MU researcher works to save Missouri bats from fungal disease

Kathryn Womack is on a mission to save bats from a fungal disease that already has killed more than 1 million of them in 11 states since 2006.

Womack, a graduate researcher in the University of Missouri College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, is working with bat experts and scientists to attach small homing transmitters to the backs of the endangered bats.

They track the bats' flight pattern for clues on how white nose syndrome spreads from cave to cave.
Future of center up in air

MU scrutinizes health facility.

By Janese Silvey

Thursday, July 15, 2010

University of Missouri Health Care administrators are trying to figure out how cuts in state funding will affect the future of a long-term acute care facility in Mount Vernon.

Spokeswoman Mary Jenkins stopped short of saying administrators are considering closing the Missouri Rehabilitation Center, or MRC, but she did confirm they have been in discussions with state officials about the center.

“We’re currently preparing contingency plans for a variety of scenarios,” she said. “In addition to the possibility of cuts in state appropriations for MRC, we’re also looking at the current utilization, and we’re looking at operating costs versus revenues.”

In fiscal year 2009, the center’s annual operating expenses were $33.9 million. The center made $23.9 million in operating revenues that year and received about $10 million from the state. Those numbers do not reflect capital expenses, such as upgrades and repairs to the 100-year-old building. Earlier this year, Jenkins said the state cut about $1 million from the center.

Administrators also are questioning how the center is used today. It opened in 1907 as a tuberculosis sanitarium, a need that has dwindled with medical advances. Earlier this year, after seeing admissions decline from 22 to five patients, the center closed its TB unit. Last month, it averaged about 44 patients a day.

It also is no longer the only center that provides long-term care for those with traumatic brain injuries, Jenkins said, adding that there are now 13 such centers in the state, including two in southwest Missouri.

Closing the doors would devastate Mount Vernon, a community of about 4,500, said city administrator John Rice. In addition to being the town’s largest employer with roughly 420 workers, the center has become Mount Vernon’s identity, he said. City officials, he said, are waiting for an official decision before reacting to any changes.

Although the center might not be a moneymaker, “it’s a facility that provides a very necessary statewide mission, and Missourians who aren’t even caught by the Medicaid safety net are taken care of,” he said. “MRC does a remarkable job of allowing those folks who otherwise might not be alive for very long return to productive lives.”

Jenkins said delivery of care to the patients served at the center is “first and foremost in our discussions.” She said the university realizes the center provides some of the most medically complex care available to those critically ill.

State cuts to the center provide an example of the state picking winners and losers, especially in light of the General Assembly’s passage of legislation that gives Ford Motor Co.’s Claycomo plant $150 million in tax breaks, said Goodman, who fought against the Ford bill.

“The very idea of carving out $150 million from the state budget to incentivize one employer,” Goodman said, “while the state is struggling to perform and deliver the services taxpayers and voters prioritize is inappropriate.”

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU Wheelchair Basketball Camp comes to a close

By Sara Cox
July 15, 2010 | 8:06 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Nate Murray, 13, from Alexandria, Va., took two determined dribbles along the baseline before glancing at a teammate waving his hands wildly directly underneath the basket.

But before Nate could make a decision to shoot or pass, a buzzer interrupted, and the final day of the MU Wheelchair Basketball Camp came to a close. The second annual camp for ages 12 to 19 ran for five days and was held in the MU Student Recreation Complex.

MU’s wheelchair basketball team coach Ron Lykins patted Nate on the back and told the other campers to form a huddle. Ray Petty, a wheelchair basketball coach from Topeka, Kan., watched from the sideline.

“This camp has come a long ways, thanks to MU and Coach Lykins,” Petty said. “I think all of the kids are worn out, but they know it is worth the experience and have grown because of it.”

Petty, who was there to pick up his Kansas team, said that as long as his players bring him good reviews, he will come back.

One of Petty’s players, Josh Ruoff, 15, said he will definitely be back next year. He said his speed and shot had "gotten loads better."

“Coach Lykins is the best coach I have ever seen,” Josh said. "He just has this way of communicating with you. He finds out what’s wrong and how to fix it.”

For Ashley McGeeney, 16, of Kansas City, this was her first basketball wheelchair camp experience.
"I simply loved it," Ashley said. "I have gained lifelong friends and will surely be coming back next year."

Basketball is now tied with tennis for her favorite sport.

Due to spina bifida, a birth defect that affects the spinal cord, Ashley has been in a wheelchair her entire life. Her mother, Patty McGeeney, said that in addition to confidence, the camp has given her daughter "a feeling of community and belonging that is priceless."

"Playing basketball with other kids around her age in wheelchairs shows Ashley that she is not alone in the experiences she has undergone," McGeeney said.

Lykins said last year's two-day camp drew 14 participants and cost $5, because it was a much shorter program and excluded food and housing. This year's program had 26 participants from 11 states and cost $425, including housing at Johnston Hall and food at Plaza 900.

"What we are looking for in the next year is growth, which will certainly come with time," Lykins said.
Bank-regulation bill isn't perfect but should help, experts say

At 2,300 pages, the bank-regulation bill that the Senate passed on Thursday is large and far-reaching.

The legislation doesn't, however, live up to the hype of either its supporters or its opponents. It won't prevent a repeat of the financial panic we've just lived through, nor will it, as AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka declared in a triumphant e-mail, cause "a historic shift of power away from big bankers and CEOs to working families and Main Street."

Nor is it a job killer, as some business groups assert. "This legislation will only add more costs and have a negative impact on those who had nothing to do with the financial crisis," asserts John Engler, president of the National Association of Manufacturers.

Engler's concern is that manufacturers will face higher costs when they use derivatives to hedge, for example, their exposure to energy prices or currency fluctuations.

The bill requires most derivatives to be traded on exchanges, which makes it harder for someone such as American International Group to amass a big, dangerous derivatives position. The exchange, as a middleman, does add a layer of cost; but Douglas Elliott, a fellow at the Brookings Institution, thinks that cost is exaggerated.

"It's going to be more competitive and more transparent on the exchanges," he says. "I think pricing could actually improve."

Elliott doesn't like everything in the bill; he thinks the so-called Volcker rule, which restricts banks' ability to make speculative investments, will raise trading costs without doing much to reduce risk. Overall, though, he gives Congress high marks. "We went through this massive financial crisis and realized there were a lot of major problems," Elliott said. "I think we'll be significantly better off with this in place than under the old rules."
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Although much of politicians' anger has been directed at Wall Street, the bill will affect Main Street banks too. A new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau will have jurisdiction over everything from checking account fees to credit cards to mortgages.

Rick Bagy, president of First National Bank in St. Louis, called the establishment of another regulatory agency "ridiculous" and predicted that consumers would end up paying more for banking products.

"At a minimum it will slow down the process," he said.

"We're going to have additional costs, and the consumer pays for everything in the last analysis."

Stephen Marsh, chairman of Enterprise Bank in Clayton, says parts of the bill may actually help banks like his. Deposit insurance premiums, for example, will now be based on total assets instead of just deposits. "That is good news for community banks," Marsh said. "We tend to be a lot more reliant on deposit funding than a Goldman Sachs or a J.P. Morgan Chase."

We won't really know the bill's impact until federal agencies issue thousands more pages of implementing regulations. They could add massive costs that cause lending to shrink, or they could keep red tape to a minimum.

**John Howe, a professor of finance at the University of Missouri, sees this as more of an incrementalist bill than a revolutionary change, which means supporters have exaggerated its benefits.**

"Will it prevent the next crisis?" Howe asks. "I don't think so. The fundamental causes of the crisis were not addressed. I'm not sure this is broad enough reform to significantly change the incentives of the decision-makers whose decisions got us in trouble in the first place."
JEFFERSON CITY — Missouri education officials plan to meet next week to discuss ways to make college campuses safer.

The Department of Higher Education is holding a conference on such issues as student suicide and the sending of sexually charged cell phone messages. Experts in mental health, risk assessment and law enforcement are expected to take part.

Organizers say they want to focus on ways to prevent problems before they start. The conference is to be held at the Tan-Tar-A resort at the Lake of the Ozarks.