A year later, Big 12 is back from the brink

BY VAHE GREGORIAN • vgregorian@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8199 | Posted: Sunday, May 29, 2011 12:45 am

At its best, last year's Big 12 meetings in Kansas City represented a chance for conference brethren to renew vows amid unsettling gossip, Oklahoma athletics director Joe Castiglione recalled this week.

But Castiglione more sharply remembered the meetings a year ago this week as "a summit," dominated by hard truths and seemingly irreconcilable differences to be resolved as the conference and the fundamental structure of major college football were being confronted by the rattlings of realignment.

Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany, as then-MU president Gary Forsee suggested, started the furor by announcing a 'study' of expansion in December 2009.

Further stoked by the Pac-10's designs on a 16-team super conference, intense media coverage and rabid rumor-mongering, the college athletics world was engulfed in near-hysteria.

"'Holy Cow, what's going on? And what's everybody going to be like?' " Mizzou AD Mike Alden remembered thinking. "Pretty much everybody was looking over their shoulders."

If so, their heads were whirling between the time the meetings ended and 10 days later, the deadline to give what Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe called an "unequivocal, unconditional" commitment to the future of the conference after three schools — Colorado, Nebraska and Missouri — waffled at the meetings.

It was a strategy, Beebe said this week in his office, that came with conviction but risks. To a degree, even the question was questionable. Did it ask too much? How was it binding?

"Some schools (wondered), 'Is this even a reasonable way to be asking the question?' " said MU chancellor Brady Deaton, now the chairman of the Big 12 board.

Reasonable or unreasonable, it immediately smoked out Nebraska.

The Omaha World-Herald reported that as Nebraska chancellor Harvey Perlman drove back to Lincoln, he called Delany to follow up on earlier contact and said, "This is not an ultimatum to you, but ... if I don't have something definitive from the Big Ten, I'll have to commit to the Big 12."
A week later, a day after Colorado's move to the Pac-10 became public, Nebraska's departure for the Big Ten was announced, and Mizzou among others increasingly appeared in limbo.

With the deadline nearing, Texas suddenly became the pivot point between extinction and extension of the conference.

For days, the Longhorns appeared likely to leave for the Pac-10 along with others, perhaps including Oklahoma, which felt it had no choice but to meet with the Pac-10, too, as dominoes fell.

If so, what then for those left standing when the music stopped, including Mizzou, which never received the offer it hoped to from the Big Ten?

"It was near death of the conference," Beebe said this past week in his office in Dallas. "I mean, the five institutions that looked like they were going to remain would have wanted us to reconstitute the conference, repopulate it. But it wouldn't have been the same as it was."

As speculation peaked over the creation of four 16-team super conferences, and with that an inherent structure for a playoff, Mizzou football coach Gary Pinkel fretted the next step might be a merger with the Mountain West.

"We didn't have a place to go," he said recently, immediately adding, "I think we would have, but it was very troubling. The whole infrastructure of college football appeared to be maybe changing."

A STRONGER FUTURE

As it happened, the end of the daze didn't result in the end of days for the conference when Texas re-upped.

Pledges from the brink last June to remain together for the foreseeable future, vows that may have seemed dubious to outsiders, were given further clout when ABC/ESPN and Fox didn't seek to recalibrate contracts despite the losses.

Last month, it was all given even more tangible heft when the 10-member Big 12 signed a deal with Fox Sports for secondary broadcast rights believed to be valued around $1 billion over 13 years.

That suggests mushrooming value for first-tier TV terms, which open up in four years, even as the conference enables so-called third-tier rights for each school — better known as the ability to set up their own networks.

Texas has already landed such a deal, in conjunction with ESPN, valued at $300 million over 20 years. Mizzou and Oklahoma are among others seriously probing the concept.
Moreover, the change brings with it intriguing new scheduling formats. Divisional play and the championship game are things of the past in football, which now will feature a full round-robin every year. Men's and women's basketball will go to a double round-robin setup.

"That will develop rivalries, familiarity, the kinds of things that really cement a conference together," Beebe said.

All of which, Alden reasons, is cause not merely for cautious optimism but, in fact, 'sincere optimism."

When he enters this year's meetings in Kansas City on Tuesday, Alden said, he expects all now to be "looking forward and looking toward each other."

Perhaps what didn't kill the Big 12 made it stronger.

"I think that's definitely true," Deaton said, laughing and adding, "At least that seems true to me right now."

At least it's definitely true that it lost two members but didn't die, elusive as the reasons might be.

"There's no earthly way that ... you can identify every element that played some role in any of the decisions, choices, interests," Castiglione said from his office in Norman. "There were too many moving parts. For somebody to say, 'Oh yeah, we could have stopped it if this or that,' I don't know.

"You would have to have sat in the board room of every institution to know for sure. And that's never going to happen."

**HISTORY OF DISCONTENT**

From its inception in the mid-1990s, the Big 12 was an uneasy mesh of a mish-mash of cultures and histories.

So much so that it's hard to find consensus on whether it constituted an expansion of the old Big Eight or its merger with the teetering Southwest Conference. It initially even was unclear whether it would seek to further grow.

Castiglione, who at the time was the Mizzou AD, was on a sub-committee that copyrighted not only the name Big 12 but also Big 13, Big 14, Big 15 and Big 16.

Even with a mere 12 on board, the philosophical bickering entailed everything from academic standards to revenue distribution, from whether to hold a football championship game to whether the league office should be in Kansas City or Dallas.

Less debated but perhaps equally significant in the end was the decision to go to North and South divisions.
"I remember being asked about this and saying, 'Look, we are one group, and we are going to speak with one voice,'" Castiglione said. "But I don't like the word 'divisions' because there's a connotation that's divisive. I mean, people are drawing party lines within their own conference."

For one reason or another, several had commitment issues even in the embryonic stages.

Mizzou made public overtures toward the Big Ten that left then-Iowa State coach Jim Walden screeching, "Don't come to my house and eat dinner and then go outside and tell people what a terrible cook I am. ... Thirty days — either shut up or get out."

Colorado's board of regents voted just 5-4 to enter the Big 12 rather than move to the Pac 10, Beebe noted, adding, "They've got 50,000 more alums in the Pac-10 footprint than here, they get a lot of their students from there and a lot of their graduates go to work in the Pac-10. So I get that."

At Nebraska, then-coach Tom Osborne felt that the conference was tilting too strongly for all things Texas/South. And he apparently felt little different after returning as Nebraska's AD in 2007, 10 years after retiring as coach.

"When he first became AD a few years ago, he was lamenting some of the things that the Big 12 changed or did when it was formed," Beebe said. "Even though that was 13, 14 years earlier, it still was obviously in his craw."

Ultimately, Osborne's attitude led Beebe to believe Nebraska's departure was inevitable despite his contentions that Nebraska was far more in harmony with Big 12 policies than it publicly said.

In announcing its decision, chancellor Harvey Perlman said the school was much more "aligned" with the Big Ten when it comes to culture, athletics and academics.

That was, of course, before Nebraska was stripped last month of its 102-year membership in the American Association of Universities, a designation the Big Ten said all along was crucial for any prospective new member.

Had that happened a year earlier, some wonder whether Nebraska would have been invited despite Delany saying in Omaha in May that it would have had no impact because of what the Nebraska "brand" entails.

**BEEBE'S PLAN**

With the Nebraska brand gone, the Big 12 lost a marquee presence on its own label, a chunk of its identity — Colorado was more of a dent in it — and a commodity that Texas valued immensely.

That augured further trouble ahead.
As the likelihood of further losses and even dissolution loomed closer and larger, Beebe was becoming something between the lightning rod and scapegoat for it all.

He was being blamed for not anticipating and fending off the raids, for seemingly having no plan, for evidently not being able to bring his constituents together and even for ongoing issues such as revenue sharing that were in the by-laws long before he came to the Big 12.

Fortunately for Beebe, and ultimately the conference, he is not prone to panic and prides himself on thinking things through instead of acting rashly.

"Probably not smart enough to be anything but transparent," he joked.

The native of Marceline, Mo., has background that helps explain his disposition.

Beebe’s résumé includes being an attorney and a past as an NCAA investigator, and his family history in Missouri arguably offered some DNA suited to confronting North-South disputes: He has roots in both sides of the Civil War.

While he acknowledges he at times questioned whether he was taking the right tack, Beebe rejects the idea he ever sat on his hands.

In the immediate wake of Delany's announcement and "intelligence" he had on Pac-10 designs, he said, the Big 12 vigorously studied whether it should itself expand at least in part as a pre-emptive action.

From his perspective, he was being methodical, not passive, trying to stay steady and get to the truth amid a bombardment of conjecture.

"I'm a pretty gray person," he said. "I'm not really black or white; I'm more middle ground and can see both sides. ... You know the truth is somewhere in between."

But by the time of the meetings, the need for clarity had trumped Beebe's ability to live in gray.

Or as Deaton saw it: "There appeared to be just a storm brewing nationally that was going to rip apart everything that wasn't nailed down, and we knew we didn't have everything nailed down."

Awkward as it might be, Beebe was going to "call for the question" in KC and move forward after the conference board approved his approach. Any other scheme, he said, "would have made us look weak."

He crafted and presented a five-page "Case for the Big 12 Conference," noting the promise of future media contracts, fan support in the Big 12 footprint, the importance of proximity and the unforeseen consequences of "mega-conferences."

And he channeled his NCAA experiences of having to "interrogate" high-powered coaches "where you kind of get at peace with the discomfort and work with it" into his pitch.
"I set the stage to say 'we need to determine who's on the plane and who's off' and wasn't willing to just have our fate twist in the wind while other conferences decided what they wanted to do," he said.

To some, it was a necessary and welcome gesture. Whether murmurs of imminent departures were "real or implied or perceived or untrue," Castiglione said, there was a need to "put it to rest."

But whether it was because of a need for approval from boards, wanting more time to decide or belief in better offers coming, Colorado, Missouri and Nebraska hedged.

Deaton declined to clarify Mizzou's posture, but last June a source in the room told the Post-Dispatch: "When we had a chance to get everybody to commit, they didn't. They just kept saying they were a 'proud member of the Big 12.'"

"They were playing the game like they thought they were going to get invited to the Big Ten, and they didn't. That doesn't mean they won't, but where are they going to be if this doesn't work out?"

More forgivingly, MU could also have been seen as simply trying to keep options open during the turmoil.

Despite the perception of many that Texas was a destabilizing force, UT at the time apparently indicated it was in.

"I got the feeling ... they had already worked through all the perceived options and made their decision to stay with the conference," Castiglione said. "That didn't mean if something didn't hold together that they weren't going to examine options."

That soon became a factor. Whether precipitated by Beebe's scheme or, more likely, flushed out by it, Colorado and Nebraska made their moves — with Nebraska somewhat curiously blaming Missouri for not being committed.

Texas cranked open its options again and essentially held in its power the ability to make or break the conference just days before the deadline.

That uncertainty created several days of utter bleakness for those who appeared to have murky options, most notably the four remaining schools in what had been the Big 12 North.

"I thought we were behind in the fourth quarter," Beebe said. "But I always feel like I'm going to win. Not me, personally, but we were going to play as hard as we could until the final whistle."

Still, he was braced for an aftermath of "what have we got left, and what are we going to do?"

A 'MARRIAGE OF COMMITMENT'
But on Monday, June 14, amid conflicting reports of the conference’s life or death, Texas announced it was staying.

Among its reasons was the Pac-10’s unwillingness to allow UT its own media rights, traveling two time zones for many competitions and other aspects of a cumbersome 16-team configuration.

Relieved as many might have been after what Beebe characterized as a "last-second field goal," Alden made a perceptive point that week.

"It's like this meteor hit," he said, "and so now we've got all these aftershocks."

Believing some healing was immediately necessary, Beebe said he convened a meeting of conference athletics directors and went around the room asking each what was on his mind and what they felt about one another.

"There was a lot of relief and excitement and forgiveness," he said, "which was good because I didn't know what was going to come out of it."

As the conference began navigating its future, it also was negotiating complex multimillion-dollar settlements with Colorado and Nebraska, which initially contended it owed nothing because the Big 12 was disintegrating.

As a year of transition comes to an end with this weekend’s Big 12 baseball tournament that featured neither Colorado (doesn't play baseball) nor Nebraska (didn't qualify), the 10-team conference now is reworking its bylaws to fit the new membership.

For the immediate future, that membership means the oddity of a 10-team Big 12 even as a 12-team Big Ten commences.

That doesn't preclude the Big 12 expanding back to 12 in the future, but Beebe said, "Once we came out with 10, it was kind of an 'ah ha' moment. This might be very, very good."

Not that all the issues have been resolved, Deaton said, but the 'sobering' threat has served to "call our attention back to the fundamentals" of what binds the conference and revive a cooperative spirit.

Still, there is fallout. Castiglione particularly laments the loss of the Oklahoma-Nebraska rivalry, one of the classics in college football.

"Let's face it," he said. "Two members elected to leave; it's not that we elected to go a direction without them."

Adding that he didn't "want to remotely imply that we haven't moved on," Castiglione said he believed the conference was moving in the right direction but has to prove itself in new ways.
Beebe contends, though, that even before the new look begins in the fall, certain truths are self-evident.

"When the conference came together, it was a marriage of convenience to put together a lot more homes to be able to compete in the market place — television homes, to be crass about it," he said. "Well, now after the full exploration everybody gave to whether they should do something different, it's a marriage of commitment."

If that's not exactly the same as renewing vows, at least it makes for a different tone entering this year's meetings.

"There was a period there of several days when everyone's hands were at the wheel," Deaton said, understatedly adding, "This year is a much more favorable atmosphere."
Engineer’s solar panel collects more energy

By Steven Adams of MU News Bureau
May 27, 2011

Efficiency is a problem with today’s solar panels; they only collect about 20 percent of available light.

Now a University of Missouri engineer has developed a flexible solar sheet that captures more than 90 percent of available light, and he plans to make prototypes available to consumers within the next five years.

Patrick Pinhero, associate professor in the Chemical Engineering Department, said energy generated using traditional photovoltaic methods of solar collection is inefficient and neglects much of the available solar electromagnetic (sunlight) spectrum.

The device his team has developed — essentially a thin, moldable sheet of small antennas called nantenna — can harvest the heat from industrial processes and convert it into usable electricity. Their ambition is to extend this concept to a direct solar-facing nantenna device capable of collecting solar irradiation in the near infrared and optical regions of the solar spectrum.

Pinhero said he and his team members have developed a way to extract electricity from the collected heat and sunlight using special high-speed electrical circuitry.

Also working on the project are an electrical engineering professor at the University of Colorado and a partner with MicroContinuum Inc. of Cambridge, Mass.

Their goal is to convert laboratory bench-scale technologies into devices that can be inexpensively mass-produced.

“Our overall goal is to collect and utilize as much solar energy as is theoretically possible and bring it to the commercial market in an inexpensive package that is accessible to everyone,” Pinhero said. “If successful, this product will put us orders of magnitudes ahead of the current solar energy technologies we have available to us today.”

As part of a rollout plan, the team is securing funding from the U.S. Department of Energy and private investors. The second phase features an energy-harvesting device for existing industrial infrastructure, including heat-process factories and solar farms.
Within five years, the research team believes it will have a product that complements conventional PV solar panels. Because it's a flexible film, Pinhero believes it could be incorporated into roof shingle products or be custom-made to power vehicles.

Once the funding is secure, Pinhero envisions several commercial product spin-offs, including infrared detection. These include improved contraband-identifying products for airports and the military, optical computing and infrared line-of-sight telecommunications.

A study on the design and manufacturing process was published in the *Journal of Solar Energy Engineering*. 
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Peruvian statues uncovered by MU professor, students called New World's oldest

By Katie Wall
May 30, 2011 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — In 2005, Robert Benfer made “the find of a lifetime.”

An MU professor emeritus of archaeology, Benfer was on an expedition 30 miles from Lima, Peru, six years ago when his team discovered two mud-plaster statues.

Carbon dating determined that the statues dated to about 2,000 B.C., making them the oldest in the New World, Benfer said.

Benfer plans to return to the area in August to map massive animal effigies, which he says are in danger of being destroyed.


Benfer co-authored the paper "Ancient South American Cosmology: Four Thousand Years of the Myth of the Fox," which explains the discovery's significance.

He wrote the paper with Louanna Furbee, MU professor emerita of anthropology, and Hugo Ludeña, archaeology faculty member at Universidad Nacional Federico Villarreal in Lima.

Benfer said his expedition team included both a group of MU field school students and Peruvian excavators in charge of individual units of excavation. The MU students assisted the excavators and learned the methods and techniques of archaeology.
The group, excavating a coastal site near Lima, hoped to uncover plant and animal remains that could shed light on the importance of crops to ancient Andean people, Benfer said.

On a sunny day in July 2005 — winter in Peru — Benfer was making a circle among all of the excavation's units when one, managed by Neil Duncan, then an MU graduate student, and Bernardino Ojeda, a Peruvian archaeologist, surprisingly uncovered the head of a statue.

Benfer said they did not immediately comprehend how old the statue was.

“We assumed it must just be a later time-period sculpture that had rolled in the site,” he said.

They found the statue sitting in front of a temple whose age already had been determined. Members of the team had a hypothesis, but not until the statue was fully uncovered several days later did they grasp its age.

After Benfer's team completely excavated the first statue, it moved to a nearby area of the same site. Almost immediately, they found a second sculpture, he said.

According to his published paper, the second statue is a painted "menacing disk" adjacent to two mythical foxes.

The foxes, likely one male and one female, look away from the disk with "lunar-fox eyes, which look to the June solstice sunset," according to the paper.

The fox represents a key constellation in the Andean zodiac, Benfer said. According to a myth still widely told in the Andes and the Amazon, the fox constellation helps direct the agricultural activities of the South American people.

The statue particularly interested Benfer because it reveals just how old the myth is.

“No one ever imagined that a myth could persist that long without a written language to capture it,” he said.
Both statues were found in a rocky area on the side of a coastal river valley. Benfer described the excavation site as an "incredible contrast."

The valley floor is lush, green and fertile enough for three crop cycles per year, though not a blade of grass can be seen on either side.

Benfer said Peru's National Institute of Culture was so fascinated with the artifacts that it considered taking the statues from their original site and preserving them in a museum.

"They were as excited as anybody would be because these were the oldest," he said. "No one had found a sculpture of that antiquity."

Because of a grant from National Geographic, Benfer said he was able to install a steel-frame building to protect the statues at the original site.

To determine the age of the artifacts, the team used carbon dating on decayed carbon isotopes found in grass from the mud plaster, Duncan said. By measuring the isotopes' degree of decay, the team was able to estimate when the grass died and determine the artifacts' age.

"This find is important because Peru is one of the few places in the world where civilization developed without contact from other civilizations," said Zach Zorich, senior editor of Archaeology magazine. "Finds like this give archaeologists insight into the origins of civilization."

The animal effigies that Benfer plans to map in August are similar to ones found in Ohio, Wisconsin and elsewhere in the north central United States. He said he found three pairs of mounds, each more than 200 yards in length and formed in the shapes of animals.

He noticed the mounds last time he was in Peru and used Google Earth to further research them.

He said the mounds are in danger because Peruvians are unfamiliar with them, and farmers have already destroyed some. Benfer said he hopes reports of the research will help save these potentially historic landmasses.
Despite his accomplishments, which also include discovering the remains of Peru’s conqueror, Francisco Pizarro, in the 1980s, Benfer remains humble.

“I’m a very lucky person. I’ve been making one find after another lately,” he said. “My Peruvian friends tell me that I make my own luck, but I’m not superstitious. I just think it’s dumb luck.”
Guest commentary: Students, take heart; college is within your grasp

By David R. Russell | Posted: Tuesday, May 31, 2011 12:00 am

The economic recession and resulting budget constraints at state and federal levels clearly have affected funds available for financial aid, but resources still are available in Missouri to help students afford the cost of attending college.

To put college within reach of more Missourians, the state has taken systematic steps to keep tuition low while maintaining opportunities through student financial aid. No student should be discouraged from investing in a college education at one of the state's diverse institutions of higher education.

Public colleges and universities in other states have raised tuition drastically in response to cutbacks in state appropriations. But in 2009, Gov. Jay Nixon persuaded the state's public colleges and universities to hold tuition levels flat for two years in exchange for smaller-than-anticipated cuts to their operating budgets. As a result, tuition in Missouri has increased only 12 percent since 2006, compared with 37 percent in Illinois, 36 percent in Kansas, 23 percent in Arkansas and 19 percent in Iowa.

Most Missouri institutions have responded to the need to keep costs within the means of low-income students by setting aside a larger amount of their revenue for financial aid. At Southeast Missouri State University, for example, regents voted to raise tuition 4.8 percent, but directed that $450,000 be added to need-based financial aid.

Missouri's popular A+ Scholarship program promises free community college or vocational/technical tuition to graduates of qualifying high schools who maintain a 2.5 GPA and fulfill requirements for community service. The A+ program will expand next year, from $22.4 million to $29.4 million and from 310 qualifying high schools to 364.

The state's largest need-based student financial aid program, Access Missouri, took a big hit during the budget crisis of 2010, but it received an influx of funds from the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority. MOHELA again has signaled its intent to contribute $30 million to the Access Missouri Program to help Missouri's neediest students next year.

The availability of financial resources is only part of the picture. Missouri equips students to plan for and manage their college expenses. The Missouri Department of Higher Education
coordinates financial literacy programs to help students make wise financial decisions. We also send staff into schools as early as fifth grade to teach students about how to prepare for college costs.

One result is that only 5.8 percent of Missourians defaulted on their student loans, compared with a national default rate of 7 percent, according to figures released last fall by the U.S. Department of Education.

Planning and preparation seem to be the keys to successfully graduating from college without burdensome debt. St. Louis is uniquely endowed with several highly effective non-profit organizations that mentor low-income and first-generation college students to prepare financially and academically to enroll in college.

Some question whether a degree still is worth the time and money. According to a recent Pew survey, 84 percent of two- and four-year graduates said their degrees were worth the investment.

College graduates earn almost $1 million more over a lifetime than those with just a high school diploma. They enjoy better health, are half as likely to be unemployed and are more engaged in their communities. Studies show that a higher percentage of college graduates in a community raises the standard of living for all residents, not just those with a college degree.

Missouri faces huge challenges in increasing the college attainment rate. Maintaining affordability — especially for minority, low-income and first-generation students — is key. If all minority groups in Missouri had the same education and income potential as whites, the total annual personal income in the state would be about $4 billion higher. We must not waste this important human resource.

Higher education can be an expensive budget item for the individual and the state. But making the investments necessary to keep a college degree within the grasp of all age and income levels will boost long-term prosperity for Missourians.

David R. Russell is the Missouri Commissioner of Higher Education.
With more than $1 million in donations on hand, the Heart of Missouri United Way is ready to help Joplin residents rebuild their lives and community.

A “United for Joplin” fundraising effort that culminated last night at the new Museao building on Buttonwood Drive raised $1,036,000. The Columbia United Way chapter will dole out the money as needed, working with its affiliate in Joplin, said Executive Director Tim Rich.

Joplin Mayor Mike Woolston extended a “thanks” through a phone call this morning with the Tribune. “The kind of support people have offered, whether it’s been financially, in prayer or through volunteerism, the support we’ve received has been overwhelming, and Columbia is part of that,” he said. “We’re very appreciative of the efforts up there.”

Joplin has literally been overwhelmed with tangible donations, to the point officials are asking on websites and through social media that people stop bringing unsolicited items because there’s no place to store them. Regardless, media across the country are reporting groups from Utah, Colorado, Chicago, Nebraska and Tennessee planned to haul semitrailer loads of goods to the tornado-ravaged town this weekend.

One reason cash donations are preferred is they allow agencies to fund what’s actually needed rather than having to rely on volunteers to sort goods and figure out which victims need which donated items.

Rich plans to head to Joplin next week to talk to officials about how to best use the “United for Joplin” funds. “We want to have the biggest impact and provide the greatest return on investment for our donors,” he said.

That might include helping residents pay for temporary housing, cover utility costs for a while or fund whatever else they need to start over, Rich said. “One of the nice things about United Way is we have the ability to work with our partners and those who aren’t our partners so we custom-tailor the needs of people and each family individually.”

Fundraising efforts here started almost immediately after the tornado struck Joplin Sunday when Brent Beshore, a Joplin native turned Columbia entrepreneur, sent Rich a message asking to set up a fund for relief efforts. Although most of the contributions have come from individuals, other entities pitched in.

The University of Missouri created a T-shirt promoting “One State. One Spirit. One Mizzou.” to raise money for the campaign. As of this morning, 9,100 T-shirts had been sold, mostly from online orders, raising some $100,000 in profits for Joplin. The shirts were temporarily sold out this morning.
"I don’t think anyone expected the shirts to be flying off the shelves and Web as quickly as they did," said Ana Compain-Romero, director of University Affairs. “I think it’s extraordinary that not only the community here but, heaven knows, nationwide people are really turning out for this."

Also contributing to the total amount was a $200,000 check from Sam’s Club, delivered personally to Columbia yesterday from a representative in the Bentonville, Ark., office. That money is specifically earmarked to help small businesses rebuild, Rich said. He plans to form a Columbia task force made of business and university leaders who can help Joplin form a long-term recovery plan.

Joplin is still literally picking up the pieces, so economic recovery isn’t an immediate need, Woolston said, “but down the road, it’s going to be critical.”

The Missouri Press Association in Columbia set up a separate fund to assist the Joplin Globe and its employees. As of this morning, that effort had raised about $20,000, said Executive Director Doug Crews. The tornado damaged or destroyed the homes of 27 newspaper employees, but the entire Globe family felt the impact, he said, noting the body of a graphic designer was found yesterday. The association’s foundation will determine how to use the funds.

Efforts continue tonight at Stephens College, where the Summer Theatre Institute is putting on a free benefit concert featuring rock star impersonators at 7:30 at the Warehouse Theatre on Willis Ave.

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com
MU Delta Tau Delta fraternity members aid relief efforts in Joplin

By Kristen Zeis, Molly Bullock
May 27, 2011 | 3:10 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Members of MU's Delta Tau Delta fraternity were among the first to offer help to the victims of Sunday's deadly tornado.

Fifteen university juniors, seniors and alumni headed to Joplin on Monday night with $1,500 worth of relief items. Some planned to stay through the weekend, with others looking to join the effort next week.

Volunteer Seth Alden said the work has included picking up shingles, sheet rock and other debris, nailing plywood over windows to prevent looting, delivering generators and flood lights and helping people salvage belongings.

“There’s a lot of our university family here,” said Delta Tau Delta President Patrick Wolff. “It’s really nice to be able to come down and help those ... families, help our own state.”

The men said they were moved to action when they heard about the destruction from friends. After spending two days working in Joplin, they agreed that pictures of the aftermath do not do it justice.

“It’s hard to fathom that people were actually able to ... ride out the storm and survive it,” Wolff said. “As we’re going down the road, I’m just thinking, there’s no way. I have no idea. It kind of makes you appreciate maybe a little bit more the severity that some of these storms can cause.”

Fraternity member Charlie Landis recalled one sobering moment.
“I saw this older man get out of the car,” Landis said, “and he just looked at his family who was helping move stuff out and just started bawling, and they all came up and group hugged for a while. And all you could hear is this guy crying, and that was kind of eye-opening for me.”

Landis said going to Joplin was about providing the assistance he would hope for if he found himself in a similar situation.

“I’ve never been through anything like this, but if I was, then I would love if someone came in and helped me,” Landis said. “So I’m gonna do the same thing for them.”

*Missourian reporter Eliza Smith contributed to this report.*
Lawsuit challenges quick-fix surgery

By ANDREW DENNEY

After giving birth to two children, Suzette Howell wanted her old body back.

The 33-year-old Jefferson City resident always had been in great shape — she had been a gymnast. But after having her second child, the excess fat she had gained did not go away. Howell said she still looked pregnant, and exercise wasn’t helping.

That’s when Howell learned about SmartLipo, a quick, minimally invasive procedure that supposedly melts away fat cells and tightens the skin with the use of a laser. Skin Rx MedSpa & Laser Center — a hair-removal clinic in Jefferson City and Columbia — began offering the procedure at its Columbia location in 2009.

Howell said she was told SmartLipo wouldn’t require general anesthesia and would take only a few hours. Recovery time from the procedure would take about one day. She was told the weight would go away and that she would have the best abs of her life.

"I was hoodwinked," Howell said.

Instead, she was down for two days, and rather than waking up with tight abdominal muscles, she discovered a lumpy torso.

Now — after spending roughly $30,000 on both SmartLipo and a corrective surgery to repair the damage to her body she says was caused by the procedure — Howell is one of five Mid-Missouri women who have filed lawsuits against the clinic, its owner and the physician who performed the procedures. They claim they were the victims of negligence and false advertising, and each woman is seeking at least $25,000, plus punitive damages and attorney fees.

But Laura Rackers, owner of Skin Rx, and Vishnu Subramani, the physician, say they are victims of falsehoods spread by the plaintiffs, their attorney, David Brown of Columbia, and the former medical director for Skin Rx, Matt Concannon, a Columbia plastic surgeon.

"I believe that the facts of all of this will overwhelmingly show that greed and ... malicious intent from these clients, and our previous medical director, Dr. Concannon, is the motivation for these untrue claims," Rackers said in an email.

Both Skin Rx locations have folded since Howell filed the lawsuit, but some of the patients of the clinic say they still bear the scars of a swift procedure given to them with the promise it would help them feel more beautiful.

And in a society obsessed with both beauty and convenience — where the perceived "ideal body" is becoming increasingly difficult for most to obtain — such an offer is hard for many to pass up.
'I HAVE A DEFORMITY NOW'

According to the lawsuit Howell filed last year in Boone County Circuit Court, she was never told of the possible negative side effects of SmartLipo. Other than not losing the weight they were promised to shed, some patients — including four of the plaintiffs — developed "mysterious, untreatable draining wounds that will not heal," court documents say.

One patient, unnamed in the documents, developed more than 70 pockets of fluid throughout her body after receiving SmartLipo. The patient sent samples of the fluid to the Mayo Clinic and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which were unable to treat the symptoms and attributed the fluid pockets to SmartLipo.

Howell complained the procedure left her abdomen deformed, resulting in an unsightly "cobblestone" texture in her skin. "My husband was almost physically repulsed" when she showed him the results, Howell said.

Howell, a stay-at-home mom who co-owns a plumbing business with her husband, also said she noticed nerve damage after the procedure when one of her children hugged her leg and she felt immense pain.

Another plaintiff, Cheryl Fisher of Columbia, claimed she experienced the same "cobblestone" texture on the skin of her abdomen after she received the procedure.

Subramani operates a clinic in Cape Girardeau and would drive to Columbia to perform the surgeries. He is a licensed physician in the state, which means he is legally able to perform surgery, but he's not a "board-certified" surgeon, something he advertised on his website.

Rackers is a registered cosmetologist in Missouri, according to the Missouri Division of Professional Registration, but that does not qualify her to provide consultation for surgeries.

In an interview, Subramani said he had been providing the SmartLipo procedure since 2007 and had only begun to hear complaints from patients after he started practicing in Columbia two years later. He said he offered his services to the clinic on a freelance basis.

Another patient filed a separate lawsuit against Subramani last year after receiving the procedure at the Cape Girardeau clinic, said Brown, the Columbia attorney who also represents her.

Subramani argues cosmetic surgery is among the most subjective of medical procedures — one patient’s masterpiece is another’s deformity. He said the lawsuits filed against Rackers and himself are the result of a KMIZ ABC-17 investigation into the clinic, which aired in March and featured interviews with Howell.

The other Mid-Missouri women who have filed lawsuits against Subramani and Rackers did so in April, and Subramani said they would not have done so without Howell planting a seed of doubt about the results of their procedure.

"All of the sudden, magically, I have a deformity now," Subramani said, characterizing the plaintiffs.

LOOKING FOR THE QUICK FIX

Plastic surgery once was considered one of the trappings of wealth and privilege — something the rich and the famous bought to keep looking young. But through the past couple of decades, plastic surgeries have become more democratized. Demand and availability have increased.
And the worst economic recession of the modern era did nothing more than put a dent in the demand for medically enhanced beauty. Reports indicate the recession blunted demand for cosmetic surgery, but the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reported in April that there were about 9.5 million cosmetic surgery procedures conducted in the United States in 2010, a nearly 10 percent increase from the previous year.

Another source, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, released a report last month that says most cosmetic surgical procedures, other than breast augmentation, have been declining over the past decade, but minimally invasive procedures have become big business.

From 2000 to 2010, the number of Botox injections performed in the United States increased by more than 580 percent, and soft tissue fillers, such as collagen injections, increased 172 percent. In 2010, U.S. consumers spent more than $10.1 billion on cosmetic procedures. And more than 90 percent of those consumers were women.

Pressure for women to look good is nothing new, said Jennifer Aubrey, an associate professor of communications at the University of Missouri. But in recent years, popular media have made that pressure more intense, exalting models, actresses and singers who are buxom yet sport a rail-thin waistline. It’s a Barbie-doll look that is nearly impossible to obtain without the help of plastic surgery, Aubrey said.

“It’s not just that we see women becoming thinner in the media,” she said. “It’s that we are seeing them becoming more curvaceous and thinner.”

This is occurring, Aubrey said, while Americans on the whole are getting more obese by the year. It has created a paradoxical belief among U.S. consumers — that being healthy is positively related to thinness.

And women have a much more difficult standard to meet than men in terms of what can be considered beautiful, a notion that is reinforced by American media, said Rebecca Scott, a sociology professor at MU. Men can be fat, ugly or aging as long as they have some redeeming quality — a sharp mind, a good sense of humor or a bulging bank account. Very rarely are women with extra weight or a not-so-perfect face given a central role, at least not without criticism.

Scott used a timely example: the search for a new head of the International Monetary Fund. After former IMF Chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn resigned from his position last week after charges of sexual assault, Christine Lagarde, France’s finance minister, applied for the job. Scott said she heard media reports discussing her style and appearance, traits not likely to be discussed among male candidates.

But equating looking good with feeling good is not something that is reserved for adult women, Scott said. Schoolchildren are getting plastic surgery to avoid the taunts of bullies, and an increasing percentage of men are shelling out their paychecks for cosmetic procedures. What’s more, she said, there is now increased economic incentive in appearing flawless as coming short of beautiful could be a barrier to employment opportunities.

“People aren’t going to hire people who do not meet that normative standard,” Scott said.

And with cultural messages pressuring consumers to have a perfect appearance, hucksters who can promise to deliver beauty quickly and affordably have a very attractive market. STORY CONTINUES...