MU police investigate apparent suicide

Richard Fancher, sanitarian with University of Missouri Environmental Health and Human Safety, works to clean the second level of the University Avenue parking garage Thursday after an apparent suicide.

By Janese Silvey

University of Missouri police Thursday responded to an apparent suicide at University Avenue Garage.

The call came in at 11:39 a.m. as a medical emergency, said Capt. Scott Richardson of the MU Police Department. He declined to give details and said the department is trying to get in touch with the man's family members first.
On site this afternoon, MU police Chief Jack Watring said the victim was a male in his 50s or 60s who apparently shot himself in the head. The man left a note attached to himself, leading officers to conclude it was a suicide, Watring said.

A stream of blood was still visible just after 1 p.m. on the second floor of the garage as police blocked off public access to some entrances. The department sent students, faculty, staff and media an emergency notification at 12:30 p.m. asking them to avoid the area.

Richardson said he expected more details to be released later Thursday.
MU police investigate apparent suicide at University Avenue parking garage

By Benjamin Unglesbee, Kip Hill
December 29, 2011 | 4:36 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — An unidentified man died of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound in the University Avenue parking garage Thursday, according to MU police.

MU Police Chief Jack Watring said a note left behind by the man led police to believe the death was a suicide. Police also found a gun at the scene, Capt. Scott Richardson said.

The man was pronounced dead at the scene by medical personnel, according to police.

Police will not release any more information about the deceased until the family has been notified, Watring said.

Police responded to an 11:40 a.m. call about a medical emergency from the Joint Communications center. At 12:30 p.m., MU police had cordoned off upper levels of the parking garage and were redirecting traffic.

Richardson said the death will remain under investigation until the medical examiner reaches a finding.

A notification about the incident was sent at 12:25 p.m. Thursday through MU's emergency alert system.
Chairman of MU radiology department retires

By Janese Silvey

The chairman of the University of Missouri School of Medicine’s Department of Radiology has retired, capping the latest phase of a long and controversial career.

Ken Rall’s retirement was announced this month in the MU Health Care newsletter InSights. According to the three-paragraph blurb, Rall will remain a faculty member. Amolak Singh, professor of radiology, will serve as interim chairman while the School of Medicine conducts a national search for a replacement.

“Please join me in thanking Dr. Rall and supporting Dr. Singh as we continue to advance radiology at MU,” Bob Churchill, dean of the school, said in the announcement.

Neither Churchill nor Rall returned Tribune calls this morning.

In January, the Boone County Medical Society named him Doctor of the Year, an honor that prompted some of his former partners to contact the Tribune about Rall’s past.

Twenty-five years ago, Rall left Columbia after he was found guilty of schemes that bilked his radiology partners out of hundreds of thousands of dollars. He returned to Columbia and began working for the school of medicine in 1998.

Rall was charged with embezzling money in 1986 after his partners became suspicious and hired an independent auditor to review the books. In one case, Rall testified he paid back $928,000 in a check-kiting scheme that used lag time between banks to inflate one account balance with nonexistent funds from another account.

Rall faced felony charges in another case where he was accused of writing checks for Medicaid refunds that weren’t owed and then signing the checks over to himself. The prosecutor overseeing that case, Tery Cox, said he lost the evidence days before the trial. Shortly afterward, Cox resigned, and the prosecuting attorney’s office settled on a misdemeanor stealing conviction.

In March, Churchill told the Tribune that Rall paid his debt and is “highly respected by his peers.”

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.
U. of Missouri Softens Limits on Recording of Lectures

December 29, 2011, 2:22 pm

The University of Missouri system has tweaked new restrictions on the recording of classroom lectures to allow students to at least make recordings for themselves or their classmates, the Columbia Daily Tribune reports. A draft version of the policy had prohibited students from recording lectures at all without written permission from their classmates and instructor. The new policy was drafted in response to an incident last spring in which videotaped recordings of classroom lecturers were rebroadcast, in heavily edited form, on the Web site of the conservative blogger Andrew Breitbart. To prevent a repeat of what happened last spring, the policy requires students to get written permission from everyone on the tape before sharing their recordings with outsiders.
COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — A University of Missouri spin-off company plans to test a new plasma dental brush on human patients in hopes of creating a pain-free alternative to filling cavities.

Scientist Meng Chen says he expects human clinical trials to begin in early 2012 at the University of Tennessee's Memphis campus. Chen is chief scientist for Nanova Inc., a company formed by several professors that shares a patent on the new technology with the university.

The plasma brush use chemical reactions to disinfect and clean out cavities for fillings within 30 seconds. The research team hopes the technology will allow dentists and patients to reduce the number and costs of replacement fillings as well as decrease the need for patients to have teeth pulled after repeated fillings.
A new study says that people who commit blunders while under the influence of alcohol know they're doing it; they just don't care.

This means buzzed or drunk people who engage in embarrassing or harmful behavior can't blame it on not having control, said researcher Bruce Bartholow, associate professor of psychology at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

While this isn't the first study that shows alcohol alters the behavior of those who consume it, "It's the first to show they don't care that they're making mistakes," said Bartholow, chief researcher on the study.

Brain tests during the study of 67 people in Columbia, Mo., showed that alcohol dulls a mechanism in the brain that tells individuals to put on the brakes when they realize they're making mistakes.

When the mechanism is working, "They slow down and try not to make the mistake again, or they take corrective action," Bartholow said.

Introduce alcohol and people are more likely to disregard the moral stop sign, he said, even though they know what they're doing.

The study involved people between the ages of 21 and 35, students and nonstudents.

• Researchers gave a third of the participants drinks with enough alcohol to raise their blood levels to just under the legal driving limit of .08 percent, Bartholow said. They all got the same amount so researchers didn't measure if the effect was gradual.

• Researchers gave a third of the participants placebo drinks; they didn't know whether the drinks contained alcohol.

• A third consumed drinks they knew contained no alcohol.

Then the groups were given tasks designed to elicit mistakes. Researchers measured changes in participants' mood, their accuracy in computer tasks and how they perceived their accuracy in the tasks.
Bartholow said the researchers used devices on the participants to measure brain activity as the subjects took the tests. Medical technology exists to measure brain activity for impulse control, emotion, mood and other functions.

Nondrinkers had normal activity in the part of the brain that regulated recognizing mistakes. Drinkers had less activity, he said.

Nondrinkers who made mistakes slowed down and tried to correct the errors, he said. Drinkers made less of an effort or simply moved past their errors, the researcher said, even though they knew they'd made errors.

Researchers also interviewed participants after the tests, which helped affirm the findings in the computer tests, he said.

The dulling of the brain's mistake alarm only occurred among people who had alcoholic beverages, he said.

"Normally, someone who makes mistakes is aware and makes an effort not to make that mistake again," Bartholow said. The people in the alcohol group were less likely, however, to slow down and be more careful, but they realized they had made errors.

"Using alcohol doesn't allow someone to escape culpability," he said.

Dr. Douglas Schuerer, a trauma surgeon with Barnes-Jewish Hospital, said the findings aren't a surprise. "This says that people should think before they drink," he said.

That advice goes beyond New Year's Eve and its tradition of drinking: "It's something that needs to be considered 365," he said.

Many of Schuerer's patients are people from the hospital's emergency room who need surgery.

"About 50 percent of patients we see from traffic accidents, alcohol was involved," he said. "That doesn't always mean they were drinking; sometimes they were hit by a drunk driver."

In addition, he said he sees more personal injury accidents involving people impaired by alcohol.

The findings have a flip side, Bartholow said. A small amount of alcohol may help people with anxiety disorders or those who are hypersensitive to making errors, Bartholow said.

But he warns that "consistently drinking as a way to reduce anxiety can lead to serious problems, including alcoholism."

Bartholow's study, "Alcohol Effects on Performance Monitoring and Adjustment: Affect Modulation and Impairment of Evaluative Cognitive Control," has been accepted for publication in a coming edition of the Journal of Abnormal Psychology. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and the University of Missouri Research Board paid for the study.
UM student curator wraps up her term

By Janese Silvey

Even though she didn’t have a vote on the University of Missouri’s Board of Curators, Laura Confer is confident she made a difference during her two-year stint as the student representative.

Mainly, her vocal support for course fee increases early this year helped curators reach a compromise. Some curators in January had feared proposed course fees were too steep, and the discussion at times seemed to be at an impasse. Confer argued students were happy to pay more if it ensured a quality education.

Confer, a senior at Missouri University of Science & Technology, said she is not sure some of the fees would have passed “without myself kinda pushing for them.”

“She was deeply involved in tuition and fee” discussions, board Chairman Warren Erdman said. “She was very articulate in defending some of the fee proposals.”

Confer’s two-year term as a non-voting student representative on the board ends Sunday, although she will continue to serve until a replacement is named. She said she has been told a new representative will be appointed shortly, which could mean her replacement will serve at the next board meeting set for Feb. 2-3 in Kansas City.

Student representatives are appointed on a rotating schedule, and the next student curator will come from the UM-Kansas City campus. Student representatives, like curators, aren’t paid for serving, although they do get tuition for 12 credit hours waived for each semester they serve.

Confer served during a significant year for the board. In addition to conducting a nearly yearlong presidential search, the board this year also agreed to let MU Chancellor Brady Deaton shift the university out of the Big 12 Conference and into the Southeastern Conference.

The latter decision came a year after talk of MU going to the Big Ten, so Confer was prepared for the discussion.

“Since we had gone through something similar with the media blitz the year before, I really got used to it,” she said. “When” the SEC “situation came up, it was easy for me to handle. I understood the history of the Big 12. … The facts were just there and made it easy to make the decision.”
Some students jokingly asked Confer for closed session information about the decision, but for the most part, peers understood she was sworn to secrecy, she said. Plus, she said, it helped she spent this past semester working for Cargill in North Carolina, removing her from potential pressure.

During the search for a new UM leader, Confer was given a rare vote as part of a presidential search committee. Erdman said she took the role seriously and was “deeply engaged” in candidate interviews.

Having that vote, Confer said, was a “great win for students.” She and others have argued in favor of having a student curator with voting power, but legislative attempts to make that change have repeatedly failed. Erdman opposes the idea, saying the board should be made up of fiduciaries responsible for the entire institution — not stakeholders representing specific groups.

Still, having a student voice to guide board discussions is essential, curators agreed.

“Laura did a great job,” said David Bradley, incoming board chairman. “She gave us great insight into what students were thinking and the pressures and challenges they were facing. ... She did not hesitate speaking up about student interests and was not afraid to give an opinion, even if it was different than an opinion heard earlier in the conversation. It was a good experience, all the way around.”

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.
After a somewhat tumultuous season, University of Missouri football ended the year with an impressive win over the University of North Carolina.

For the average fan, what we saw on television belied the quality of the win. As our Tigers had their way, it looked like UNC was a hapless opponent, hardly in our league, but as Joe Walljasper and Dave Matter told us in Tuesday’s Tribune, the Tar Heels were anything but. In fact, the Tigers’ Independence Bowl opponent included more NFL prospects and featured more physical threats than Missouri typically has seen in the Big 12.

That the Tigers routed this team is a significant accomplishment, a fitting cap for the 2011 season.

The game also was an entrée of sorts to the Southeastern Conference. Indeed, Louisiana State University, the No. 1 team in the country and the current mainstay of the SEC, ran a half-page ad in the Shreveport newspaper welcoming the Tigers, a nice touch.

The moment also is nice for MU Chancellor Brady Deaton and Athletic Director Mike Alden, who had suffered considerably during the rough run up to the final SEC decision. As smoke clears the move is receiving steadily more approval. I think most fans are looking forward to the new association. This is happening rather quickly, considering our long connection with the Big 12.

The success of the Tiger basketball team is a factor. Today the SEC is a noticeably better basketball league than the Big 12. The No. 8 Tigers should present themselves well in the new conference. We will see an array of new opponents in Mizzou Arena and their fans on the streets of Columbia.

HJW III