Health insurance audit to ask faculty, staff to confirm status of their dependents

Auburn University has contracted with ContinuousHealth, an Atlanta-based benefits-technology company to conduct an audit in early 2013 of university employees covered by Auburn’s health and dental insurance plans.

In the audit, scheduled to commence in January or early February, each employee will be asked to produce proof that everyone listed as a dependent under the university’s self-insurance plan is still eligible. Examples of ineligible dependents would include a divorced spouse or adult children beyond age 25.

The audit is necessary to ensure that everyone covered by the university’s insurance plans is properly enrolled in the plan, said Karla McCormick, executive director of Auburn’s Office of Payroll and Employee Benefits, who on Tuesday briefed the University Senate about the insurance audit.

Citing requirements of the Affordable Care Act as well as rising health care costs, McCormick said, “We are trying to find ways to control plan costs without eliminating or reducing benefits. It is also important for compliance reasons: Only eligible employees and dependents should be enrolled in our plans.”

Similar audits have been conducted by the University of Alabama, UAB, the University of Georgia, the City of Montgomery and PEEHIP, the state employees retirement plan. The PEEHIP audit resulted in the removal of almost 5,000 ineligible dependents and savings of more than $14 million per year.

Auburn’s health insurance and dental plans are administered by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama, but the university self-insures the plans. As a result, McCormick noted, costs and savings are reflected directly in the premiums university employees pay. The average cost of coverage per member is approximately $3,500 per year, just for the health coverage. In the 12 months from June 2011 through May 2012, Auburn’s health insurance plan handled claims of more than $39.6 million.

“BCBS does not pay the claims, Auburn does,” McCormick emphasized. “BCBS just manages the administration of the payment for us. So every dollar spent on our employees’ health care that isn’t paid by the employee through premiums, co-pays, deductibles and co-insurance is paid by Auburn.”

Nationally, 3 percent to 7 percent of persons covered by health care plans are ineligible, according to industry estimates. With 6,200 dependents covered under its health insurance plan, Auburn and its employees could save an estimated $650,000 to $1.5 million per year by removing ineligible persons.

After reviewing its options, Auburn chose ContinuousHealth to conduct the audit for two primary reasons. “First, they seemed to understand and respect our culture,” said McCormick. “Second, they offer a ‘soft landing’ program that helps anyone found to be ineligible find affordable coverage to meet their needs.”

Under the audit, employees will complete a questionnaire and provide documents confirming the eligibility of their dependents to ContinuousHealth, not to the university or to Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Required documents will differ for spouses and other dependents, with specifics to be provided on a website to be posted soon on the Payroll and Employee Benefits home page, www.auburn.edu/administration/business_office/payroll/. The website will also provide answers to frequently asked questions. See Insurance audit, Page 2

New center introduces Korean language, culture to Alabama

Auburn University recently celebrated the opening of its new center for Korean culture and language education with music, dance and Taekwondo performances. The new Auburn University-Keimyung University Korea Center will offer non-credit classes in Korean language and culture beginning later this fall. Taught by a visiting instructor from Keimyung University, a private university located in Dae-gu, South Korea, the classes will offer the Auburn community a way to understand and connect with the area’s growing Korean and Korean-American population.

“Korean language has an important place in our community due to the growing presence of Korean-based industries in Alabama,” said Andrew Gillespie, assistant vice president for Auburn’s Office of International Programs. “Your neighbors, your children’s school friends and your co-workers may be fluent in Korean; learning those language skills can provide a definite edge in the job market in this state and globally.”

The three Keimyung University groups that performed during the opening ceremony are recognized in South Korea as among the country’s leading talents.

The Keimyung University Taekwondo Demonstration Team was founded in 1998 and has conducted demonstrations in Korea and across the globe, including a display at the 2011 World Taekwondo Championship. Grandmaster Lee Kyu-hyung, who directed Taekwondo demonstrations at the opening ceremony of the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, leads the team.

Keimyung University’s Korean Traditional Dance Team has performed across North America, Europe and Asia to further its goal of advancing recognition of Korean traditional dance worldwide. The Keimyung University String Quartet consists of outstanding senior students drawn from the Keimyung Chamber Ensemble.

Introduction to Korean culture

Members of Keimyung University’s Korean Traditional Dance Team, shown here, were among three visiting groups entertaining guests at the recent opening on campus of the Auburn University-Keimyung University Korea Center.
Students take technology to Bolivia

Nine Auburn University students, their professor and an alumna spent a week in August in the mountains of Bolivia, developing and implementing irrigation systems to make life better for the residents of Quesimpuco.

The remote village lies in a rugged and rocky area and receives very little rain during the South American winter. To help improve crop production, the Auburn team designed two projects: a gravity-fed irrigation system and a hydroponics demonstration unit. Both are aimed at managing the limited amount of water that is available while providing enough to meet demand.

“Our students are introducing the science and technology in a way that meshes with what the local people are already doing,” said Steve Duke, team leader and professor of chemical engineering. “We have tried to listen to the needs and requests of the people of the village and engineer solutions to their challenges.”

One of those challenges is irrigating the crops that struggle to grow on the terraced, rocky sides of the mountains. Auburn students have been creating a system that will employ a storage tank to collect water from a nearby waterfall so it can be distributed to the crops at the appropriate flow rate.

“The people here do not live on a money market system,” said civil engineering major Travis Bugg. “They grow everything they eat. We’re trying to help them increase their yield because the threat of starvation here is real.”

Other Auburn team members built a small-scale hydroponics system that recycles water across crop roots growing in gravel beds. The team worked with local high school students and others from the village and showed them another way to water crops and keep them thriving.

“This is Auburn’s third trip to Quesimpuco,” said chemical engineering major Whitney Brown. “We have a commitment to this community and are hoping to improve their way of life each time we come.”

— Mike Clardy

Insurance audit

Continued from Page 1

questions and will address privacy and protections the company provides for all materials received.

In most cases, required documents for a spouse will include a copy of the marriage license and another document such as proof of a joint bank account, joint household bill or joint tax return with financial information blacked out. Additional documents may be required of spouses whose employer provides access to health insurance. Provisions will also exist for newlyweds and common law spouses.

A copy of a birth certificate will be required for each child covered by the policy. Additional requirements will be specified when the dependent is a stepchild, adopted or age 19-25.

Employees who do not claim dependents on their insurance plan will not be subject to the audit. Those who carry dependents who are no longer eligible can remove them ahead of the audit during the annual November open period for adjustments to the insurance plans.

— Roy Summerford

Campus Calendar

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 14
PUBLIC LECTURE Karla Simmons of the College of Human Sciences Department of Consumer Affairs discussing faculty’s use of 3D images to assist Under Armour in design of customized uniforms, 4 p.m., Goodwin Room, Auburn Alumni Center; part of Game Day Lecture Series
BIRDS IN FLIGHT “Football, Fans and Feathers,” educational program with raptor demonstrations, 4 p.m., Southeastern Raptor Center, 1350 Raptor Road (off Shug Jordan Parkway, west of Wire Road, also Sept. 21, admission $5 per person
DOWNTOWN AUTUMN NIGHTS Street dance featuring music by the Swingin’ Medallions, plus appearances by Aubie, the Auburn University cheerleaders and band, 6-9:30 p.m., Toomer’s Corner

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16
CONCERT Auburn University Orchestra, 4 p.m.-5:30 p.m., Kiesel Park; admission free

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18
FACULTY GUITAR RECITAL Joseph Ikner, 7:30 p.m., Goodwin Recital Hall; tickets $10 general admission, $5 students, available at door 45 minutes before performance

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19
STUDY ABROAD FAIR Booths and information about Study Abroad programs and assistance with passport application, drawing for $500 scholarship, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., Haley Center lobby

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 20
MULTICULTURAL CENTER FILM “Killer of Sheep,” examines daily struggles in the Watts section of Los Angeles during the 1970s, 2 p.m., Student Center; part of the Watch and Learn Film Series
UNIVERSITY THEATRE “Nickel and Dimed,” 7:30 p.m., Telfair Peet Theatre; admission, $15 general public, $10 faculty and staff, free for students with ID; also Sept. 21 and Sept. 25-29 at 7:30 p.m. and Sept. 23 at 2:30 p.m.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 21
MEETING Board of Trustees, The Hotel at Auburn University; committee meetings followed by meeting of full board, times TBA

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28
NEXT Auburn Report
White House recognizes CHS dean for anti-hunger initiative

June Henton, dean of the College of Human Sciences at Auburn University, was recognized at the White House last week as a Strengthening Food Security Champion of Change.

The White House recognizes Americans each week who are making positive change in their communities, but this was the first time food security was acknowledged.

Almost a billion people do not have access to a sufficient supply of nutritious and safe food, and 16 million children in the United States experience food insecurity each year, according to information provided by the White House. Henton and 11 other leaders were selected for using innovative approaches to ensure that no man, woman or child goes hungry and for inspiring others to do the same.

“Today’s champions are examples of the groundbreaking work being done to tackle hunger at home and abroad,” said U.S. Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan. “These individuals are making improved access to healthy food a reality for millions of individuals in need.”

Henton is the founder of Universities Fighting World Hunger, a global alliance of more than 300 higher education institutions that began in partnership with the United Nations’ World Food Programme in 2004 as the Auburn University War on Hunger.

The Human Sciences dean is also executive director of the recently established Hunger Solutions Institute at Auburn, which provides leadership for the UFWH alliance.

The Champions of Change program was created as a part of President Obama’s Winning the Future initiative. Each week, a different sector is highlighted and groups of Champions, ranging from educators to entrepreneurs to community leaders, are recognized for the work they are doing to serve and strengthen their communities.

Among the other honorees were the Rev. Sally Allocca of Birmingham, founder and executive director of Promoting Empowerment and Enrichment Resources, P.E.E.R., Inc., and former U.S. Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn, the president of the World Food Prize foundation in Des Moines, Iowa.

The acknowledgment from the White House comes on the heels of another honor for Henton. In August, the U.S. Green Building Council of Alabama awarded her with its Clover Award, which recognizes outstanding people, projects, communities, school systems and businesses from throughout the state that exemplify qualities of sustainability, leadership, stewardship and advocacy within their industry.

Among this year’s award winners, Henton was the only winner who received the award as an individual. Other honorees were B.L. Harbert International, the Joint Armed Forces Readiness Center at Pelham Range and Neil and Ashley Johnston’s home, “Tide’s In.”

— Amy Weaver

Exhibition reunites historic artworks

A collection of modernist American art was assembled in 1946 by the U.S. State Department and launched as a traveling exhibition, “Advancing American Art,” to show the world America’s artistic coming of age. While praised by art critics, the show attracted the ire of political leaders of that era and was quickly withdrawn.

Now, nearly 70 years later, all but 10 paintings from the original 117 oils and watercolors are on display through Jan. 5 at the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art at Auburn University in the debut of the exhibition, “Art Interrupted: Advancing American Art and the Politics of Cultural Diplomacy.”

“Advancing American Art” was the highlight of a U.S. State Department initiative of cultural diplomacy during the Cold War,” said Dennis Harper, curator of collections and exhibitions at the Jule Collins Smith Museum. “The exhibition was slated to travel to Eastern Europe, Asia and through the Latin American republic to show the freedom of expression enjoyed by artists in the United States.”

Controversy soon erupted in the American media, in government forums and among the public. The exhibition was abruptly canceled, and Congress eliminated funding for the project. The following year, the War Assets Administration auctioned the paintings as war surplus.

Auburn successfully bid on a third of the 117 paintings offered in the sale. The rest were purchased by other educational institutions, including the University of Georgia and the University of Oklahoma, as well as various other museums and collectors throughout the United States.

The renewed exhibition was made possible by grants from the Henry Luce Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts as part of American Masterpieces: Three Centuries of Artistic Genius.

Auburn again ranked in top 50 among public institutions

Auburn University is ranked 37th among public universities nationwide for its undergraduate programs, according to an annual survey released this week by U.S. News & World Report. The ranking marks the 20th consecutive year the magazine has ranked Auburn among the nation’s top 50 public universities.

Auburn is ranked 89th in the nation among both public and private schools, while its College of Business undergraduate program ranked 27th among public institutions and 47th overall. Among land-grant universities, Auburn ranks 19th.

“We are certainly honored to continue to be recognized as a top 30 public business school in the U.S.,” said Bill Hardgrave, dean of the College of Business. “External rankings serve as validation of the reputation we have created among our peers. Our faculty and staff are dedicated to our mission of producing highly desired graduates and generating knowledge that drives business thought and practice. This dedication is reflected in the rankings.”

The Samuel Ginn College of Engineering ranked 30th among public universities offering doctoral programs in engineering and 53rd overall.

Rankings of other programs are released at various times during the year by U.S. News & World Report.

“While no calculation can ever capture what is most essential and alive about a college or university, it is always good to have confirmation of the challenging and supportive environment that Auburn provides for learning,” said Drew Clark, director of Auburn’s Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

— Charles Martin
Play about the working poor

Theatre starts new season with ‘Nickel and Dimed’

Auburn University Theatre in the College of Liberal Arts launches its 2012-13 season Sept. 20 with “Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America,” a play based on a best-selling nonfiction book about the struggles of the working poor in today’s economy.

On stage at Telfair Peet Theatre on West Samford Avenue, “Nickel and Dimed” is directed by Chris Qualls of the Department of Theatre faculty and will be performed by a student cast Sept. 20-21 and Sept. 25-29 at 7:30 p.m., with a Sunday matinee Sept. 23 at 2:30 p.m.

“Nickel and Dimed” is one of those rare works of journalistic theatre that manages to show all sides of a story while also capturing amazing hilarious characters,” said Qualls. “It’s not just a one-sided political rant. It pulls no punches. Even the journalist gets roasted at times. It’s like reality TV, except the stories are real this time.”

Adapted by Joan Holden from Barbara Ehrenreich’s book of the same name, “Nickel and Dimed” is drawn from author Ehrenreich’s personal account of her struggles in a series of low paying “entry-level” jobs that last a lifetime for many of her co-workers. The play presents the comedy and tragedy of “invisible” people, as Ehrenreich describes them, trying to make ends meet on minimum wage while working hard as cooks and waitresses, cleaners and other jobs that the many in upper income brackets never experienced or try hard to forget.

Other plays in the 2012-13 season include the musical “Guarding Gold Street,” about life in a small town seen through the eyes of three generations of American women, Oct. 16-21; the classic Greek comedy “Lysistrata,” about a plot by the women of Athens and Sparta to end the war between the two city-states and bring their men home, Nov. 8-9, 11 and 13-16; the dance celebration “Dance by Design,” featuring the University Theatre’s student dance ensemble, Jan. 24-26; “She Loves Me,” based on the story that inspired “Little Shop Around the Corner”; “You’ve Got Mail,” Feb. 21-24 and Feb. 26-March 2; and “Elephant’s Graveyard,” based on a true story about the tragic visit of a circus to a small Tennessee town in 1916, April 16-21.

Season tickets are available from Auburn University Theatre for $50, with a special offer of two free additional tickets to any production if purchased before Sept. 20. Tickets for individual performances are $15 for the general public, $10 for faculty, staff and seniors and free for students with ID. For additional information, see the website www.cla.auburn.edu/theatre/productions or call the Theatre Ticket Office at 844-4154.

Wellness Center reaches topping-out stage

The topping out of the new Auburn University Recreation and Wellness Center took place Sept. 5. The construction milestone marked the completion of the steel structure by ceremoniously raising the last beam into place by a crane. The steel beam, signed by administrators, faculty, staff, students and construction workers, was adorned with an American flag and a genetic clone of Auburn’s historic Toomer’s Corner oak trees.

The oak was used in place of the traditional evergreen tree, representing life and growth of the new building, and will be planted at the facility when the project is completed.

The $72 million facility is on track to receive LEED Silver certification and will feature a cardio and weight room, indoor track, outdoor leisure pool, three-story rock-climbing wall, eight basketball courts, an indoor soccer field and a golf simulator, among other amenities. The 240,000-square-foot center is scheduled to be completed in spring 2013.

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Auburn Report

September 14, 2012

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