MOREnet left reeling amid cuts

Agency lost state funding of $6.8M.

By T.J. Greaney

Monday, June 21, 2010

MOREnet, a consortium that provides Internet service to Missouri’s public schools, universities and libraries, is grappling with its future after a deep budget cut.

Last week, Gov. Jay Nixon axed about $6.8 million from the fiscal year 2011 budget of the Columbia-based consortium that employs 93 people. The cuts are part of about $281 million in cuts statewide approved by Nixon. The trim will amount to about one-quarter of MOREnet’s total budget, Executive Director John Gillispie said.

“The governor has very difficult decisions to make as they lose the federal stimulus money over the next year,” said Gillispie. “I find it unfortunate that this program got targeted because it really does help education. And education is one of the foundations of why government exists. This just hurts schools disproportionately.”

MOREnet — the Missouri Research and Education Network — operates as a separate business within the University of Missouri. It is a 20-year-old collaboration between the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the secretary of state’s office and the Department of Higher Education. It serves 864,000 public school students, 26 colleges and universities, 319 public library buildings and other high-tech projects such as the Missouri Tele-Health Network, which links rural residents to doctors by videoconference. It provides high-speed Internet service, technical support and network security.

In a letter Friday to members, Gillispie said MOREnet will make up for about 20 percent of its lost funding by reducing its operating budget. The remainder of the lost money must be recouped through fee increases to its members. That could sting the Columbia Public Schools, which already is scheduled to pay about $18,200 in fees for its Internet service in 2011.

The fees for public school districts across the state will now likely rise by an average of 35 percent, although MOREnet is still working to revise its fee schedules before July 1.

Because the money cut was part of an appropriation tagged specifically for K-12 and higher education, those MOREnet members such as Columbia Public Schools will bear a heavier...
burden, Gillispie said. It could hit rural school districts hardest because it costs more to provide Internet service to areas with few competing providers.

"We use this appropriation to level the playing field between rural and urban schools," Gillispie said. "And with the loss of this … we may find it more difficult to create that level playing field for them."

This marks the second consecutive year MOREnet has been targeted for cuts. The state withheld about 48 percent of MOREnet's funding for the current fiscal year, and many on its staff and the MOREnet Council were bracing for similar cuts next year. Still, ending state funding completely came as a shock to many.

"I don't think any of us expected to lose the appropriation completely," Gillispie said.

Reach T.J. Greaney at 573-815-1719 or e-mail tjgreaney@columbiatribune.com.
A MU power plant received a 2010 EPA Energy Star Combined Heat and Power (CHP) award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. MU is one of three universities in the nation recently recognized with the honor; the others were the University of California in San Diego and Fairfield University.

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"Our efforts to provide reliable, efficient and clean energy have not gone unnoticed," said Karlan Seville, communications manager for MU Campus Facilities. "We are proud of the reputation we've earned at the national and international level."

According to the Campus Facilities website, MU has been operating a combined heating and power plant since 1892, supplying energy and cooling and heating for buildings, which total more than 13 million square feet, including three hospitals, the research reactor and several research facilities.

The 66-megawatt plant uses coal, gas, tire-derived fuel and biomass to produce both steam and electricity.

MU's combined heat and power system uses nearly 38 percent less fuel than typical systems by mixing on-site thermal generation with purchased electricity. The plant
reduces carbon dioxide emissions by an estimated 107,000 tons per year. This reduction is equivalent to the annual emissions from more than 17,900 passenger vehicles, according to the website.

MU plans to expand the use of renewable biomass in the plant with the addition of a biomass-fired boiler, which will reduce emissions. Biomass burned in the plant will come from within 75 miles of MU's power plant, Seville said.

"Being an environmentally friendly campus is important," Seville added.

The plant has been reducing energy usage by 10 percent per square foot and greenhouse emissions by 12 percent per square foot since 1990. MU has saved an average of $6.6 million annually over the past 20 years, the Campus Facilities website said.

The plant's awards include:

- 2008 Energy Efficiency award from the National Wildlife Federation
- 2004 International District Energy Association's System of the Year award
- 2001 Energy Star Partner of the Year award
Historical society seeks commitment for proposed museum site

By Ji Young Won
June 21, 2010 | 2:58 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — The Missouri State Historical Society wants to ensure it has a site available for its proposed new museum.

The MU parking lot next to the Heinkel Building has been identified as a tentative site for the museum but the society needs more “concrete terms” for the location, said Doug Crews, president of the society’s board of trustees.

The city, has been working on behalf of the society to acquire land for the new building, and about 18 months ago, the city’s efforts to acquire the property occupied by Bengal’s Bar and Grill fell through. The University of Missouri System offered the parking lot to the city in exchange for use of a city-owned lot next to the parking garage at Fifth and Cherry streets, according to a previous Missourian article.

“Our thought, fairly recently, was that we should get that agreement at least down on paper in writing,” Crews said.

The society has put together a first draft of a memo of understanding regarding the property. While the memo sets the groundwork for making an agreement, City Manager Bill Watkins said last Friday there was no certainty regarding the future of the document. He said the first step is to talk to the City Council and decide whether to meet with the University and the Historical Society for further discussion.

“I have no idea when that will be,” Watkins said, but he said he hoped to bring the subject to the council’s attention on Monday night.

Watkins also said that coming up with an agreement and eventually signing a final draft of the memo could help the society focus on funding for the building, which it currently lacks.
“They want to ask donors for money but first, they need an assurance they have a place,” Watkins said.

The society estimates about $33 million is needed to build the proposed museum. Since it failed to receive the federal stimulus money for the building in 2009, it has had to rely on fundraising drive to raise money. Though it would welcome some funding from the state, Crews said the society would mostly have to be “dependent on private sources.”

“The State Historical Society has about 4,500 members and just like capital campaigns for any organization that’s building a new building or fundraising, we will eventually be asking individuals for donations,” Crews said.

For now, Crews said, the society’s focus remains on operating its existing facility in MU’s Ellis Library.

He said the society’s operational budget over the past couple years has been difficult because of state funding cuts.

Watkins said it’s possible the University will offer only part of the parking lot to the society. In that case, it might not need access to the city lot any longer.

For years, the society has longed for a new building that can provide enough space and more ideal conditions for the 7,000 to 8,000 works of art that are crammed into its current space, Crews said.

“Art work needs to be stored in temperature-controlled, humidity-controlled (space), and we don’t have that at the library,” he said.

He said he also believes the new building could serve both the community and the campus, given its potential location on the north edge of campus and the south edge of downtown Columbia.

Sasaki Associates identified the property as ideal for a society museum in its conceptual plan for redeveloping the southern half of downtown. That plan was put together for the city, MU and Stephens College in 2006.

“It’s a worthy project,” Crews said. "It will be a great addition to the downtown area."
Missourians cope with rising rivers
By JIM SALTER
ASSOCIATED PRESS
Tuesday, Jun. 22 2010

MU mention page 2
ST. LOUIS — Several Missouri communities along the nation’s two largest rivers were dealing with moderate flooding on Monday, the result of persistent June rains both in the Show-Me State and to the north.

The National Weather Service maintained flood warnings Monday along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. The northwest corner of the state appeared to be getting the worst of it, the result of heavy rain in Nebraska that flowed down the Missouri River.

“The saturation level is just so high,” St. Joseph city spokeswoman Mary Robertson said. “We’re just getting a lot of rain and it won’t let the river go down.”

Floodwaters washing over farmland on the flood plain upstream from St. Joseph prompted the evacuation Monday of the town of Corning, which has about two dozen residents. About 150 people in the nearby village of Big Lake have been evacuated since an agricultural levee was breached last week, and people in neighboring Craig were preparing to leave their homes if necessary.

Gov. Jay Nixon on Monday declared a state of emergency in response to several rounds of severe weather that have hit the state since June 12. The declaration allows state agencies to work directly with local jurisdictions to provide emergency services.

To help relieve the threat of major flooding downstream and take pressure off levees, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers slashed the release of water at Gavins Point Dam in Nebraska late Sunday from 33,000 to 15,000 cubic feet per second.

The Missouri was 7.2 feet above flood stage at St. Joseph by Monday afternoon, with a crest at 26.4 feet — 9.4 feet above flood stage — predicted for Wednesday. If that happens, it would be the fourth-worst flood on record in St.
Residents of nine to 10 properties in a low-lying area of the city would have
to evacuate their homes when the river reaches 24 feet. Robertson said if the
river reaches 27 feet, it would become a cause for concern. A levee could be
compromised, and the wastewater plant would have to pump directly into the
river.

“We’ve got pumps on standby,” Robertson said. “Sandbags are ready to go.”

The Missouri was also flooding moderately in towns including Boonville,

National Weather Service meteorologist Andura Hennecke said a wet weather
pattern has stalled over this area of the Midwest.

“We’re just getting round after round of precipitation,” Hennecke said. “It’s
not allowing the rivers to recede.”

Temperatures well into the 90s were forecast for the area, but there was also a
chance of rain through most of the week, especially in northern Missouri.

The Mississippi was nearly 3 feet above flood stage in Hannibal and St. Louis,
and was expected to rise slightly before cresting Wednesday. In southeast
Missouri, Cape Girardeau’s reading was 36.5 feet Monday — 4.5 feet above flood
stage with a crest 38.4 feet predicted for Friday.

The rain and saturated ground was also causing problems for farmers. Cornfields
were already wet, and those in northern Missouri will likely get more saturated
with rain this week, said Pat Guinan, climatologist for the University of
Missouri.

Wayne Crook, a University of Missouri Extension agronomist in Chariton County
in northern Missouri, said farmers are starting to worry.

“Farmers are starting to sandbag lower levees on the Grand River,” he said.
“Others are moving their machinery to higher ground as concern grows about the
levees holding. They are getting pessimistic.”
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The Missouri was also flooding moderately in towns including Boonville, Jefferson City, Hermann, Washington and St. Charles.

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Lucy's Ancestor, 'Big Man,' Revealed

The discovery could reshape what scientists know about Lucy and her species.

An older guy has sauntered into Lucy's life, and some researchers believe he stands ready to recast much of what scientists know about the celebrated early hominid and her species.

Excavations in Ethiopia's Afar region have uncovered a 3.6-million-year-old partial male skeleton of the species *Australopithecus afarensis*. This is the first time since the excavation of Lucy in 1974 that paleoanthropologists have turned up more than isolated pieces of an adult from the species, which lived in East Africa from about 4 million to 3 million years ago.

A nearly complete skeleton of an *A. afarensis* child has been retrieved from another Ethiopian site.

Discoverers of the skeleton, led by anthropologist Yohannes Haile-Selassie of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, consider this a Desi Arnaz moment. As the late actor often exclaimed on his classic television show, "Lucy, you got some 'splainin' to do!" But other researchers are not so convinced that the new fossil changes much of what they already knew about Lucy and her kind.

Haile-Selassie's team has dubbed its new find Kadanuumuu, which means "big man" in the Afar language. At an estimated 5 to 5-and-a-half feet tall, he would have towered over 3 and a half-foot-tall Lucy. Excavations between 2005 and 2008 in a part of Afar called Woranso-Mille -- about 48 kilometers north of where Lucy's 3.2-million-year-old remains were found -- yielded fossils from 32 bones of the same individual.

Big Man's long legs, relatively narrow chest and inwardly curving back denote a nearly humanlike gait and ground-based lifestyle, according to a preliminary report published online June 21 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Lucy has often been portrayed as having had a fairly primitive two-legged gait and a penchant for tree climbing.

Big Man's humanlike shoulder blade differs as much from those of chimpanzees as it does from those of gorillas, Haile-Selassie says. The shape of that bone, combined with characteristics of five recovered ribs, suggest to Haile-Selassie's team that Big Man's chest had a humanlike shape.
Earlier reconstructions of Lucy's rib cage had endowed her with a chimplike, funnel-shaped chest.

So despite chimps' close genetic relationship to people, he says, this new fossil evidence supports the view that chimps have evolved a great deal since diverging from a common human-chimp ancestor roughly 7 million years ago and are not good models for ancient hominids. Big Man's shoulder blade bolsters recent analyses of 4.4-million-year-old Ardipithecus ramidus that also challenge traditional views of ancient hominids as chimp-like.

Estimates of Lucy's build were based on comparisons to chimps and indicated to some scientists that she lacked the easy, straight-legged stride of people today. Haile-Selassie and his colleagues suspect that their final reconstruction of Big Man's anatomy will provide a better model for assessing what Lucy looked like.

"Whatever we've been saying about afarensis based on Lucy was mostly wrong," Haile-Selassie says. "The skeletal framework to enable efficient two-legged walking was established by the time her species had evolved."

Lucy's legs were short because of her small size, he adds. If Lucy had been as large as Big Man, her legs would have nearly equaled his in length, Haile-Selassie estimates.

Although lacking a skull and teeth, Big Man preserves most of the same skeletal parts as Lucy, as well as a nearly complete shoulder blade and a substantial part of the rib cage.

"This beautiful afarensis specimen confirms the unique skeletal shape of this species at a larger size than Lucy, in what appears to be a male," remarks anthropologist Carol Ward of the University of Missouri in Columbia.

A long-standing debate over how well Lucy's kind walked and whether they spent much time in the trees appears unlikely to abate as a result of Big Man's discovery, though. "There's nothing special I can see on this new find that will change anyone's opinion" on how the species navigated the landscape, comments Harvard University anthropologist Daniel Lieberman.

Haile-Selassie's team disagrees. Big Man demonstrates that A. afarensis spent most of the time on the ground, the researchers conclude.

"They were good walkers, but we don't know how well they ran," Haile-Selassie says. Big Man's long-legged stride indicates that members of his species could have made 3.6-million-year-old footprints found more than 30 years ago at Laetoli, Tanzania.

Anthropologist Owen Lovejoy of Kent State University in Ohio, a coauthor of the new paper, regards Big Man as having been an "excellent runner." His pelvis supported humanlike hamstring muscles and, as indicated by the Laetoli footprints, his feet had arches, Lovejoy holds.

Fossil hominid skeletons as complete as Big Man "are few and far between," says anthropologist William Jungers of Stony Brook University in New York. But the new find mostly confirms
Chimps are better tree climbers, even if they couldn't climb as well as chimpanzees do, he says.

Groups of A. afarensis individuals must have devised ground-based strategies to avoid orwards. Jungers contends. Some big cats would have negotiated trees better than Lucy's kind, he notes.

Jungers also doubts Lovejoy and Haile-Selassie's contention that a nearly humanlike gait had evolved in A. afarensis. Big Man includes only one nearly complete limb bone, from the lower left leg, which makes it difficult to estimate how long his legs were relative to his arms, Jungers contends.

Limb remains of hominid species that came after afarensis indicate that they evolved increasingly longer legs and a more efficient walking stance, Jungers adds.

In his view, hips conducive to walking slowly with legs wide apart evolved in an even earlier hominin, 6-million-year-old Orrorin tugenensis and characterized later Australopithecus species, including Lucy's kind.

Haile-Selassie counters that features of Big Man's pelvis related to walking closely resemble those of a 1.4-million to 900,000-year-old female Homo erectus from another Ethiopian site.

Big Man's legs also demonstrate that the comparably long legs of nearly 2-million-year-old South African hominids don't represent a transition to the Homo genus, Haile-Selassie asserts.

Haile-Selassie doubts that additional pieces of Big Man's skeleton will turn up. "If anything more was there, we would have found it by now," he says with a resigned laugh.