Erdman pushes ‘advancing’ agenda

Campaign to show UM worth.

By Janese Silvey

Monday, December 20, 2010

“Advancing Missouri.” You’re going to be hearing that phrase a lot in the coming year.

It’s a new buzzword University of Missouri System administrators have begun using in hopes of demonstrating how the four campuses benefit Missouri in education, health care, economic development and “the myriad of ways the university has breadth across the state,” spokeswoman Jennifer Hollingshead said.

Warren Erdman, the incoming chairman of the Board of Curators, also will use his position to promote the campaign.

Typically, board chairs have an allotted period of time at the regular meeting to talk about specific programs. Outgoing Chairwoman Judith Haggard, for instance, focused her attention on e-learning. Erdman said he plans to use his time to let others within the university talk about how they’re advancing Missouri.

“I’m going to yield my time during the normal board remarks for stories to be told, short stories, about what I call the individual heroes within the university, people who are doing remarkable things that advance Missouri,” said Erdman of Kansas City.

Those attending curators meetings this coming year can expect to watch a short video clip highlighting a specific advancement before hearing from the people involved in those achievements.

“We’re trying to raise public awareness of the many ways the University of Missouri makes possible the advancement of the state,” he said. “I want people to be given some exposure to those stories.”

You can catch a sneak peek of the new marketing campaign on the UM System’s website, where UM President Gary Forsee has used his annual electronic holiday card to promote Missourians who have ties to the four campuses. The clip features students, faculty and citizens and has accompanying videos of those featured, including Byron Hill, president of ABC Labs in
Columbia. In his video, Hill talks about his company’s decision to relocate to MU-developed Discovery Ridge and the fact that 30 percent of the lab’s 370 employees are MU graduates.

Erdman said the January curators meeting in Columbia will highlight health care professionals who not only work in university clinics but also are trained in the UM System.

“That’s just one of a million examples,” he said. “I want real people to put into context how the university really improves the quality of life in the whole state.”

Erdman was appointed to the board in 2007 by then-Gov. Matt Blunt. He had previously served as co-chairman of a state government review commission Blunt established in 2005. On that board, Erdman had suggested that the chancellors of each of the four UM System campuses report directly to the curators rather than the system president. The recommendation was not adopted.

Last week, Erdman said he remains an “unapologetic advocate for campus autonomy,” although he has backed away from any change in the governance of the campuses.

“I have objected in the past to proposals that have come forward to take away management discretion at the campus level,” he said. “By the same token, I understand the concept of economy of scale. There are things more efficiently done when centralized,” such as purchasing.

Erdman said he’s happy with the way Forsee has balanced campus autonomy with system administration. “Today, I think we do have the right balance,” he said. “At every board meeting, chancellors come directly to the board and bring things we need to know. I’m a strong advocate for that.”

Erdman, a Republican, is senior vice president of corporate affairs for Kansas City Southern Railroad. He previously served as chief of staff for U.S. Sen. Kit Bond.

Despite his conservative roots, though, Erdman said he personally would support an increase in Missouri’s cigarette tax. At the last board meeting in St. Louis, he suggested that the increased revenues could be used to continue Caring for Missourians, a program Gov. Jay Nixon started to allow nursing programs to increase enrollments.

“As the population ages, we don’t have the health care professionals we need to tend to that aging population,” he said. “We can choose to train those health care professionals in Missouri, which has a direct economic benefit, or we can import them from other states. I choose to train them here. … We can’t do it with the facilities and faculty we have now. We need to expand that capacity in an environment of declining state support.”

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.
Officials meet with EPA about Hinkson rules

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Published December 20, 2010 at 4:56 p.m.

KANSAS CITY, Kan. — Boone County and Columbia city officials made a final plea Monday for the Environmental Protection Agency to allow time for additional testing of Hinkson Creek and to allow a phased-in implementation of a proposed plan to clean up the creek.

EPA is under a federal court-ordered deadline of Dec. 31 to establish a Total Maximum Daily Load, or TMDL, that regulates the amount of pollution that can enter the creek. The Sierra Club of the United States and the American Canoe Association successfully sued the EPA in 1998 to bring the Hinkson Creek and two other Missouri streams into compliance with the Clean Water Act. The Sierra Club agreed last week to a 31-day extension of the TMDL deadline, but that extension is not yet official.

The latest TMDL calls for a 39 percent reduction in stormwater runoff that reaches Hinkson Creek. Local stormwater managers worry that enforcing that standard on the joint stormwater runoff permit held by Boone County, the city of Columbia and the University of Missouri could result in tens of millions of dollars of stormwater mitigation and abatement costs.

At a meeting Monday at EPA’s Region 7 headquarters, Columbia attorney David Shorr, along with Boone County and Columbia city government leaders, and University of Missouri stormwater managers, presented the case that they have made since the state Department of Natural Resources drafted a proposed TMDL in September 2009.

Shorr, who also is a member of the Boone County Regional Sewer District board of directors and the attorney for the Central Missouri Development Council, said that using stormwater runoff as a surrogate for an identified pollutant is an unproven, costly method of achieving water quality. He also said that stormwater managers believe the drafts proposed by both DNR and EPA are based on outdated, faulty science.

“We don’t come here as adversaries,” Shorr told members of the EPA’s water quality division. “We have the same objective” to remove Hinkson Creek from the federal list of “impaired waters” that fail to meet Clean Water Act rules.

Todd Houts, MU’s assistant director of environmental health and safety, joined Boone County stormwater manager Georganne Bowman in a presentation describing the runoff mitigation and stormwater regulations passed in Columbia and Boone County since DNR scientists studied the creek more than five years ago. Houts pointed out that the sewer district has eliminated 13
wastewater treatment plans and that six more are scheduled to be connected to the city’s sewer system, which will reduce by 700,000 gallons the amount of wastewater reaching the Hinkson.

Columbia Mayor Bob McDavid suggested that the Hinkson eventually could become a “demonstration stream” to feature how local governments can work together to achieve greater water quality.

“We want a beautiful, robust, healthy urban stream.” McDavid, a retired obstetrician, said EPA’s approach to targeting stormwater runoff is “akin to recommending surgery when I don’t know what those results are going to be.”

John DeLashmit, the chief of EPA’s water quality branch, said his staff would review the comments from today’s meeting as well as the information received during a recent 30-day public comment period.

“Our obligation is to respond to each and every comment we get,” he said.

DeLashmit said the public comments could lead to modifications of the proposed TMDL or his staff could adopt the TMDL as it is written.

Reach Jodie Jackson Jr. at 573-815-1713 or e-mail jjackson@columbiatribune.com.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Some question attorney's authority in city's dispute with EPA

By Payan Vangipuram
December 20, 2010 | 7:32 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Ken Midkiff of the Osage Group of the Sierra Club has acquired a letter that appears to limit attorney David Shorr's authority in the Hinkson Creek dispute.

Shorr has represented the city, county and MU in their effort to challenge the EPA's recommendations to clean up the creek.

A 2001 court order mandated that the EPA issue guidelines to remove the Hinkson from the state's list of impaired creeks. Draft guidelines were submitted in November, and the public comment period ended on Dec. 1.

The city objects to the EPA's recommendation to reduce the amount of stormwater entering the creek as too costly.

On Dec. 1, Shorr submitted a 23-page response on behalf of the city, county and MU criticizing the EPA recommendations.

Midkiff filed an open-records request that unearthed a letter appearing to restrict Shorr's authority solely to the matter of stormwater permits issued by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.

The controversy centers around the language used to hire Shorr to represent the city, county and MU.

The July 9, 2008, letter from Lathrop and Gage, Shorr's law firm, defines the terms of his relationship with the city in its appeal of the stormwater permit issued by DNR.
In a section titled "Scope of Representation," the letter states: "Your engagement of the firm is limited to the matter described in the initial paragraph of the letter," referring to the stormwater permit appeal.

Thus, Midkiff disputes whether Shorr can legally represent the city, pointing out that "the City Council has never, ever voted on or even discussed the city's position on the EPA's recommendations."

"The matter of appeal was a general stormwater permit," Midkiff said. "There is apparently no amendment that authorizes him to represent the city in matters relating to the TMDL."

TMDL, or total maximum daily load, refers to the EPA recommendations to clean up Hinkson Creek.

"The City Council has never even discussed the Hinkson Creek TMDL, has taken no position on it and has not agreed to be represented by David Shorr on the TMDL matter," Midkiff said.

Shorr maintains he is authorized by the city, county and MU to proceed on their behalf.

"I don't agree with Mr. Midkiff," Shorr said. "I would not have had to have extra authorization to talk to the EPA."

Shorr also pointed out that he has general engagements with the city, county and MU independently, which allow him to represent them on matters not specified when he was first hired.

First Ward Councilman Paul Sturtz disagreed.

"As far as I can tell, the City Council, which is elected by the people of Columbia, has not deliberated on the issues Mr. Shorr is lobbying about," he said. "Him representing the position of the city of Columbia is problematic."

Second Ward Councilman Jason Thornhill, however, said, "It's safe to say that on some level (Shorr) speaks for the city."
"The City Council doesn't represent the city," he said. "We represent the residents of the city. The city itself can seek out professionals to do this job."

Sturtz called Thornhill's statement "interesting."

"I don't think Thornhill's interpretation is borne out by the charter," Sturtz said.

City Manager Bill Watkins called Midkiff's allegations baseless.

"Shorr has represented the city for several years," he said. "I believe it did come before council. This is a professional services contract."

If Midkiff's position is correct, the comments Shorr submitted to the EPA would not represent the city's views.

"Who does Shorr represent? Himself," Midkiff said.
The Doctor's Dog Will See You Now

Therapists Use 'Canine Assistants' to Comfort, Cheer Patients; Duke Senses an Anxiety Disorder

By MELINDA BECK

Walk into psychiatrist Drew Ramsey's office in Manhattan and you'll likely be greeted by Gus, a four-year-old shih tzu. After escorting you through the waiting room, he may hop onto the ottoman and go to sleep or sit beside you on the couch.

Therapists use 'canine assistants' to comfort and cheer up their patients. WSJ's Christina Tsuci sees how psychiatrist Drew Ramsey teams up with his four-year-old shih tzu Gus.

Some patients pat Gus while they talk to Dr. Ramsey. A few talk to Gus instead. And if they get emotional, Gus provides physical comfort that therapists can't offer. "We can't hug patients, but patients can hug Gus," says Dr. Ramsey, who began bringing his dog to his office two years ago. Now, he says, "I think about Gus the way a cowboy thinks of his horse—he's part of the job."

A small but growing number of psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and other therapists are bringing their dogs to work in their private practices, where they help calm patients down, cheer them up and offer a happy distraction with a wagging tail. The job is similar to what therapy dogs do when they visit hospitals or nursing homes, but these "canine therapy-assistants" often work full days and get to know the patients just as well as the doctors.

Even some medical doctors have put their pups to work. Lacey, part golden retriever, part spaniel, entertains waiting patients at New York plastic surgeon Janis Di Pietro's office, though she isn't allowed in the procedure room.

Lola and Wolfie, mutts aged three and 17, put elderly patients at ease for New York neurologist Gayatri Devi, who specializes in memory disorders. "Coming to this office can be unnerving for dementia patients, but when they see a dog, it's disarming. They feel comforted and safe," she says.

Research shows that a few minutes of stroking a pet dog decreases cortisol, the stress hormone, in both the human and the dog. It also increases prolactin and oxytocin, hormones that govern nurturing and security, as well as serotonin and norepinephrine, neurotransmitters that boost mood. One study found that five minutes with a dog was as relaxing as a 20-minute break for hospital staffers.
"It's chemical, not magical," says Rebecca Johnson, who teaches a popular course in animal-human interaction at the University of Missouri and has conducted much of the research.

While there are no set requirements for having an animal assistant, most dogs who work with doctors have been trained in obedience and as therapy dogs. The Delta Society offers such courses to human-and-pet pairs nationwide, as do other organizations.

Interacting with a dog can work wonders for some patients. Early in his practice, child psychologist Aubrey Fine treated a 9-year-old girl who was painfully withdrawn and refused to speak until his golden retriever, Puppy, laid her head in the girl's lap. The girl slowly began petting Puppy, smiled and spoke to her as her astonished parents looked on.

For the past 30 years, Dr. Fine, who practices in Claremont, Calif., has used dogs and other animals to help treat children disorders such as autism, attention-deficit/hyperactive disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder. Learning to walk and interact with the pets helps the kids learn to maintain focus, eye contact and communication. "With some children, I use the dog as an external form of biofeedback," to help them learn to regulate their behavior, says Dr. Fine, who edited the "Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy," a key textbook in the field.

"You never have a problem getting a child to go see Dr. Fine—they want to go," says Velene Lima, whose daughter, Angela, now 24, has been a patient since infancy, when a brain tumor left her with multiple challenges. "She would be bouncing off the wall when she was young, but with Dr. Fine, she'd be calm. Those dogs mean everything to her."

Some therapists report that their dogs act differently with different patients, depending on their conditions.

"I call them 'seeing heart dogs'—because they can see into people's hearts," says Lois Abrams, a marriage and family therapist in Los Alamitos, Calif., who practices with her two cavalier King Charles spaniels, Duke, 11, and Romeo, eight. Duke lies on the floor next to patients with anxiety disorders and sits on the couch close to those who are depressed.

Once, Duke jumped up and sat next to a patient she hadn't realized was depressed. "When I asked if she was, suddenly the woman poured out her heart to me," says Dr. Abrams. "My three-year-old dog knew more than I did."

How can dogs be that sensitive to human emotions?

Experts speculate that people give off tell-tale scents under certain physical or psychological conditions that only dogs can detect.

That acute sense of smell also enables specially trained service dogs to recognize when seizures, diabetic comas or heart attacks are imminent in humans. Some dogs can even detect the presence of cancer cells in lab specimens—much like detecting traces of contraband or explosives in luggage.
That still doesn't explain some of the things dogs seem to intuit. Sandra Barker, director of the School of Medicine Center for Human-Animal Interaction at Virginia Commonwealth University, recalls taking a therapy dog to visit a patient who was paralyzed from the neck down. When the patient blinked "yes" to invite the dog on the bed, the dog nestled around his head. "How did that dog know that was the only part of his body that had any feeling?" Dr. Barker marvels.

Anita Sacks, an assistant professor of psychiatry at New York University's Langone Medical Center, "prescribes" dogs for some patients. From a psychoanalytic perspective, dogs offer the kind of unconditional love that some people didn't get from their mothers, which sets them up for life-long attachment problems, says Ms. Sacks, who practices with her chocolate lab, Deacon.

Dr. Ramsey thinks their appeal is simpler. "Like Freud said about cigars, sometimes a dog in the office is just a dog in the office," he says. "They're just nice to have around."

He also thinks Gus is good for his own mental health. "Much of psychiatry is about loss and depression, so when I get a break, it's great to have him there to take for a walk."

What do dogs get out of working with patients?

"Lots of cookies," says Dr. Barker, whose Lhasa apso, High Anxiety, or Hi for short, helped out in her practice treating trauma survivors for nine years before retiring.

And many dogs seem happiest when they have a job to do—whether it's herding, guarding, patrolling or engaging in supportive listening. What's more, patients bring presents. "Gus got a Freud chew toy," Dr. Ramsey says.

Not every dog is cut out for the health-care profession. Dogs that are highly energetic, territorial or demanding could be disruptive to a practice. Temperament is more important than any particular breed, says Dr. Barker, who says the Virginia Commonwealth program has included pit bulls, Great Danes and everything in between as therapy dogs.

As a rule, dogs are better suited to therapy than other animals. "Cats like relationships on their own terms," says Dr. Johnson, who is president of the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organizations, a nonprofit working to advance the nascent science of understanding between humans and animals.

But other animals can serve other roles. Besides golden retrievers and black labs, Dr. Fine has worked with guinea pigs, bunnies, birds and bearded lizards. He recalls one lizard that had a severed tail and chronic constipation, which helped some children relate to her even more closely. "She was one of the nicest lizards I have ever met," he says.

Of course, some patients are allergic or frightened around animals. Most doctors who practice with dogs inform patients before the first visit, and put the pup elsewhere for part of the day if necessary. But most find that practicing with a dog is a draw for patients, not a deterrent.
Animal-assisted therapy is still in its infancy. But research is expanding and interest is growing steadily. Some universities now offer undergraduate courses. VCU's School of Medicine offers a course in human-animal interaction for fourth-year medical students and another for psychiatry residents.

"When you have psychiatrists who say, 'I want to leave my practice and come and work with you,' you know it's an area of great interest," says Dr. Barker.
Income taxes decrease economic growth, prosperity

By John Payne, Special to the Beacon

Posted 11:11 am, Mon., 12.20.10

With the 2010 Census complete, Congress will soon reapportion seats in the House of Representatives, and it appears Missouri may lose one of its nine congressional districts. According to a new report by Americans for Tax Reform, our state shares a feature with the other nine states likely to lose representatives: relatively high state income tax rates and government spending.

Four of the eight states gaining seats -- including the biggest winners, Texas and Florida, with four and two new seats, respectively -- have no income tax. The average top income tax rate for all eight states is 2.8 percent, compared to 6.05 percent in the losing states, which is just higher than Missouri's top rate of 6 percent. The governments of states that gained representatives spent only $4,008 per capita -- almost 22 percent less than their counterparts in the states that lost seats, which spent $5,117.

These figures suggest that high taxes and government spending tend to drive people away. They also lower the standard of living for those who remain. Two new studies released by the Show-Me Institute explain why and suggest alternatives that can once more set Missouri on a path for growth.

In his new policy study, "A Review of Cross-Country Evidence on Government Fiscal Policy and Economic Growth," University of Missouri Columbia economics professor Shawn Ni compares economic growth and taxation rates, along with government spending, for a number of countries. He finds that taxes reduce economic growth by discouraging businesses and entrepreneurs from creating the capital that raises productivity and, ultimately, wages.

Ni estimates that a 10 percent cut in the corporate income tax rate will lead to a 1- to 2-percent increase in the rate of GDP growth. This may not seem terribly significant, but if two economies started at the same level and one of them grew by an extra 2 percent each year, it would be twice the size of its rival in a little more than 35 years.

Nobel laureate economist Robert Lucas once said, when contemplating the differences in international economic growth rates, "The consequences for human welfare involved in questions like these are simply staggering: once one starts to think about them, it is hard to think about anything else." A similar idea is expressed more succinctly by a quote usually (but inaccurately, in all likelihood) attributed to Albert Einstein: "The most powerful force in the universe is compound interest."
Long-term economic growth rates are affected not only by the rate of taxation, but by the form of taxation. Show-Me Institute Chief Economist and University of Missouri Columbia professor Joseph Haslag, along with Washington University economics doctoral student Grant Casteel, argue in a new essay that replacing Missouri's income tax with a sales tax will lead to a higher growth rate and therefore higher lifetime consumption than we would have under the current system. Casteel and Haslag concede that shifting the tax burden to a broad-based sales tax would result in consumption falling initially, because it would increase total prices for goods and services. However, eliminating the income tax provides a greater incentive for people to create new income -- and, therefore, wealth -- for society as a whole. This translates to a higher economic growth rate.

The authors estimate that, absent the state income tax, the average annual growth rate for Missouri would rise from 0.6 percent to 1.4 percent. Over time, consumption would rise along with people's real incomes. Within nine years, consumption would be as high under the sales tax system as under the income tax -- and it would continue to rise. After a generation (29 years), according to Haslag and Casteel's calculations, consumers would derive more overall satisfaction in a sales tax system, with even bigger gains to come in the future.

Using statistics from Gapminder, we can see that in 1910 Russia and Japan had very similar per capita GDPs: $1,731 and $1,736, respectively, adjusted for inflation. However, after a century of marginally better than average GDP growth, the average citizen of Japan enjoys a standard of living more than twice that of the average Russian. If we want to give Missourians a higher standard of living, we should strive for better economic growth by keeping taxes and spending low and broadly based. Furthermore, the few necessary taxes should not be designed to punish people for creating new wealth, thereby slowing down the engine of economic growth, as the income tax has been shown to do. Over time, small changes can make a huge difference.
Lunar eclipse to fall on solstice for first time since 1638

by Ryan Famuliner on December 20, 2010

in Miscellaneous

If you’re up extra late tonight, you’ll notice something strange in the sky. The moon will turn red for about an hour during the lunar eclipse early Tuesday morning. The eclipse actually lasts for about three hours, starting at around 11:30 pm.

“Initially what you’ll see is: it looks like something is taking bites out of the moon as the shadow of the earth crosses it. Then when it gets completely dark, a second later as your eyes adjust, and all of the sunlight has been filtered through the atmosphere... Then it suddenly goes really red, and it should stay that way for about an hour,” said Angela Speck, the Director of Astronomy at the University of Missouri.

At about 1:30 am, the eclipse will reach totality and the moon will turn red for almost an hour. Speck says if you want to just wake up to get a quick glimpse of the eclipse, she recommends getting up around 2:00 am. But she also warns that cloudy conditions can block the moon completely from sight, so it might be a good idea to check the weather conditions in your area before setting your alarm clock.

This is the first time a lunar eclipse has happened on the same day as the winter solstice since the year 1638.

Speck explains lunar eclipses actually happen every six months or so, but are only visible every year or year and a half because sometimes they happen during the day. Speck says this is also an especially long eclipse because of the current position of the moon’s orbit around the earth.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Public can experience full lunar eclipse at MU observatory Monday night

By Andie Tessler
December 20, 2010 | 1:08 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — A full lunar eclipse will occur Monday night, and MU’s Laws Observatory will open its doors to the public for free from 11 p.m. to 3 a.m. for the celestial showcase.

The observatory is in the Physics Building, 701 S. College Ave.

The last full lunar eclipse seen from Earth occurred almost three years ago, and Columbia has prime seating for this one, according to the National Weather Service website.

The eclipse will be viewable from Western Europe, North America and parts of Eastern Asia, but Missouri is directly in the moon’s path and will have one of the longest possible viewing times, according to the website.

The moon will begin to darken about 12:33 a.m., and the eclipse will last roughly 72 minutes, according to NASA’s website.

The lights on Stankowski and Faurot fields and in the MU greenhouses will be turned off to enhance viewing, according to a news release from MU News Bureau.

For those interested, warm clothes are recommended. Monday night’s forecast is cloudy with a chance of drizzle with a projected low in the 30s, but there is still a chance that the eclipse will be viewable through the cloud cover, according to the National Weather Service website.