

## UM officials study effect of possible boost in state aid

By Janese Silvey

Wednesday, February 8, 2012

**University of Missouri System administrators are crunching the numbers to see how a smaller cut in state funding could affect tuition rates next year.**

Gov. Jay Nixon announced yesterday that an unexpected revenue windfall allowed him to plug \$40 million back into higher education. He is expected to meet with university and college presidents to discuss the change tomorrow.

UM spokeswoman Jennifer Hollingshead said in an email that administrators are pleased with the reduction.

They're "still determining what this change means to our tuition recommendations to the Board of Curators," she said. "We all are interested in making higher education more affordable and accessible."

The UM System last week recommended increasing tuition by an average of 6.5 percent, including a 7.5 percent tuition increase at MU. Curators are expected to set tuition rates at a special meeting Feb. 20.

Board Chairman David Bradley said he's waiting to see new recommendations.

"This definitely should give us a chance to relook at the request from administrators," he said. "We'll definitely relook at it and see if we can lower the request. I would hope we would."

Xavier Billingsley, president of the Missouri Students Association, said he's confident curators will lower proposed tuition increases in light of Nixon's announcement.

MSA has been leading a campaign opposing the original 12.5 percent cut from the state. The group has a petition with more than 600 signatures opposing the cut, and members are stationed at the MU Student Center this week to encourage students and employees to sign letters to lawmakers. Cathy Scroggs, vice chancellor of student affairs, signed the 2,000th letter yesterday.

Billingsley credited vocal students for getting Nixon to reduce the cut and stressed that the campaign isn't over.

"We're happy about it, but we still feel like we can make a big difference," Billingsley said. "We want to try to get that knocked down even more."

# COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

## **\$40 million to higher education could temper possible tuition increases**

By Breanna Dumbacher, Celia Ampel

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**COLUMBIA — If a nationwide mortgage settlement nets money for the state, proposed MU tuition hikes might be softened, university Budget Director Tim Rooney said Wednesday.**

**At a presentation to faculty, Rooney calculated that if \$40 million comes back into the higher education budget, MU could reduce its proposed tuition increases from 7.5 percent to 5 percent.**

Gov. Jay Nixon said Tuesday that \$40 million from the settlement might be allocated to two- and four-year public colleges and universities in Missouri, lessening the 15 percent cut to higher education he proposed in January.

### **No guarantees**

Rooney emphasized at the presentation that the allocation of the money — and its potential effects on MU's budget — are far from certain.

Even if the money comes through, it won't change anything after the 2012-13 fiscal year, Provost Brian Foster said.

"That's one-time money," Foster said at the meeting.

State Budget Director Linda Luebbering said there is still a process to go through to finalize the amount of funding higher education receives from the state.

The legislature is in charge of deciding the final amount that is put in the state budget, which will be divided among Missouri's public colleges and universities. The legislature must have the decision about the amount of funding, along with all appropriation bills, finalized by May 4.

Luebbering said that any proposed increases to funding are estimates at this point. She said Attorney General Chris Koster's statement that Missouri will be participating in the settlement is a good sign, but there is no guarantee that the money will come through.

Regardless of the amount, the funds would not be available until the start of the new fiscal year in July.

### **Where MU stands now**

If the \$40 million doesn't come through, Nixon's proposed 15 percent cut to higher education will likely become a reality.

"The governor's proposed budget is almost always the one that's approved," Rooney said.

Even before the cut, MU's state funding is behind that of most other states.

Here's how the state measures up:

- Missouri ranks 44th in the nation in per-pupil state funding for higher education for the 2011-2012 fiscal year.
- The state's per-pupil higher education funding is far below that of the other states that contain Southeastern Conference schools.
- MU's tuition and fees for 2011-12 amount to \$8,989, compared to an average of \$10,434 for public institutions in the Association of American Universities. The discrepancy means that MU is not bringing in as much revenue from tuition as other AAU members.

Rooney described MU's budget as a tree. The roots are tuition and state funding. The trunk is the operating fund, which is the \$510 million part of the budget that MU can freely allocate. It includes funding for building maintenance and salaries for faculty and staff.

"A good trunk of a tree needs a good root system," Rooney said.

The branches of the tree represent funding designated for specific areas, such as grants, gifts and school- and service-specific fees. University-based businesses, such as KOMU, MU athletics, the bookstore and the hospital, cover their own expenses and generate their own income, but pay an overhead cost to MU.

None of those branches could function without academic programs, Rooney said.

The roots must balance each other: Rooney said when state funding goes down, tuition must go up.

"There's a direct relationship between those two," he said.

### **How should MU fill the gap?**

Rooney said one option was delaying a proposed 3 percent merit-based salary increase for MU faculty.

At a University of Missouri System Board of Curators meeting held Feb. 2, several curators said that if possible, they would like to retain the proposed salary increases.

Another possibility is using evening hours to teach classes, Rooney said. That would free up building space during the day, which would make increasing enrollment easier to manage. At some point, there could be program reductions, Rooney said. But programs bring in revenue, and it takes years to reduce them.

Chemical engineering professor Galen Suppes suggested implementing hybrid teaching methods: Some classes could be taught partially in a classroom and partially online, reducing classroom use.

Foster said Suppes' idea is a good one, but that hybrid teaching can't be put in place overnight, and there would be costs for added technology. However, at the curators' meeting last week, a new eLearning system was widely discussed and is already in early stages of operation. For now, furloughs and early retirement are not on the table, Rooney said. Those decisions would need to be made on a system-wide basis.

### **Looking ahead**

With the exact amount of higher education funding still up in the air, the Board of Curators has not yet discussed budget options that include the extra \$40 million.

UM System spokeswoman Jennifer Hollingshead said the System is pleased with the proposed reductions in higher education budget cuts, but the Board of Curators does not yet have a plan about how the proposed increase in funding will affect issues discussed at last week's board meeting, including tuition, the merit pool and maintenance needs.

The board plans to meet sometime in mid-to-late February to vote on the proposed tuition increase.



## Professor's case highlights unclear tenure policy

By Janese Silvey

Wednesday, February 8, 2012

**Greg Engel isn't the only one whose future is at stake when University of Missouri administrators and faculty decide how to interpret a vague set of university policies.**

Some think his case could set a bad precedent for other tenured professors who might someday anger their bosses.

"This could affect us all adversely," said Sudarshan Loyalka, a curators' professor in the College of Engineering.

Engel is the associate engineering professor whose colleagues launched a faculty irresponsibility charge against last year for alleged disrespect to students and ineffective teaching. A committee made up of non-engineering professors recently cleared him of those accusations, saying his accusers did not have "clear and convincing" evidence to prove Engel's guilt.

Provost Brian Foster appealed the ruling, saying the committee should have used "preponderance of evidence," basically meaning members should have made their decision based on whether the accusations were more likely than not to be correct. Chancellor Brady Deaton has agreed, sending the case back to the committee to decide based on the lower standard.

The sections of the UM System's collected rules — the university's legal guide — aren't clear. One section guiding faculty irresponsibility charges doesn't specify what type of evidence is needed, but it does say the university will follow American Association of University Professors standards. That's what Engel and his supporters are hanging their hats on: AAUP rules say "clear and convincing" evidence is needed to severely punish tenured faculty.

Another section of the UM rules that govern tenure, which would come into play if the committee were to recommend Engel's dismissal, says "clear and convincing" evidence applies to termination for a medical reason. But another part of that chapter says a committee should "be convinced by the evidence" before recommending dismissal.

"It's an extremely rare case," said Leona Rubin, a member of the UM Interfaculty Council, noting that it has been at least 30 years since this type of case has gone to a full faculty committee. "So it's the first time the type of evidence needed has come up."

If it is ultimately decided that “preponderance of evidence” is a standard that should be used in faculty irresponsibility cases, Loyalka worries that all faculty members are at risk of being ousted if their colleagues simply don’t like them.

“If the standard is lowered for suspending or firing faculty, it could lead to any group of faculty getting together and accusing someone with no clear evidence,” he said.

MU’s Faculty Council is expected to discuss the case tomorrow.

Engel has been entangled in a battle with his administrators since 2010, when his chair and dean accused him of stalling on a research project and reassigned a federal earmark he had secured. Last year, four female students accused Engel of discrimination when he gave three of them zero grades because of plagiarism. A student grievance committee cleared him of those charges.

Engel recently filed a lawsuit against his administrators, seeking \$5 million in punitive damages.



## Lawmaker admonishes Still for cigarette tax talk

By Rudi Keller

Wednesday, February 8, 2012

JEFFERSON CITY — State Rep. Mary Still was criticized by a Republican committee chairman yesterday for speaking out in favor of higher cigarette taxes during a discussion of education spending.

Rep. Mike Lair, R-Chillicothe, chairman of the House Appropriation-Education Committee, began yesterday's meeting by telling members that their panel was not the place to discuss whether the state needs money. "We do not decide tax policies that create these funds," Lair said. "The self-serving political speech we were subjected to at the end of the last meeting was uncalled for."

Lair said he tries to keep a bipartisan, cooperative atmosphere on his committee. "I do not allow and I do not want a repeat performance," he said, without naming Still. "Members of both parties expressed their disdain, and I apologize for not stopping it in the middle."

Still, a Columbia Democrat intending to challenge incumbent state Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, this fall, said afterward she felt she had done her job.

"I said something that resonated with a lot of people," she said after remaining silent throughout the meeting, which took a little more than an hour and consisted of a first look at the items up for discussion in committee deliberations. The committee is the first legislative panel with a chance to change Gov. Jay Nixon's spending recommendations for public schools and higher education.

"It is the bit dog that howls the loudest," she said of Lair.

**When the committee met last week, Still told University of Missouri officials: "You all have done, and universities throughout the state have done, what they can to make college affordable and provide an appropriate education. I apologize that we have not done our part."**

Lair said he just wants to avoid partisanship. "We'd love to be able to give education what it requires," Lair said.

Asked if he, personally, supported asking voters for the cigarette tax hike, which Still said would bring in \$400 million annually, Lair said he did not. "I don't believe, in this economic climate, that I can in good conscience raise taxes," he said. "What people who come up here need to realize is that it is not their money."

Lair was not wrong to make a plea for a smooth working relationship, and Still was correct to make the hearing a forum to highlight the need for more education funding, state Rep. Chris Kelly said. Kelly, D-Columbia, was chairman of the House Budget Committee two decades ago.

“I think neither of them did anything wrong,” he said. “She was doing what all of us in Boone County are doing — pushing for revenue.”

Still said she’s not going to remain quiet anywhere she thinks it will do some good.

“The people of Boone County did not send me up here to sit on the sidelines,” she said. “I felt compelled to talk about the policy choices we have made in this state.”

## Romney Missouri backers say he has to step up his game

WASHINGTON — Sen. Roy Blunt said Wednesday he was disappointed that Mitt Romney did not put any time or money into Missouri's presidential preference primary.

"No money and no effort," Blunt, R-Mo., said when asked about the results of Tuesday's vote, in which ex-Sen. Rick Santorum won 55 percent of the vote to Romney's 25 percent. "... This has got to be the only state where Rick Santorum spent all of the TV money."

He and others who support Romney emphasized that Missouri's results were not binding — and that Romney and other GOP presidential candidates will get another chance to woo voters in this battleground state next month, when Republicans hold caucuses to divvy up GOP delegates to the convention.

"It was just kind of a beauty contest and not that many people paid attention to it," Rep. Billy Long, R-Springfield.

Noting that Santorum was the only candidate who made a serious effort in Missouri, Long said, "When there's only one dog in the field, that dog is going to win." The caucus, he added, will be "a whole different animal."

Still, Romney's defeat in Missouri came even though the former Massachusetts governor had snagged the support of Blunt, Long, and other members of Missouri's GOP establishment. Blunt and ex-Sen. Jim Talent endorsed Romney early in the GOP contest. Long added his support last month.

And even though it was nonbinding, Santorum's Missouri victory took on added significance because he also racked up big wins in Colorado and Minnesota on Tuesday. With that three-state sweep, Santorum has new momentum heading into Super Tuesday, the March 6 contest when voters in 10 states will cast their ballots.

**Romney "probably didn't think (Missouri) mattered, and in isolation Missouri doesn't matter," said Peverill Squire, a political science professor at the University of Missouri. "But the fact that Santorum finished ahead in all three contests, it became part of the storyline."**

Now Romney will have to try to reverse his loss in Missouri before the March 17 caucus, his supporters said.

“Missouri’s delegates are still very much up for grabs,” Blunt said. He noted that Romney has “the organization and the resources to go the distance in this election.”

Long conceded that Romney’s loss in Missouri “to a degree” highlighted Romney’s tough path to winning over conservatives.

Santorum got a “good bump yesterday” and “right now, the conservatives are saying, ‘He’s our man,’” Long said.

But Romney can turn things around by emphasizing Santorum’s support for earmarks and other spending bills when he was in the Senate, which Long said demonstrates that the former Pennsylvania lawmaker is not a true fiscal conservative.

“They’ve got to work people and get them motivated to show up for those caucuses,” he said.

Squire said it would be hard for Romney to pull out a caucus win now, because Tuesday’s tally for Santorum will “put pressure on Missouri Republicans to reflect the will of the people who showed up to vote.

“It’s going to be difficult for Republican leaders to walk away from what the rank and file has expressed.”

Then again, he said, “Things change so rapidly in this campaign. We might be talking about a whole set of different circumstances by then.”



## Details emerge about MU football day fan zone plan

By Andrew Denney

Wednesday, February 8, 2012

**Supporters of a downtown fan zone for University of Missouri football game days envision tailgaters on surface lots near Peace Park, vendors and beer tents on streets closed to traffic, parties on the top floor of parking garages and open alcohol containers throughout downtown.**

“Those are ideas floating around out there,” said Tiger Town booster Greg Steinhoff, an executive at Veterans United Home Loans and a former director of the Missouri Department of Economic Development.

Steinhoff said organizers must work quickly to get the details in place before Southeastern Conference fans start coming to Columbia. The University of Georgia is the first SEC opponent to visit Columbia. That game is scheduled for Sept. 8.

The idea for Tiger Town was inspired by SEC tailgating areas such as The Grove at the University of Mississippi and The Coop at the University of South Carolina. Organizers envision creating a tailgating area on MU parking lots just north of Peace Park between Seventh and Eighth streets.

To get the details worked out, Tiger Town organizers have formed a committee made up of members of the Downtown Community Improvement District and representatives from MU and the Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Steinhoff said although the idea of allowing open containers outside of the Tiger Town area would require further discussion, he said allowing containers to leave the area would alleviate some security concerns for police and could help to allow downtown businesses farther away from the proposed area to take part in the festivities and attract foot traffic.

Other ideas for Tiger Town include a family-friendly area somewhere on the MU campus, a nighttime pep rally, a “Tiger Trail” leading from downtown to the stadium and special events such as live music.

Steinhoff said organizers have laid out their proposals with officials from the Columbia Police Department, and he said the department planned to do some research into a similar game-day area in Norman, Okla. Bob Gerding, a fellow Tiger Town organizer and a partner at Gerding, Korte and Chitwood, gathered some ideas for Tiger Town while in Norman for an MU football game against the University of Oklahoma.

Gerding said although the cost of the undertaking has yet to be determined, organizers have filed to establish a not-for-profit group to help with financing. He said determining what kind of attendance to expect at Tiger Town will depend in part on ticket sales.

“It could be 5,000, it could be 30,000,” Gerding said. “We just don’t know.”

Gerding said 7,500 tickets to MU football games have been made available to opponent schools, and he said last year the highest attendance from fans for an away team was about 2,000 for the matchup with the University of Texas.

# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

## Editorial: How a 'job creator' would actually help state of Missouri

### MU MENTION P. 2

Some time ago, as the economy was tanking, a focus group paid for by a political consultant must have reacted to the word "jobs" like children on Christmas morning.

And the 2012 campaign season was born.

These days, you can't run for elected office without being a "job creator," a coinage of the brilliant Republican spin doctor Frank Luntz.

So it is in Missouri, where every politician is talking about jobs, but few are seriously tackling the root causes of joblessness.

Take gubernatorial candidate Dave Spence, a St. Louis businessman seeking the Republican nomination to oppose Gov. Jay Nixon, a Democrat. Mr. Spence recently put up his first television ad touting his job-creator status.

There is no questioning the success of Mr. Spence's company, St. Louis-based Alpha Packaging. It has grown by leaps and bounds since Mr. Spence bought it in 1985 with a government loan. But how the company grew is key to understanding Mr. Spence's job-creation credentials.

Alpha's strategy has been to attract investment from venture capitalists to help it buy other plastics manufacturers across the country and around the world. It has been a profitable strategy, one that Mr. Spence has said was tied to an "aggressive" and even, at times, "risky" business model.

Mr. Spence's success is a walking advertisement for the quality of the business environment in St. Louis and Missouri. So why would he want to change it?

Well, that's the political theme of the day in the Republican Party. Why let a few facts get in the way?

The key fact for Missouri is this: Our business climate is pretty darn rosy. The conservative Tax Foundation says Missouri has the 15th best business climate in the country, better than every surrounding state except for Tennessee, which comes in one place better. One reason Missouri

fares well in such rankings is because its corporate taxes are among the lowest in the nation (eighth lowest, according to the Tax Foundation).

Another reason is that lawmakers fill the corporate Christmas stockings with tax-credit goodies. That's one of the reasons Kiplinger's business magazine this week ranked St. Louis as one of the top 10 cities for starting a business.

What Missouri really needs to improve business in the state is not more corporate giveaways, but a renewed plan to invest in our state's future. That means, for instance, no more cuts to higher education, which provides the workforce that growing companies need.

Mr. Spence has been critical of Mr. Nixon (as have we) for the governor's proposed cuts to higher education, for which Missouri spends less per capita than all but five other states.

**Both Mr. Nixon and Mr. Spence graduated from the University of Missouri. It's time for one or both of them to stand up for the future of their alma mater.**

We suggest applying the Alpha Packaging business strategy to Missouri. It's time to seek some new sources of revenue (for starters, by increasing the state's lowest-in-the-nation tobacco tax) and to invest in a key sector of our state's business model (an educated workforce).

That's a jobs plan rooted in reality.

If there's no gubernatorial candidate in Missouri willing to take that risk, all the job-creator talk is just focus-group-driven mumbo-jumbo.

# The New York Times

## For Older Fliers, Plan Ahead

### MU MENTION PAGE 2

By *CHRISTINE HAUGHNEY*

FLYING, as most travelers know all too well, can be arduous. But while some of us may grumble about cramped airline seats and security pat-downs, simply navigating an airport can be downright disorienting for elderly travelers.

“There’s no bill out there for seniors’ rights,” said Jill Rosenberg, the group travel manager for AAA New York, who has watched her mother-in-law and elderly clients struggle with check-in and security lines.

Older passengers with serious health issues do have some protections. The Air Carrier Access Act provides rights to fliers with physical or mental impairment, no matter their age (passengers with emphysema, for instance, may fly with a portable oxygen concentrator). And updates in federal rules that took effect in 2009 mean that fliers requiring wheelchairs must be provided with them in a timely manner. That still leaves out slower-moving older fliers who don’t have a disability but find airports intimidating.

Some families are so fed up that they spend thousands of dollars to fly relatives on private jets. But if you don’t have an endless budget, here is what you can do during the various phases of the flying process to make the next trip for your elderly friend or relative less daunting.

**BOOKING** Experts recommend making as many requests as possible when booking a flight, including requests for expedited boarding and seats with extra legroom. Ms. Rosenberg of the AAA said that some of those seats are bulkhead or other desirable seats, and that fliers should get a doctor’s note that they can present at check-in and the gate. “You can’t just say, ‘I have a disability, and I’m old.’ ”

Those who need wheelchairs should ask for them when booking. Even though the Transportation Department can penalize airlines for not providing wheelchairs, Ms. Rosenberg said that requesting one means only “there may be a better possibility you will get” one. While “8 times out of 10, they do” provide wheelchairs, she said, she has heard of some airlines at larger airports running out if too many flights arrive at the same time — all the more reason to reserve ahead. Wheelchair requests at the flier’s destination should also be made when booking.

Elderly fliers who don’t need wheelchairs but have trouble walking can ask about electric carts. Delta, for example, offers carts at four airports — Kennedy, in New York; Hartsfield-Jackson,

Atlanta; Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International; and Salt Lake City — said Morgan Durrant, a Delta spokesman.

Industry experts say it doesn't pay to book an older flier in business or first class, where flight attendants are no better trained than those in coach to deal with older fliers. Heidi MacFarlane, a vice president at Medaire, which trains airlines on accommodating people with disabilities, said that "passengers will receive the same in-flight medical assistance regardless of the class they are sitting in."

If you have questions that airlines can't answer when booking, call the Transportation Security Administration's hot line (855-787-2227). Greg Soule, an administration spokesman, said that fliers with special needs can also ask to have an airport contact at the airport on the day they fly.

**GETTING TO THE AIRPORT** **If you can't drive the person, arrange it with a volunteer driving program or medical transportation company instead of a taxi, said James D. Stowe, who researches older adults and their transportation needs at the University of Missouri Hospital.** He said the Independent Transportation Network of America (itnamerica.org) can direct passengers to drivers more attuned to problems like getting in and out of a car. Katherine Freund, its president, said that older fliers who order a car by 5 p.m. the day before will be picked up by a driver who will come to the door and help with luggage at the airport. The average fare costs \$11.50 for a five-mile ride. ITN is offered in California, Maine and 15 other states.

**CHECKING IN** People who can't help an elderly flier check in can take advantage of free services — for instance, a Delta employee can help an older person through check-in with 48 hours' notice — or pay for a concierge. American Airlines has a Five Star Service program that shepherds fliers from curb to gate. For domestic flights, it is \$125 a person; \$200 for two; for international, it is \$200 for one or two people.

Other companies, like Royal Airport Concierge Services, will meet passengers at the curb to help them check bags and escort them to security. It charges \$150 in New York and \$250 at other airports across the country. Ron Gorfinkel, a founder of Royal, said that greeters can arrive at the airport up to one hour before an elderly flier arrives to make sure a wheelchair is available.

**SECURITY AND BOARDING** State Senator Michael N. Gianaris, Democrat of Queens, who has worked on passenger-rights issues, said that fliers should inform security officials about any medical conditions. He added that passengers, no matter the age, should not be asked by security to inspect medical equipment like a colostomy bag, or to put a back brace through an X-ray machine. If these incidents occur, he said, fliers should get the name of the official and file a complaint with the security administration.

Airlines allow elderly fliers to be escorted by one caretaker through security and to the gate as long as the escort provides his or her full name, birth date and government-issued ID, said David Vance, the managing director for airport operations for American Airlines. He added that it helps to request this at least a day ahead and that security is strict about numbers. "They limit that to one individual," Mr. Vance said. "So you can't have a family seeing them off at a gate."

JetBlue has two programs that specifically target the security and boarding processes. Even More Speed, available in 24 cities, expedites security screening, and Even More Space, offered on all flights, offers early boarding and access to bin space. Availability of the service varies among airports and costs \$10 to \$65 for each leg of the trip. Currently, those who pay for Even More Space get Even More Speed, said Allison Steinberg, a JetBlue spokeswoman, adding that, while she did not know how many elderly fliers use the services, the programs are designed to help passengers, “particularly those who might be older.”

**ARRIVAL** Ms. MacFarlane of Medaire said that elderly fliers are usually better off waiting for other passengers to debark so attendants can assist them with carry-ons and escort them from the plane.

A relative is allowed to meet an older passenger at the gate. Mr. Durrant, the Delta spokesman, suggested that relatives call 48 hours ahead to notify the airline, and arrive more than an hour before the flight does.

In general, the key to arranging a less intimidating journey for an older flier is simple: plan in advance. And, Ms. MacFarlane said, understand that airlines genuinely do want to help. “The big thing is not to be hesitant to ask the crew for assistance.”

# Missouri farmers lay groundwork for truffle market

By [Anna Boiko-Weyrauch](#)

February 9, 2012 | 6:00 a.m. CST

The field doesn't look like much yet. At the flat top of a hill there is a three-fourths acre patch of grass clumps that have been slathered with limestone powder to alter the soil. Deer have left tracks in the soft dirt.

[Ozark Forest Mushrooms](#) co-owner Nicola Macpherson gets excited imagining what will come.

"I just dream of having a table here," she says. "Wouldn't that be fun? Just to have a glass of wine and a (piece of) truffle toast?"

If everything goes right, in five to six years this square of dirt will be an orchard of oak and hazelnut trees with lumpy black mushrooms growing underneath the soil at their roots. Ozark Forest Mushrooms, located near the Current River in southern Missouri, is preparing to be the first commercial truffle farm in Missouri.

The farm is one of three businesses that are looking to start growing the prized fungus for the first time in the state. **The cultivation efforts are a collaboration with MU plant pathologist and agroforester, Johann Bruhn, who has been researching truffles since 1999.**

**Bruhn is convinced he finally knows enough to help start "truffières," or truffle orchards. Bruhn and his colleagues have planted a research orchard at the MU Center for Agroforestry at New Franklin to see how the European mushrooms fare under Missouri conditions. He said he hopes the first truffles will develop as early as next year and hopes to use them to propagate more truffles.**

There are at least 200 different species of truffle, Bruhn said. But of the three priciest gourmet varieties, the black Burgundy truffle — named after the Burgundy region of France — is best suited to Missouri weather. Burgundy truffles (or *Tuber aestivum*)

mature in autumn, unlike another type of gourmet black truffle, which fruits in the winter and might be damaged by frozen ground or cold weather.

The truffles could fetch a nice price if the commercial operations are successful, Bruhn said. The Burgundy truffle sells for about \$400 a pound, he said, or about \$40 to \$50 for one the size of a golf ball.

With a little luck, each acre could yield 10 to 20 pounds of truffles a year, he said.

In 2010, the U.S. imported more than 132,000 pounds of prepared truffles worth almost \$3 million, mostly from France and Italy, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics.

### **The Flavor**

Andy Ayers, former chef of Riddle's Penultimate Cafe & Wine Bar in St. Louis, said truffles give food a powerful, unique flavor. "There's nothing that tastes like truffles but truffles," he said.

Ayers said he used to cook with black truffles from Oregon. He described the flavor as "earthy" or "cave-like" yet delicate. "It's amazing to me how pervasive and domineering the flavor can be and at the same time be so ephemeral," he said.

Pasta with cream-sauce is his favorite way to cook the mushrooms, he said.

If you use them properly, the taste of truffles is "not so much resting on your tongue as radiating flavor gently throughout your mouth," Ayers said.

The smell is what sets the truffle apart from other culinary delights. The fragrance, which resembles the sex hormones of male pigs, is actually a survival mechanism, Bruhn said. The fungus spores are spread by animals, so truffles have to emit an odor mighty enough to convince wild critters to unearth them, he said.

### **Missouri's first commercial truffières**

Nicola Macpherson jets among the rows of oak logs in the greenhouse at Ozark Forest Mushrooms. The stems of fuzzy brown shiitake mushrooms snap between her fingers.

"They look like velvet when you pick them," Macpherson said.

The 450-acre, 20-year-old Ozark Forest Mushrooms produces an average of 100 pounds of shiitake and 150 pounds of light yellow and gray oyster mushrooms a week in the winter.

Ten years ago, a chef friend of Macpherson's brought her an Italian company's brochure for truffle products and suggested she get into the business. Since then, her business has, well, mushroomed.

Macpherson buys truffles and truffle products, such as truffle shavings, oil and juice, from Italy and sells them to upscale restaurants and country clubs in St. Louis, she said. She makes her own truffle butter from canned truffles; a small tin goes for \$5.

Now, Bruhn is working with Macpherson and her business partner and husband, Dan Hellmuth, to raise an orchard of oak and hazelnut trees that will foster their own black truffles.

Growing truffles is a tricky process. Truffles need trees to grow — they form a symbiotic, or mutually beneficial, relationship. The fungus' structure attaches to the tips of shallow tree roots in the first foot of soil below the surface. The fungus provides the tree with nutrients from the soil, such as phosphorous and iron, and the tree feeds the fungus carbohydrates.

Truffles are detail oriented. For example, the Burgundy truffle will hook up with some tree species more easily than with others; the soil has to be just so sweet with a pH of between 7.5 and 8. The baby truffles need moisture to survive the summer but not too much, Bruhn said.

If everything goes right, Burgundy truffles can fruit as early as four to five years after the orchard is planted — otherwise it could take up to a decade to know if something went wrong, Bruhn said. After the first crop, orchards can produce the truffles every year for a century between September and December, he said.

Missouri has an active community of mushroom-enthusiasts, but truffle cultivation is "a bit beyond our means for most members," Missouri Mycological Society Executive Secretary Patrick Harvey said.

"We're mostly amateurs," Harvey said.

Besides that, many amateur mycologists in the state prefer to hunt wild mushrooms for the experience, rather than grow their own, said Stan Hudson, foray coordinator for the Mid-Missouri Chapter of the Missouri Mycological Society.

"It's kind of my stress relief, getting out and looking for mushrooms," Hudson said.

Down in the Ozarks, Macpherson said she might sell whatever truffles her farm produces to her clients in St. Louis or use them in her truffle butter. But she said she will wait and see how things grow.

As the owner of Eat Here St. Louis, chef Ayers works with gourmets across St. Louis to deliver locally grown food. He said he is interested in Missouri-grown black truffles.

"I would certainly try them, and I would sell them, and if I had a restaurant, I would serve them," he said.

Chef Gerard Craft of the St. Louis gourmet restaurant Niche said his business doesn't normally use truffles "a ton" in part because they are so expensive and hard to get. Also, using foreign fungi doesn't fit in with the restaurant's image of "taking humble Midwest ingredients and elevating them," Craft said.

Missouri-grown truffles, however, are something he would use.

"To be able to get that locally and cultivated, most likely more affordably, would be fantastic," he said.

At least two farms other than Ozark Forest Mushrooms trying to grow truffles also want to offer customers the experience of truffle hunting and tasting. Bruhn sees the potential for an agrotourism renaissance.

At Ozark Forest Mushrooms, visitors rent out a lakeside farmhouse near a pine grove of shiitake-sprouting logs. In the future, Macpherson hopes to host gourmet dinners with local chefs who will prepare a banquet for paying guests using the farm's ingredients.

Persimmon Hill Farm near Branson also plans to break ground on a truffle orchard next year. The owner, Earnie Bohner, said 90 percent of his business comes from visitors who come to pick berries, tour the shiitake farm and eat homemade blueberry pancakes and muffins on the farmhouse porch. A truffle orchard would extend the farm's profitable season into the fall, he said.

"The interest factor is high," Bohner said. "It's going to be really fun for people, "What are truffles? How do you grow them?"

They hope to train their two Labrador retrievers, Jake and Carolina, to sniff out truffles so they can help visitors with their hunts.

Tourism is not a primary concern for The Farm at Sugar Creek, which will break ground on a truffières in the spring or summer this year, owner David English said. He is a marketing consultant in St. Louis but wanted to turn his family's 200 acre farm southwest of Hermann into a profitable enterprise.

"I've always been fascinated by the idea of doing something, especially here in Missouri for Missouri, that maybe would set a precedent," he said. "I can't imagine any more precedent setting than a truffières in Missouri."

English said he is "really excited about the prospect" of a homegrown truffle industry in Missouri and thinks it will be positive for the state.

At Ozark Forest Mushrooms, the soil pH of the future truffle orchard is being adjusted with lime, and depending on the result, could be ready to host trees by fall.

The couple has already invested a lot of time, energy and at least \$7,500, along with support from a grant, they said.

"It's not a get-rich-quick scheme by any means," Hellmuth said.

Hellmuth said if the truffières works, cultivation could help boost the economy in the Ozark region. He said it's a new agricultural product that would bring income, as well as "another reason to come down and spend money" in the Ozarks.

"I'm confident it has the potential," he said.

## **MU observatory open Wednesday evening for cosmic spectacle**

By Elizabeth Laubach

February 8, 2012 | 10:28 a.m. CST

**COLUMBIA – Venus, Uranus and the moon will be visible within the same lens Wednesday evening through the telescope at MU's Laws Observatory.**

Public viewing will begin at 8 p.m. at the observatory atop the Physics Building. The weather service was calling for mostly clear skies.

Val Germann of the Central Missouri Astronomical Association said the spectacle is a relatively rare alignment of the "king and queen of planets" on their path around the sun.

The viewing is co-sponsored by the astronomical association and MU's physics and astronomy department.