Curators’ chair gets new chief

Fraser reviews progress during his one-year post.

By Janese Heavin

Sunday, January 3, 2010

Despite a tight budget year, Bo Fraser said he’s proud of the University of Missouri System’s accomplishments during his one-year term as chairman of the Board of Curators.

Most notable, he said, was the addition of UM System President Gary Forsee’s accountability system. The internal assessment gauges progress made at each of the four campuses in some 80 key areas, including caliber of incoming freshmen, student retention and graduation rates.

“That, to me, is a big deal,” said Fraser, a Columbia resident. “The way to measure progress — or the lack of it — is important to the university. We should feel really good about getting that in place. … Everyone who’s part of the university can look at that and know what is important and what needs to be done. There’s no misunderstanding about what is important to move this university forward.”

Fraser also praised the system this past year for improving its technology transfer process, allowing research ideas to more easily become revenue-driving economic entities.

“One of my goals was to improve that, and I think we did during the year,” he said. “We have a ways to go, but there are tremendous opportunities and resources on our four campuses to move some of these great research ideas into the economic world.”

Living in Columbia helped him serve as chairman of the university system’s governing body, Fraser said. Not only was it convenient to stop by University Hall and talk to administrators, he said, but living in a “media intense” community also might have given him an edge.

“The university is under a microscope,” he said. “As a public institute, we need to be held accountable to the public. I have an appreciation and understanding of that.”

Judith Haggard of Kennett was elected last month to succeed Fraser as chair. Through an e-mailed interview facilitated by the system’s public relations office, Haggard said curators must represent residents across the state, regardless of personal addresses.

Haggard is an alumna of both MU and UM-St. Louis and said she has been equally impressed with the educational programs at the Kansas City and Rolla campuses. As chairwoman, she said
her priorities will be to ensure students have access to e-learning and other nontraditional programs that would allow them to attain a degree while juggling other demands.

"I take my role as the board chair very seriously," Haggard said in the e-mail. "My priorities will be to help continue to make a college education attainable for all who desire one."

Some faculty members are hoping this is the year curators approve domestic partnership benefits. Faculty Councils at both MU and UM-St. Louis have discussed resolutions urging the system to adopt benefits for same-sex couples.

Fraser said Forsee would facilitate the process of getting any recommendation to the board but that he would not let politics affect his decision if the issue comes to a vote.

"One of my goals, when I came on the board, is to make decisions that are right and good for the university without regard to politics as much as we can," said Fraser, a Republican. "I feel pretty strongly about that."

Haggard declined to answer specific questions about benefits for same-sex partners or any possible fear of political repercussions for approving benefits for domestic partnerships.

"The University of Missouri reviews its benefits programs annually," she wrote.

"Suggestions are evaluated and considered as appropriate at that time."

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.
The nation meets 44 percent of its energy needs by burning coal. The University of Missouri and the state of Missouri receive approximately 80 percent of their energy from this fossil fuel. Society has become increasingly aware of the deleterious effects of burning coal on human health and the natural environment. Recognizing these effects, MU has taken extraordinary steps for short-run, technical adjustments to reduce harmful effects and is developing and implementing longer-run modifications of its power plant to reduce and eliminate the need to burn coal to supply our energy needs. The university also is devoting resources to stimulate exploration of alternative energy sources to move society toward a more sustainable energy future.

I want to provide perspective on MU's efforts to reduce dependence on coal as an energy source. The remarkable scope of energy use at MU makes this challenge formidable and requires ongoing assessment of cost and technological change. The MU power plant is responsible for providing utility service to more than 14 million square feet of facilities across more than 1,300 acres of land on the university's main campus, which includes hospitals, a research reactor, numerous research facilities, academic buildings, residential halls, dining facilities and the athletic complex. MU administrators search continually for the most efficient, environmentally friendly ways to keep our campus running.

Given this high-energy demand, how are we responding to the need to transition away from coal? I will begin with MU's most recent step forward and then recount key action steps that are already under way and receiving wide recognition.

MU is considered a national leader in energy management. I signed The American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment on Jan. 15, 2009, committing
MU to submit a greenhouse gas inventory of our campus by Jan. 15, 2010. Currently, we are on target to meet that deadline.

As part of the pact, MU also must develop a climate action implementation plan, which is due Jan. 15, 2011. To ensure that we meet the deadline for this critical component, a sustainability coordinator was hired to spearhead, coordinate and provide oversight for the plan’s timely development. The plan must contain the following elements:

1. Set a target date for climate neutrality, a time when greenhouse gas emissions are balanced with renewable energy production.
2. Establish interim targets for goals and actions.
3. Identify actions to make climate neutrality and sustainability part of the campus curriculum and other educational experiences for all students.
4. Develop strategies to expand research and other efforts to achieve climate neutrality.
5. Ensure that mechanisms for tracking progress on goals and actions are in place.

The entire MU community recognizes our responsibility to be good stewards of our environment, and we take that responsibility seriously as our record will show.

Consider for a moment the significance of reduced energy usage on campus. While our education and general use space has grown by 30 percent since 1990 with many new energy-intensive research facilities, our energy use has actually been reduced by 10 percent per square foot. We also have experienced a 12 percent decrease of greenhouse gas emissions based on square footage. This has only been possible through the work of our experts in campus facilities – energy management.

Since 1995, MU has won 14 international, national and state awards for energy management techniques. The most recent award was the 2008 Missouri Waste Control Coalition’s Outstanding Achievement Award based on our use of old tires to replace a portion of our coal as a fuel source. Rather than discard these used tires in landfills, they are shredded and burned. As a fuel source, they burn cleaner than coal, reducing emissions.

We are proud of the leadership role of our students, faculty and staff. Earlier this year, our student group, Sustain Mizzou, submitted a grant application to become part of a project that investigated challenges universities face to incorporate sustainability
practices in their operation and curriculum. As a result, we were visited by officials from the Rocky Mountain Institute. Located in Snowmass, Colo., the institute is dedicated to the responsible use of natural resources while encouraging sustainable practices. Following their visit to our power plant, institute officials commented that MU was a "rock star" among its peers.

In October, the Sustainable Endowments Institute gave MU an overall grade of "B-," but MU received an "A" in the area of "Climate Change and Energy," the highest (along with the University of Colorado) of all Big 12 universities.

While we continue to use coal at our plant, we have explored and been successful with using alternative fuels, including corncobs, waste wood and switch grass. Currently, we are preparing to replace a coal-fired boiler with a special boiler that will have the ability to burn 100 percent biomass. MU's power plant uses combined heat and power technology to produce steam and electricity for the campus. The efficiency of this process is nearly twice that of a conventional power plant. By taking these actions, we are continuing our steps toward eliminating coal usage on our campus. This will not happen overnight, but we realize that by taking these actions, we are setting the stage for minimal coal use in the future.

Even as we cope with the problems associated with burning coal, economic realities and new technologies will determine the exact timetable for eliminating coal use. There is no doubt that we will succeed. Our plans are based on specific investments, a deep commitment to a cleaner and safer environment, knowledge of the damaging effects of coal, and the problems of greenhouse gas and other emissions that harm human and plant life.

As we continue our concerted efforts to achieve our energy and environmental goals, I ask you to join the MU community in open and informed discussions of this complex issue of national and international importance.

*Brady Deaton is the MU chancellor.*
Payroll dispute riles company

Shepherd's Co. sues MU over rejection.

By Janese Heavin

Sunday, January 3, 2010

A Fulton-based company is suing the University of Missouri for denying it the chance to bid on future construction projects.

In a petition filed Oct. 30 in Boone County Circuit Court, The Shepherd's Co. argues the university has unlawfully denied its constitutional right and is asking a judge to restore the company as an eligible bidder.

The university's facilities planning and development office in October sent a letter to Shepherd's Co., saying it had been placed in a rejection list. "Should your firm be the low bidder on any University of Missouri construction project, a recommendation will be made to reject your bid," Director David Sheahan wrote. "Should your firm bid as a subcontractor or supplier on a university construction project, appropriate action will be taken to prohibit your firm's participation."

The letter claimed the company "balked at requests to release records related to prevailing wage compliance."

But Jabbock Schlacks, who oversees the construction partnership, said the company complies with prevailing wage laws when required to do so and denied that the company rejected university requests for proof.

"We have nothing to hide," Schlacks said. "We believe we've always been in compliance."

Shepherd's Co. is a partnership made up of more than 60 owners, all of whom attend Shepherdsfield Church. The church has been in existence for more than 20 years in the Fulton area and is a communal society whose members relinquish personal property to the group. The company offices are located on property deeded to New Christian Life Fellowship, which adjoins the church property.

Payroll documents from a September job at the university show each of the owner-employees of Shepherd's Co. were paid separately. Rates of pay were $40 an hour for the week of Sept. 11, with standard pay between $35 and $45 in earlier weeks at the same job.
Curtis Chick Jr. with Sheet Metal Workers' Local 36 said local labor unions are concerned about the company. He said they began looking into Shepherd's Co. after the group was awarded the university contract for work at the Bradford Technology and Transfer Center.

"Sixty-four owners — give me a break," he said, referring to the company's partnership setup. "That's a game. I want to make sure they don't keep taking work away from the contractors and people I represent."

The Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations' Division of Labor Standards appears to be looking into Shepherd's Co., although spokeswoman Amy Susan said she could neither confirm nor deny an investigation exists. The division's director, Carla Buschjost, formerly worked with Chick at Sheet Metal Workers' Local 36.

The labor division has requested thousands of payroll documents from the company. Shepherd's owners originally fought the request in Cole County Circuit Court, citing demands on time and resources, Schlacks said. "That's a tremendous amount of work for a small company," he said, adding that the state division wants some 35,000 documents that span three to four years.

Circuit Judge Richard Callahan subsequently ordered the company to release documents.

In the meantime, the labor division sent a letter about Shepherd's Co. to Columbia Public Schools, which was ready to award the company a contract for work at the Columbia Area Career Center.

"We were prepared to award them a contract but received a letter from the Division of Labor Standards saying there were allegations the company didn't pay prevailing wage," said Greg Cooper, who works in the district's business office. "This particular job requires that of a contractor. That was supposed to be factored into the bid. We thought it would be best to pull the bid and in January consider the next low bidder. We thought it was best to wait until the issues were resolved."

Shepherd's representatives were adamant that the allegations are unfounded.

"Shepherd's Co. complies with prevailing wage laws in every public contract," the company's Jefferson City-based attorney, Mark Comley, said.

The city of Columbia last week sent Shepherd's Co. payroll documents to the state labor division, said Marilyn Starke, the city's purchasing agent. She said she'll let the division determine whether the employee-owner wages are up to par. The company is currently working on a project at the city's Grissum Building.

"We're not pulling them off the project at this time," Starke said. "They do good work, high-quality work."

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.
Accident takes life of former UM System president’s wife

TRIBUNE WIRE SERVICES

Sunday, January 3, 2010

Deborah Howell, a pioneering journalist who helped lead both the Minneapolis Star and St. Paul Pioneer Press in the 1970s and ‘80s and later served as ombudsman for the Washington Post, died Friday after being hit by a car in New Zealand, St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman said.

Deborah Howell

Coleman, who is Howell’s stepson, said the family received word that Howell, who was fulfilling a lifelong dream to visit New Zealand, was struck as she crossed a street near Blenheim, New Zealand. She was traveling with her husband, C. Peter Magrath, former president of the University of Missouri System and the University of Minnesota.

Howell, 68, was city editor and later an assistant managing editor of the Minneapolis Star in the 1970s, and managing editor and executive editor of the St. Paul Pioneer Press in the 1980s. Under her leadership, the Pioneer Press won two Pulitzer Prizes.

In 1990, she became the Washington bureau chief of the Newhouse newspaper chain. From 2005 to 2008, she was the Washington Post’s ombudsman.

“She played a very important role in my life after my dad died, right up to editing my speeches,” Chris Coleman said.

Among those she inspired to enter journalism was his daughter, Chris Coleman said, who will soon study it at the University of Missouri.
Howell graduated from the University of Texas and worked at the Austin American-Statesman and the Corpus Christi Caller-Times before joining the Minneapolis Star in 1965.

In 1975, Howell married Nick Coleman, the Minnesota Senate majority leader. He died in 1981. In 1988, she married Magrath, who was president of the University of Missouri System for 6½ years until he resigned in 1991.
MU MENTION PG.2

Howell Remembered as `Force for Good Journalism'

Former Washington Post ombudsman Deborah Howell remembered for journalistic spirit, leadership

The Associated Press

Former Washington Post ombudsman Deborah Howell is being remembered as "a powerful force for good journalism" who was a loyal friend and an inspiring mentor to others in the industry.

Howell, 68, died Friday when she was struck by a car in Blenheim, a town of 30,000 people on the northeast coast of New Zealand's South Island.

Detective Sgt. John Hamilton of the Blenheim police department said Monday that it appeared Howell was crossing a highway to take a picture when she stepped in front of a car in the far lane. Hamilton said it's possible she was "completely unaware of the vehicle."

Drivers in New Zealand travel on the left side of the road, not the right as in the United States, so pedestrians must look first in the direction opposite from their norm.

Hamilton said a full investigation was under way and would take some time. Police were looking at whether there was any basis for charging the driver. The most common charge in such circumstances is careless driving causing death.

Howell was in New Zealand on vacation with her husband, C. Peter Magrath, the former president of the four-campus University of Missouri system and the University of Minnesota.


"She was the best newspaper editor I ever worked with," said John Camp, whose winning series examined the life of an American farm family amid the agricultural crisis. "She didn't do things by a managerial workbook; she was instinctual."

St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman, Howell's stepson, said the family was devastated.

"Deborah was a pioneering journalist," Coleman said in a statement. "She was fascinated by people and places the world over. She was a woman of ideas and an irreplaceable guiding force in my life and in the lives of everyone who knew her." Howell previously was married to Coleman's father, former Minnesota Senate Majority Leader Nicholas Coleman, until his death in 1981.

"She played a very important role in my life after my dad died, right up to editing my speeches," Chris Coleman said. "And she was a powerful force for good journalism."
Coleman said he had been spending the day preparing for his Monday inauguration when he got the news about Howell's death. "The last thing I had yet to do was to send her my remarks for her edits," he said.

Minneapolis Star Tribune columnist Nick Coleman, another stepson, said Howell was a mentor and confidant to many in the newsroom and had a relationship with many outside the newsroom's walls.

"She had personal loyalties and could count on people's loyalties," he said.

Howell, the daughter of two journalists, once said she was "a reporter in my bones." Raised in Texas, Howell worked for newspapers there before moving to Minnesota in 1965.

She was city editor and an assistant managing editor of the Minneapolis Star before becoming managing editor and executive editor of the Pioneer Press. Howell later became the Washington bureau chief of the Newhouse newspaper chain, where her staff also won a Pulitzer. From 2005 to 2008, she was The Washington Post's ombudsman.

When Howell joined Newhouse, she became one of the first women to lead a Washington bureau, said David Shribman, executive editor of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Shribman, who ran the Washington bureau for The Boston Globe in the 1990s, said he considered Howell a colleague, a mentor and an "amazingly loyal friend."

"She took an underperforming bureau that did routine stories badly and made it a center of innovation and enterprise," Shribman said.

Colleagues said she was a force to be reckoned with who never walked away from a fight.

"She could swear like a sailor. She taught me how to swear," said former Pioneer Press reporter Theresa Persons, who wrote under the name Theresa Monsour. "She's tiny. A delicate, tiny, well-dressed woman, and she would open her mouth and say stuff that I don't think you can say in a newsroom now."

In October, Howell was awarded the University of Missouri School of Journalism's Honor Medal "in recognition of a life's career devoted to practicing and leading others to practice aggressive, fair and useful journalism," according to the school's Web site.

Chris Coleman said his own daughter was inspired by Howell, and will soon study journalism at the University of Missouri.

Star Tribune columnist James Lileks, hired at the Pioneer Press by Howell, followed her to Newhouse.

"She was the most fearless, fierce, fair and honest journalist I've ever met," Lileks said. The only thing she loved more than her profession were the people with whom she worked ... At a time when newspapers had become quiet, comfy places, she brought the spark and crackle of 'The Front Page' to any room she walked through."

Funeral arrangements are pending.

Copyright 2010 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.
Copyright © 2010 ABC News Internet Ventures
LETTER: MU band showed disrespect

By Margaret Fries
January 1, 2010 | 3:12 p.m. CST

We attended the Texas Bowl, where players, fans and coaches were good sportsmen.

At the end of the game, the Missouri players left the field and most of the Missouri fans had left. The Missouri marching band played the Missouri alma mater and the fight song. Navy players, fans and midshipmen waited patiently at the other end of the field for the Missouri band to finish.

When Missouri finished, the Navy Drum and Bugle Corps (small in number compared to the Missouri band) started playing the historical Navy Blue and Gold. At this point, the Missouri band blasted the Missouri fight a second time and completely drowned out Navy's turn to sing their alma mater.

This was completely uncalled for and disgraceful on the part of the Missouri band. The Navy players and midshipmen will be our future leaders in protecting our country starting next May. The entire incident was embarrassing for the Missouri fans and disappointing for the Navy fans and Navy midshipmen. Someone needs to talk to the Missouri band director.

*Margaret Fries lives in The Woodlands, Texas. Her husband is an MU alumnus.*
I have to admit, I'm much more into festivities and hullabaloo of Christmas than the celebration of New Year's Eve. But New Year's day, that's another story. There's something so inviting about the promise of a fresh new year, especially for a list maker.

On New Year's day, with the Rose Parade playing in the background, I broke the seal on my 2010 calendar and got out a bright, new journal. It was a good day for making plans and promises for the year ahead. I'm a fan of plans.

When my kids were little and would groan at the prospect of science projects, written reports or even the sometimes daunting task of cleaning their rooms, I'd offer this sage advice: plan the work and work the plan.

Of course, they'd roll their eyes and groan even louder, but the truth is: when there's work to be done, especially when you'd rather avoid it, you really do need a plan. If you don't believe me, believe the University of Missouri - Columbia.

Last fall, researchers, including Daniel Turban, professor and chair of the Department of Management in the University of Missouri's Robert J. Trulaske, Sr. College of Business, announced the results of a three-part job seeking effectiveness study. Having examined the efforts of 327 job seekers, ages 20 to 40, the researchers concluded that developing and following a plan at the start of a job search, and having positive emotions later in the search had a significant impact on job search success.

I know. It seems like common sense. But ... what's your plan? Is it written down with well-defined objectives and time frames? By the way, "find a job soon" is not a plan.

- Build a database (names, addresses, phone numbers, connections) of 15 viable
network contacts by Jan. 8.

— Review resume and cover letter to ensure that they best represent current job seeking goals. Redefine, if necessary, before Jan. 6.

— Contact two leads per day, beginning Jan. 6, with the goal of three information-seeking network meetings scheduled for the week of Jan. 11-15.

— Thank network contacts via e-mail immediately upon return from meeting.

— Follow-up with contacts, sharing the results of their suggestions and your actions taken, within one to two weeks of initial meeting.

— Search internet job sites each week at a designated time, such as Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 8-10 a.m. Don’t be lured into aimlessly wandering the internet all day.

— Complete online applications as job opportunities are found.

— Research two to four target companies per week. Use the internet and other sources including personal contacts to identify viable connections, problems you can solve and available jobs.

— Continue to add contacts to database at a rate of 2-5 people per week.

— Commit time each week to learning a new skill, improving an old one, or volunteering within the community.

— Utilize community resources such as the Missouri Career Source to stay apprised of training and other career enhancement opportunities as they become available.

That’s a plan, or at least a pretty good start of a plan.

Although many of these suggestions seem commonplace, Turban suggested that "they’re just not that common."
Many job seekers, he said, "don’t have strategies. They don’t assess their plans. And, they don’t think about their strategies and reflect on whether they’re working or how to make them work better. They just don’t do it."

His proof is in the study, which examined how the personality traits of extraversion and conscientiousness affect metacognitive activities (goal setting and plan development) as well as positive emotions.

In short, the study revealed that extraversion — how energetic and outgoing a person is — influenced both metacognitive activities and positive emotions. Conscientiousness —

a person's self-discipline and dependability — also affected metacognitive activities and directly influenced the number of final job offers the person received.

"Perhaps," Turban offered, "conscientious job seekers conducted better quality job searches by scrutinizing their fit with prospective employers more carefully or more effectively following up with employers." If that's the case, it's a trait that can be learned, or at least developed through careful, written planning and follow-through.

Yes, you have to write it down. Or better still keep your database, job search action items and results all in one, convenient Excel spreadsheet. Don’t have Excel? Try CALC, a spreadsheet/data management program offered free online at openoffice.org.

However, you choose to make and keep your plan, Turban and his research partners agree, you have to continuously assess its effectiveness and redefine it maximize job search success.

Turban also stressed that it’s important to expect rejections and develop a coping strategy ahead of time. "This should help maintain positive emotions throughout the process and improve one’s chances of getting a job," Turban said.

There's no time like the present. Make or re-assess your job search plan today.
Let's put Missouri back to work
By Chris Kelly

MU mention on page 2

Over the past several months it has been common to hear politicians in state government repeat the mantra of how bad the state budget is. The governor and state senators and representatives have all said it. I have said it. It is true.

Next year's general revenue budget probably will be half a billion dollars less than the current version. This bad news is usually accompanied by a list of all the things that we cannot do. The list generally is accurate. One question remains: After we have wrung our hands over that which we cannot do, what is it that we can do? Are there any actions the governor and the Legislature can take to alleviate the economic conditions and improve the overall position of Missouri? Yes! There is something we can do.

In 1982, then-Gov. Christopher "Kit" Bond, working in a bipartisan manner with Democratic legislative leaders, passed and sent to the people a proposed $700 million building bond issue to construct and repair needed major buildings at our colleges and universities and at other state buildings.

The people of Missouri agreed and voted to use some of their taxes to pay off this bond issue. Thousands of Missourians went to work in dozens of trades, constructing needed classrooms, laboratories and hospitals. Those facilities still serve Missouri 27 years later. Now, Gov. Jay Nixon and the Legislature should follow the example of Gov. Bond and send a fifth state building bond to the voters for approval.

Why?

First, the condition of the economy demands our attention.

In so far as government should act to alleviate difficult economic conditions, the best
way to act is to invest in large-scale, needed construction through the private sector.

Missouri, like all states, private companies and families, usually will borrow money to construct large new buildings. The accepted theory is that the project will serve for many years so it makes sense to pay for it over many years.

If the question of borrowing is not whether to borrow but when to borrow, then the answer is now. Interest rates have not been this low in many years and probably will not be this low in the foreseeable future. Further, if Missouri were to act now, it could take advantage of a provision of national recovery legislation through which the federal government would assume 35 percent of our debt for these projects.

Our construction industry at every level is hungry for work. We could get very favorable bids. Highway projects are coming in at more than 15 percent below the prices that the Department of Transportation expected to pay. Companies and people need the work.

A large construction bond issue is, by order of magnitude, the biggest jobs bill the governor and Legislature could enact. Construction of the buildings would employ thousands of workers in every craft all over the state. The facilities, once built, would require the employment of more people, and the students educated at the facilities would bolster our economy with their technical and scientific skills.

Second, the work that will be done is vital to the future of Missouri. Our colleges and universities have massive backlogs of needed new facilities, mostly to teach the hard sciences.

At the University of Missouri—Columbia a new engineering building would be constructed. At Southeast Missouri State, a new chemistry laboratory building; at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, a nursing building; more of the same would occur across the state.

Every university and community college would build whatever is its highest priority. If we ever hope to compete in the national and international economy, we must have the facilities to train our students in the sciences.

We also have other important state building needs: hospitals, parks and police facilities.
During the 2009 legislative session, Rep. Steve Tilley, R-Perryville, and I sponsored a $750 million bond issue. It passed the House overwhelmingly. In the Senate, it was handled by Kurt Schaefer, R-Boone, where it clearly was supported by a majority of that body but was defeated by a small group of Republican senators who threatened a filibuster. Gov. Nixon neither supported nor opposed the measure.

We, the voters of Missouri, can decide to put people to work right away on important state projects with long-term benefits. We can do so at record low bids and interest rates, and we can do so without a tax increase.

If act quickly, we can send a fifth state building bond to the people for their approval this coming April, and we can actually pass the necessary appropriation bills in the spring, getting people to work by summer.

I fear, as do many market observers, that our window of low interest rates may soon pass. It will be a shame if we wait until interest rates rise and then say, "Oh gee. We missed our chance." Voters make the final decision; it is their money. They should be allowed to decide to dedicate their tax money to build Missouri's future.

If those who agree call the governor and legislators and ask them to act now on the state bonding program, we can make real progress in Missouri.

Let's put Missouri back to work.
COLUMN: It could have been worse

By George Kennedy
January 1, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — I walked into Booche’s for lunch earlier this week, and an unusually perceptive reader greeted me: “George, I don’t remember what you wrote about; but I agreed with you.”

Thus encouraged, I made a New Year’s resolution to keep on keeping on. And how better to begin 2010 than by taking a quick look back at its predecessor?

If you’re seeking a summary of 2009, I suggest “It could have been worse.” True, it was bad enough. But it wasn’t as bad as it might have been, at national, state or local levels.

First and most important, the horrific recession didn’t turn into an outright depression. Jobs disappeared and home prices fell, but there seems to be a consensus among the experts that belated federal regulation and the much maligned stimulus package have prevented the worst. At year end, we see some signs of economic life and reasons for cautious optimism.

We also see, a mere century after Theodore Roosevelt advocated it and 15 years after Bill Clinton bungled it, the prospect of health insurance for nearly everyone. No wonder the Republicans complained of undue haste.

Locally, the federal stimulus eased the pain at our most important institution, the university. Thanks to that infusion of revenue, the standstill deal struck by Governor Nixon and President Forsee — no tuition increase and no cut in the core budget — looks awfully good compared to the crises that hit higher education in other states. Of course, it remains to be seen whether the tentative deal they’ve made for next year will survive in the legislature. And, of course, higher education remains underfunded and the faculty underpaid.
While university employees kept their jobs, they had to begin contributing to the pension system for the first time. Not for the first time, a push for benefits for same-sex partners got nowhere.

Speaking of our governor, you probably saw the Associated Press article that summed up his first year in office as being pretty good, all things considered. That judgment would be way too kind for the legislature, what with three members convicted, the former speaker indicted and the FBI snooping around. The Former Boy Governor’s name made the news, too, when the aide he fired for warning of Sunshine Law violations was vindicated and awarded a hefty cash settlement. Both parties are suddenly promising ethics legislation.

The state’s leading pork producer, Kit Bond, announced his retirement from the U.S. Senate. Rep. Roy Blunt, Missouri’s version of Tom Delay, wants to succeed him. That ambition is not universally applauded even in his own party. If he makes it through the primary, Robin Carnahan will await in November.

Here at home, 2009 brought us promising new leaders of the Columbia Police Department and public schools, the Boone County Fire Prevention District and Stephens College. All appear to be off to strong starts. In April, for the first time in a generation, Darwin Hindman won’t be on the mayoral ballot. His legacy lives in our growing number of trails and bicyclists.

What will be on the April ballot is one of those well-intentioned but misconceived attempts to promote public safety: cameras covering downtown. The City Council demonstrated wisdom and a certain amount of courage in resisting 3,000 petition signatures and refusing to authorize the cameras.

Wisely or not, the council also voted a big tax break for the redevelopers of The Tiger Hotel and committed millions to downtown’s other major developments, the enlarged city hall and a huge new parking garage. Despite public pushing and backstage maneuvering by the publisher across town, our rulers did refrain from condemning private property for a new historical museum. And that was before the Youzeum flopped.

Left over on the public agenda is the contentious question of urban chickens.
So the Old Year could have been a lot worse. The New Year surely will be better. Won't it?

George Kennedy is a former managing editor at the Missourian and professor emeritus at the Missouri School of Journalism.