism," said Mark Wright, a spokesman for the Wake Forest University School of Medicine.

The clause is part of 38-year-old agreement that established the Dr. Hillory M. Wilder Scholarship Fund for "capable and earnest young men and women of the white race."

The scholarship was funded by Kenneth and Celeste Wilder Blake, who left part of their estate to Wake Forest University for a scholarship to honor her father and help pay the way of medical students.

The Blakes' gift produces \$18,000 to \$26,000 a year for scholarships. School officials said no minority student was ever denied money because of the restriction in the Wilder scholarship.

"There's always been plenty of money for anybody, especially minorities," Wright said.

Lawyers for the school filed a petition in Forsyth Superior Court last week to release the race restriction, which was discovered recently by someone raising mon-

ey for the school. Wright said he hoped the court could make a decision "in a matter of weeks."

The petition says the racial restriction is "impossible, inappropriate and impracticable" and would violate the Civil Rights Act. Removing the clause would not change the purposes of the scholarship, the school argues.

Wake Forest officials, who were not aware of the clause until recently, have been unable to locate any of the Blake's heirs in recent years, and have not tried to locate any as a result of the legal case, Wright said.

Tuition at the medical school is \$27,500 a year. About 430 students attend the school.

The Blakes left a similar scholarship to Duke University's medical school to honor Wilder, a Charlotte doctor.

"We had that language in from the beginning. In 1979, the language was changed so that now the scholarship goes to Protestant residents of North Carolina," said Richard Merritt, a spokesman for Duke Medical Center. He could not immediately say whether the change involved a court order.

Lee Hampton, vice chancellor for university advancement at Winston-Salem State University, said race-specific scholarships were not unusual in the 1960s.

Many schools subsequently eliminated the clauses limiting the scholarships to whites, and some public uni-

versities recently have changed many scholarships that were set aside for minorities.

Hampton has spent two years at WSSU removing requirements that certain scholarships be given only to blacks.

"It goes both ways," he said. "We can't do that either."

In 1997, the University of North Carolina system began assessing its scholarship program to make sure it complied with a 1994 decision by the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The court struck down a state scholarship program for black students at the University of Maryland at College Park.

But while the UNC system was reviewing the validity of its affirmative action programs, Duke University tripled the amount of its primary minority scholarship program for 1998.

Duke's Reginald Howard Scholars program, named for the first black person elected student body president, offers annual scholarships to about five incoming black freshmen each year.

Mel Gibson gives to local charity shelter

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rock Hill — When Mel Gibson leaves South Carolina after filming his latest movie, "The Patriot," he'll be remembered here for playing a large part in expanding a local domestic violence shelter.

Gibson made a sizable contribution to the Safe Passage Inc. shelter this past week, Executive Director Peggy Payne said.

She would not say how much Gibson donated, only that "it'll go a long way toward our new facility we're building."

Gibson's publicist, Alan Nierob, confirmed the donation but said the actor does not like to comment on his philanthropic work and contributions.

Gibson does not necessarily make contributions in areas where he is filming, Nierob said, but in this case the actor chose Safe Passage Inc. from a list of South Carolina charities compiled at his request.

"He found a place he thought would benefit greatly," the publicist said.

Safe Passage plans to start building a bigger shelter in Rock Hill in November or December.

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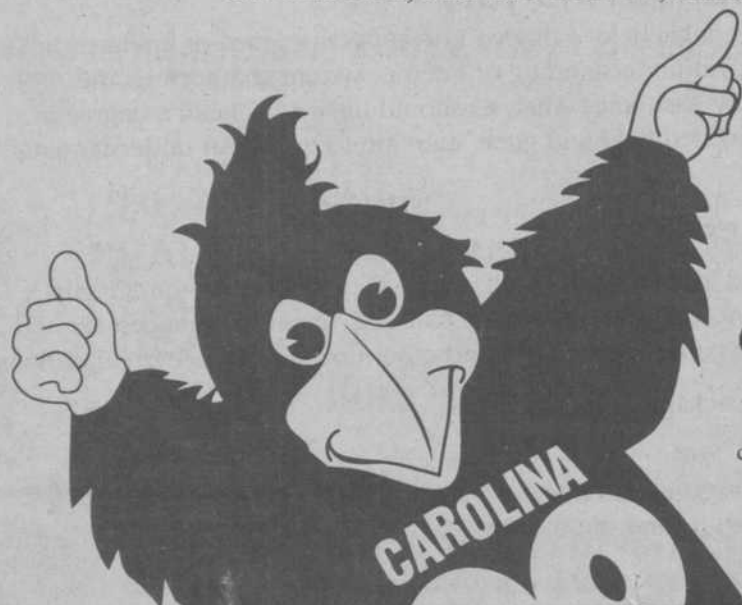
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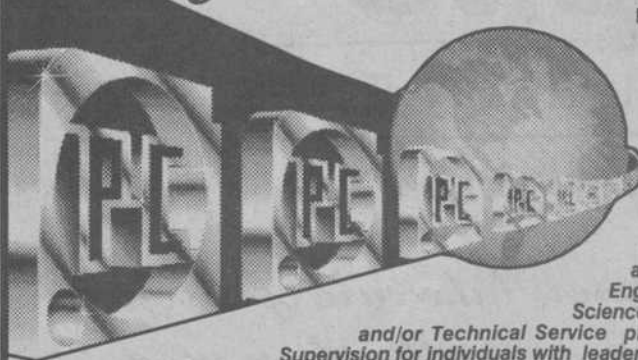


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