COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU professor in Port-au-Prince unharmed

By Tim Wall
January 14, 2010 | 6:30 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — An MU professor volunteering in Haiti was unharmed by the Haitian earthquake, but another MU professor on Thursday had yet to hear from family members there.

Carsten Strathausen, professor in the MU German and Russian departments, received an e-mail from his wife, Valerie Kaussen, from the hard-hit capital of Port-au-Prince.

Monika Fischer, a friend and colleague, said in an e-mail Thursday evening that Kaussen, a MU associate professor of French, “has posted a note on Facebook that she is OK,” but she did not post any pictures or details.

“We assume her laptop has no more power nor does her cell phone since there is no electricity. ... Thus, we have no more contact,” Fischer said.

Kaussen’s apartment building was still standing, Fischer said. Kaussen was scheduled to come back Monday, Fischer said, but her family hopes she can return this weekend.

Kaussen was working with Friends of SODA, an acronym for a Haitian Creole phrase roughly meaning "neighbors talking together." According to Fischer, Kaussen has been working with this agency for several years.

MU Chancellor Brady Deaton, in an e-mail Thursday to MU faculty and staff, said he and his wife, Anne Deaton, “were relieved to know that one of MU’s faculty members conducting research in Haiti is unharmed.” Another faculty member has yet to hear from her family in Port-au-Prince, Deaton said.

MU does not have any students enrolled from Haiti, Deaton said.
There was no additional information Thursday about efforts by Haitian native Flore Zephir, an MU French professor and chair of the department of Romance languages, to reach her two brothers in Port-au-Prince.
Columbia Resident Hears From Family in Haiti

COLUMBIA - When the earthquake struck Haiti on Tuesday, it hit too close to home for Haitian native Flore Zephir.

Columbia is more than 1800 miles away from Port-au-Prince, so few Mid-Missourians have a personal connection to the quake. Zephir has two brothers still living on the Caribbean island, but had not heard from either of them by Thursday afternoon.

On Tuesday night a friend of Zephir's called and told her about the earthquake that hit her native country. It was the worst call she had ever received.

"I could not believe it. I was shocked and in disbelief, but did not comprehend the magnitude of the quake until pictures started coming in," Zephir recalled.

Zephir said her mother, who also lives in Columbia, desperately wanted to fly to Haiti and search for her two sons.

"It really hurt my mother. She couldn't even sleep at night," Zephir commented.

In the Western Hemisphere's poorest nation, a country where only one in nine people have Internet access and one in three have a cell phone, communication to Haiti bottlenecked.

"My sister tried calling, emailing, we did everything, but whenever you dialed into Haiti, you could not get connected," Zaphir said.

However, that all changed Thursday evening at 6:30 p.m. when Zephir's mother called.

"She said Flore; I have good news to tell you. You're brothers are alive and well in Haiti."

And with that telephone call, among all the turmoil, devastation and destruction in Haiti Thursday night, there was a glimmer of hope 1836 miles away in Columbia.

Meanwhile Valerie Kaussen, an associate professor of Romance Languages and Literatures at MU, was in Port-au-Prince when the quake hit, she survived un-injured. Kaussen visits Haiti twice a year to conduct research on Haitian culture. Kaussen is married to Carsten Strathausen, a chairman of the Department of German and Russian Studies at MU.

Reported by: Kevin Lewis

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Two Columbians trying to learn fate of families in Haiti

By Tim Wall
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COLUMBIA — MU student Laura Janvier has been unable to contact her aunt, a Haitian who lives in Port-au-Prince. She also has other extended family members in Haiti.

Janvier visited Haiti when she was 12 years old. She stayed with her aunt, who used candles for light and lived without reliable running water. The country was poverty-stricken before the earthquake, so “now, they must be traumatized,” she said.

Haitian native Flore Zephir, a MU French professor and chair of the department of romance languages, said that she’d been on the phone all day Wednesday trying to reach her two brothers in Port-au-Prince. By 3 p.m., she still hadn’t heard any news from them.

Anyone who is searching for a family member in Haiti can contact the U.S. State Department Operations Center at 888-407-4747.

Mike Odneal, executive director of the Mid-Missouri Chapter of the American Red Cross, at 1805 W. Worley St., said many people called Wednesday to ask how they could help. The chapter is accepting walk-in donations. For information, call 445-9411, or donate $10 by text messaging the word "Haiti" to the American Red Cross at 90999. The amount will be added to your next phone bill.

Wyclef Jean’s charitable organization, Yele Haiti, is also accepting donations. To donate $5, send a text message to 501501 with the message "YELE." Donations can be made online at yele.org/.