

Premier Research to invest \$4.1M, add jobs

BY ALEX DIXON
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DURHAM — Contract research organization Premier Research is expanding its Durham operation with 260 new jobs over the next five years.

The global company made the announcement Tuesday afternoon alongside Gov. Pat McCrory at its Research Triangle Park office, where it will be investing \$4.1 million through 2020 to establish a North American operations hub.

The new positions will span operations, such as project managers and clinical monitors, and come with an average salary of

\$73,296, nearly \$6,700 higher than the county average. Premier, which is headquartered in Philadelphia, currently employs 62 people in Durham and has 1,000 employees worldwide.

“Believe me, Premier had many choices throughout not only the United States, but throughout North America to make this (operations hub),” McCrory said. “In this research, they are trying to solve the problem of many diseases that are destroying individuals and families and frankly our healthcare system. We need these talented people to make this happen.”

Premier is eligible for a state Job Development Investment

Grant that could pay up to \$2.58 million in reimbursements over 12 years. This grant is contingent upon Durham County offering incentives, and the board of county commissioners will vote on an incentive package of \$26,000 at its Dec. 14 meeting.

“Premier is well known for supporting and serving the needs of biotechnology, medical device and pharmaceutical companies across the globe,” said county commissioner Chairman Michael Page. “The impressive efforts of (Premier’s) talented employees helps a variety of small innovative companies to make major

SEE PREMIER/PAGE A2



The Herald-Sun | Christine T. Nguyen
Gov. Pat McCrory, left, speaks with Premier Research CEO Ludo Reynders on Tuesday. Premier Research announced plans to bring 260 jobs to Durham under a five-year expansion plan.



The Herald-Sun | Christine T. Nguyen
From left, Angela Vick and Julieta Giner hug Tuesday before releasing balloons to mark World AIDS Day. Vick, a motivational speaker, has been HIV-positive for nearly eight years. “It’s important to stop the stigma,” Vick says.

Health official calls for routine HIV testing

BY KEITH UPCHURCH
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DURHAM
Routine physical exams should include an HIV test so patients will know if they’re infected with the virus, Durham County’s top public health official said Tuesday.

Speaking at the LGBTQ Center during World AIDS Day, Gayle Harris, director of the Durham County Department of Public Health, said science has come so far in AIDS treatment that having the disease is no longer an automatic death sentence. Today, a single pill taken daily can prevent HIV, and for those who

are infected, can allow them to lead a “high-quality life,” she said.

“We want providers to start testing patients for HIV just like they do a complete blood count or test for an iron level,” Harris said. “If you don’t know your status and delay getting treatment, you’ll have complications.”

Harris, who has worked at the health department since 1972, said she remembers the day in the early 1980s when she got her first AIDS patient.

“I was petrified, because no one knew anything about the disease,” she said. “We have come so far since that time.”

Today, she said, Durham has

1,660 people living with HIV/AIDS — the third-highest rate of newly diagnosed cases in North Carolina.

“We need ambassadors to say: ‘Let’s stop the progression of this disease,’” Harris said.

She called on Durham residents to:

- Get routine HIV tests and tell others to do the same.
- Use condoms and practice safe sex.
- Talk to their children about how to practice safe sex and prevent HIV.
- Ask elected officials for more funds for HIV programs.

SEE HIV/PAGE A2

NCCU settles one equal-opportunity lawsuit

BY RAY GRONBERG
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DURHAM — N.C. Central University has settled one of the equal-opportunity lawsuits against it, agreeing to pay a former chief of staff \$175,000 to end her litigation.

The deal with Kimberly Luse included a \$59,967 payment by the university to her Chapel Hill-based lawyers.

Luse was to get the balance, with NCCU on the hook for \$50,000 and some combination of the university, the UNC system and Chancellor Debra Saunders-White

responsible for the rest.

The agreement acknowledged that Luse, who was sacked in January 2014, had filed actions against NCCU with federal equal-employment regulators and the N.C. Industrial Commission, and a state lawsuit against Saunders-White personally.

In return for the payment and NCCU’s promise to label her ouster a voluntary resignation, Luse promised she wouldn’t apply for another job in the UNC system, or “voluntarily participate” in other lawsuits against NCCU.

She also promised to ask the people behind those suits to strike from them “any allegations related to her employment” at the university.

She could do that because her lawyers are involved in the other cases.

Luse was chief of staff to Saunders-White. She had claimed she was fired for complaining the chancellor was misusing state funds and was biased against people who aren’t black.

SEE NCCU/PAGE A2

Smith in as interim chief, won’t be with department much longer

BY KATIE NIX
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DURHAM — The current deputy chief of operations will be taking over as Durham’s interim police chief beginning Jan. 1, the city announced Tuesday.

Larry Smith, a 27-year veteran with the force, will be taking over the duties following Chief Jose Lopez’s departure on Dec. 31.

“Deputy Chief Smith’s 27 years of service to the Police Department as well as to the Durham community makes him an excellent choice to serve in the interim chief position as recruitment begins for a new police chief,” City Manager Tom Bonfield said in a press release. “Smith is a well-respected leader in the department, and I’m happy that he was willing to provide continuity until a new police chief is named.”

Smith, a Durham native, has served several roles during his time at the department, including patrolling Districts 3 and 4, as a sergeant in District 4, working in the special operations division narcotics unit, as captain of District 2 and assistant chief of investigative services. He was named deputy chief of operations in July 2012.

SEE SMITH/PAGE A2

INSIDE TODAY

FOOD

Fishmonger’s gone

Bright-Leaf district restaurant closes after more than 30 years | C1

LOCAL

Old courthouse delay

Historic Preservation Commission postpones again decision on county’s renovation plan | A3

SPORTS

Duke hosts Hoosiers

The No. 7 Blue Devils take on Indiana tonight in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge | B1

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HIV

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Harris said she hopes the day will come when AIDS will be rare.

"Let's celebrate the progress that's been made and remember those who have died from AIDS," Harris said. "We want to get to the point where we have few cases of HIV in Durham."

One person who's glad he got tested is Durham resident Johnnie Robinson, who has been living with HIV for 19 years.

At age 70, Robinson says he feels like the Incredible Hulk.

A retired chef and brickmason, Robinson knows he owes his life to better drugs that have been available since his diagnosis.

"I think people ought to know that HIV and AIDS is not a death sentence as it was 20 years ago," Robinson said in an interview. "But AIDS can be a devastating thing to your health if it's prolonged and you don't get it checked out."



From right, Aubrey Pouncy, Michael Brewer and Brandon Clifton Lee King prepare to release balloons Tuesday in observance of World AIDS Day.

Robinson advocates HIV testing for everyone at risk.

"With the medications we have now, you can live with it (HIV-AIDS), but you have to be tested and know what your status is," he said.

Robinson said he used to be an intravenous drug user and was "into sex."

"I said: 'I'd better

get tested,' and I tested positive," he said. "Now I know what I've got to do, and it's saved my life."

Today, Robinson takes a single pill each night at 9 before going to bed. He said his health is excellent.

"I'm still here and going strong," he said. "I'm in great shape. I look like a baby (Incredible) Hulk."

The Herald-Sun | Christine T. Nguyen

Robinson said he feels obligated to spread the word about the importance of testing.

"I have great hope and expectation that one day, they'll find a cure and we won't need these medications anymore," he said. "But until that time, I suggest everyone get tested. Know your status and live."

SMITH

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Smith graduated from Northern High School, Campbell University, and the FBI National Academy.

"There's many times that I look out my window and say 'How'd I get here?' Smith said. "I didn't come into police work to be the deputy chief, the chief, a captain. I came in to be a police officer and I feel like I still have a police officer's heart although I know my perspective has changed and it does as you move through the ranks and come further removed from what the officers do every day. But I do have a certain affinity for the officers on the street."

Smith said the biggest concern facing the department is the upcoming change in the chief as well as promotions.

"I think preparing our officers for change, certainly any time a new chief comes in officers are going to be a little reluctant, a little standoffish just kind of waiting to

see what this new chief's going to do, what their philosophy of policing is going to be, what changes they're going to try and bring," he said. "I'm not too concerned about anything else going forward."

Once the new chief is chosen and sworn in, Smith will be retiring from the department.

"I thought my last day would be May 1," he said. "It was already planned and is happening in conjunction with the interim period. I'm in sort of a unique position that I can go out and talk with the officers and with the community in this interim time. I do want to spend some time to go out in front of the community preparing them for the fact that there's a new chief coming in, to get their ideas."

Smith said the benefit of his retirement is that when he goes out into the community asking for feedback, it won't be self-serving because he isn't lobbying for the top job.

In fact, he said he's not sure if anyone is applying for the position from within the department.

"I think there's two

schools of thought as to whether or not an inside chief is a strength or a weakness. I think it all depends on where you are as an organization, whether or not the chief should come from the inside or the outside," he said. "I don't know of anyone firsthand whose applying from the inside. Now there could be someone applying that I don't know about but at the executive level, I'm pretty sure there's no one applying."

Smith said he thinks his inside status is perfect for the interim role he'll take on at the end of the month.

"As an interim chief I think it's definitely a strength because many of the officers I know on a personal level," he said. "Many of them I don't, but some I do. I've been here a long time. I know this department inside and out. I've had the chance to establish some good connections with the community which is definitely a strength as an interim."

Follow her on Twitter at @KatieNix330 and check out her blog at heraldsun.com/news/blogs/10-4.

PREMIER

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

breakthroughs in medical and therapeutic discoveries and thus really improve the health of millions of individuals."

Premier started in 1989, and CEO Ludo Reynders said it primarily serves small biotechnology companies

"Almost 30 years later, we are here to take the next step in the development of our industry, an industry where product innovation is increasingly led by hundreds of small innovative biotech companies, whose needs are materially different from the needs of the larger, vertically integrated pharmaceutical companies," he said. "And while our innovative customers focus on more target treatment projects on rare diseases on underserved populations, we as service providers have to be as innovative as they are."

NCCU

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

The state lawsuit included an allegation that Saunders-White had told Luse "the only two things NCCU was really about were 'chicken and p---'."

Media reports indicate that Luse's deal with the UNC system was her second out-of-court settlement in an employment-related matter this year.

After leaving NCCU, she hired on as chief of staff at Valdosta State University. But her stay there only last eight months; she was forced out this March, following a run-in with campus police who said she seemed intoxicated.

Subsequent negotiations led to her temporary reinstatement, until mid-summer.

She remained on administrative leave, but received back pay and a renewed salary until her contract expired on June 30. The Valdosta Daily Times reported the deal included a prom-

ise by her not to sue the Georgia school.

Luse's ouster at Valdosta was part of a chaotic spring there that included a faculty revolt and, eventually, the resignation of the school's president.

Back in Durham, the other lawsuits filed by clients of Luse's Chapel Hill lawyers remain pending.

The one that's generated the most paperwork involves Francis Smith, a former director of the business school's graduate, professional and executive programs.

Smith, who's white, contends he was fired in a bogus "restructuring" to clear the way for a "non-Caucasian individual" to replace him.

Court documents indicate that there are parallel actions in Smith's case underway in federal court, with the N.C. Industrial Commission and with the N.C. Court of Appeals.

The federal case alleges employment discrimination; the Industrial Commission one alleges negligence by NCCU and the UNC system in tolerating employ-

ment discrimination.

NCCU's lawyers, who come from state Attorney General Roy Cooper's office, want the federal case to take precedence and the Court of Appeals to make the Industrial Commission give way.

Smith's lawyers, Nicholas Sanservino and Laura Noble, argue for letting the Industrial Commission take the lead.

The commission is further along in its review, and has been willing to let Smith's lawyers begin deposing Saunders-White and other key officials.

Sanservino has accused Cooper's staff of trying to drag things out via its insistence on letting the federal court lead; NCCU's defenders, by contrast, argue that employment discrimination law is fundamentally a federal matter.

Sanservino may have reason to see the commission as a friendlier venue, as his handling of the evidence-gathering process of an otherwise-unrelated case drew a rebuke in 2012 from a U.S. magistrate judge.

The judge, Patrick Auld, in that case cited a sequence of events that led him to think Sanservino used "litigation tactics indicative of bad faith" in the course of scheduling depositions.

He warned Sanservino to "take a more measured and civil approach in cases before this court."

Federal court records show that Auld' is overseeing procedural matters in Smith's federal case. He's also watching over a third discrimination lawsuit that Sanservino and Noble filed against NCCU on behalf of former business school professor Marianne Murphy.

Like Smith, Murphy has a parallel action pending against NCCU with the Industrial Commission. She recently filed an affidavit with the commission that said the UNC system "caused [her] additional emotional distress" by giving Saunders-White a raise in late October.

Follow Ray Gronberg on Twitter @rcgronberg.