MU medical dean to leave amid billing fraud probe

ALAN SCHER ZAGIER
Associated Press

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COLUMBIA, Mo. - The University of Missouri's medical school dean is stepping down amid a federal investigation into potential Medicare billing fraud by two radiology professors.

The university health system announced Friday that Dr. Robert Churchill, a 25-year university employee and former radiology department chairman, will retire in October. The university also fired the two radiologists at the center of the federal probe.

The moves come as the U.S. attorney's office in Kansas City continues a seven-month investigation the school said involves Medicare violations by Dr. Kenneth Rail and Dr. Michael Richards. Rail stepped down as radiology department chairman in December, but he remained a professor.

Department of Justice spokesman Don Ledford said the agency doesn't discuss pending investigations, or even acknowledge such inquiries. An internal investigation by the school found that the two doctors falsely said they reviewed X-rays but instead relied solely on resident physicians, a violation of Medicare and hospital rules.

"This is a difficult day for the University of Missouri Health system and for me personally," said Dr. Hal Williamson Jr., the system's vice chancellor. "We were shocked and disappointed to learn about this, because any kind of fraud is inconsistent with our values, our mission and our commitment to patient care."
Williamson emphasized that Churchill, who was hired as dean in October 2009 at a base salary of $480,000, was not involved in wrongdoing but will resign because he "does not want to allow distractions."

Churchill and Rall did not immediately respond to telephone messages seeking comment, and an attorney for Richards said she had not yet seen the university's statement.

The alleged misconduct did not adversely affect patient care nor were "any unnecessary tests ordered," Williamson said. The health system plans a review of its radiology operations by independent experts "with a goal of making this impossible to happen again," he said.

School officials have yet to determine how much Medicare money was involved or how long the fraud lasted, Williamson added.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reported in January that the university health system provided radiology services to Women's and Children's Hospital patients without physicians ordering those services, according to a 2010 internal university audit.

The newspaper also reported that Rall left Columbia 25 years earlier after he was charged in 1986 with embezzling money from business partners in a check-kiting scheme. He was convicted of misdemeanor stealing but had faced felony charges for a purported Medicaid fraud scheme involving patients. The case fell apart after an assistant county prosecutor said he lost evidence days before trial, the newspaper reported.

Rall was hired back at the medical school in 1998 by Churchill, who was serving the first of two stints as interim dean. By 2011, Rall had been named Boone County Medical Society Doctor of the Year in 2011.

Churchill subsequently defended hiring his colleague, explaining that "Dr. Rall paid his debt for this charge more than 20 years ago" and was "highly respected by his peers."

Earlier Friday, the university system's Board of Curators met in a hastily scheduled closed meeting under a legal exemption that allows such secret sessions to discuss certain business contracts, personnel decisions or privileged conversations with university lawyers.

And Columbia campus chancellor Brady Deaton scrapped his plans to attend the annual Southeastern Conference spring meetings in Destin, Fla. - the school's first since its decision last year to leave the Big 12 Conference - to deal with an unspecified but urgent matter back home.
MU radiologists out after billing fraud probe

By JANESE SILVEY

Published June 1, 2012 at 1:17 p.m.
Updated June 1, 2012 at 2:27 a.m.

Two University of Missouri School of Medicine radiologists, including one with a criminal history, have been fired after an internal investigation found they had committed billing fraud.

Kenneth Rall and Michael Richards certified they had performed services that had instead been performed by resident physicians, said Hal Williamson, vice chancellor of the MU Health System. That's a violation of Medicare and hospital rules.

Calling it a disappointing day for the university, Williamson announced the investigation's findings during a news conference yesterday afternoon.

"We were shocked and disappointed to learn about this," he said. "This is inconsistent with our values."

Rall and Richards also are under investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice, Williamson said.

Don Ledford, spokesman for the Justice Department's Kansas City office, would not comment, saying the office's policy is to not confirm investigations until someone is criminally charged, which has not yet happened in this case.

As a result of the fallout, medical school dean Bob Churchill is retiring in October. Williamson said Churchill, also a radiologist, is not suspected of wrongdoing but is stepping down because he hired Rall in spite of a criminal past.

Exactly how much money Rall and Richards took from Medicare is not known, nor is it known how long the fraud has been happening, Williamson said.

Rall made a $571,200 base university salary, and Richards' salary was $245,742. Those figures do not take into account payments from patients, insurance and other sources that they received as radiologists.

In light of the investigation, Williamson said the MU Department of Radiology will change the way doctors view and report on patient images, and software upgrades will provide additional protections.
The internal investigation found no evidence that patient care was compromised, Williamson said.

Under the health system's procedures, as well as Medicare rules, a resident physician can read a patient's X-ray and work with a doctor to incorporate results of the X-ray into the patient's care plan. But rules also require an attending radiologist to review the image before Medicare will pay.

"We believe these two doctors sometimes claimed that they had actually completed this second review without actually looking at the image," he said.

Williamson said the X-rays appear to have been warranted and results were read and analyzed by qualified residents.

Rail resigned as chairman of the radiology department in December. The following month, the Tribune obtained records that indicated 62.5 percent of Medicare cases from the department did not have proper physician orders.

Williamson said the internal investigation has been going on for more than a year.

Rail was named Boone County Medical Society Doctor of the Year in 2011. That year, his former colleagues, including radiologist Chuck Swaney, came forward with concerns about the recognition, reminding the public that Rail left Columbia under a cloud of controversy.

"I'm not particularly surprised" about the fraud findings, Swaney said.

In 1986, Rail was charged with embezzling money after his partners found that he was using a check-kiting scheme to take advantage of lag time between banks to inflate the balance of one account with non-existing funds from another. Rail testified that he paid back $928,000, according to Tribune archives. He also was accused of writing checks to patients as Medicaid refunds, even though the recipients weren't owed money, then signing the checks back to himself.

He faced felony charges over the latter case, but the assistant prosecutor overseeing the case said he lost the evidence days before the trial. Rail left town, and Churchill hired him back in 1998.

"Dr. Rail paid his debt for this charge more than 20 years ago," Churchill said in a statement to the Tribune last year. "He has worked diligently as a physician for more than 50 years to advance medicine in Missouri and beyond and is highly respected by his peers."

Williamson said administrators now will take another look at hiring policies. "We need to be careful about who we hire," he said. "This was not a hire we would make again."
Two MU School of Medicine doctors resign after investigation cites billing fraud

By Jordan Shapiro
June 1, 2012 | 2:13 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Two doctors in the Radiology Department at MU Health Care have resigned after a federal investigation revealed fraudulent billing practices.

MU physicians Kenneth Rall and Michael Richards resigned from the university after preliminary findings released by the U.S. Attorney’s office in Kansas City alleged billing fraud in the Radiology Department.

The vice chancellor of MU Health Care, Harold Williamson, announced the departures at a Friday afternoon press conference.

The investigation is still ongoing, but Williamson said the initial findings were "troubling enough that we felt we needed to act immediately."

At the news conference, Williamson also announced that Robert Churchill, dean of the School of Medicine, will retire in October. Churchill was not implicated in the investigation.

Williamson said he believed the billing violations are confined to Rall and Richards. He said the two doctors violated Medicare rules for billing by certifying they viewed certain images, when in fact they had not.

At issue is whether Rall and Richards reviewed X-ray images after they had been reviewed by a resident physician. Medicare policy allows a resident to initially read an image and work with the patient’s doctor who prescribed the X-ray. Before Medicare will pay for the image, however, an attending radiologist must also review them.

"We believe these two doctors sometimes claimed they had actually completed this second review without actually looking at the image," Williamson said.
The U.S. Attorney's Office is investigating the billing fraud in payments to Medicare, Medicaid and TRICARE, a health care program under the Department of Defense.

Williamson said that while MU officials "have no evidence patient care was compromised," the health system will pay for an outside doctor to re-read the images for patients who request it.

Any criminal charges resulting from the investigation will be determined by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Rall was the chair of the radiology department when the violations occurred, Williamson said. Rall resigned from his radiology post in December 2011, one month into the investigation. He was succeeded by interim chairman, Amolak Singh.

Before this investigation, Rall faced felony charges in 1986, according to court records.

Despite this, he returned to the School of Medicine in 1998.

In 2011, Rall was named Doctor of the Year by the Boone County Medical Society.

Rall's pay of $571,200 for the 2011-2012 academic year makes him one of the highest paid University of Missouri professors. Neither he nor Richards will receive a severance or buyout, Williamson said.

Williamson said the amount of money involved in the billing fraud had yet to be determined.

While not implicated of any wrongdoing in the investigation, Churchill's retirement was announced Friday. Williamson said Churchill did not want any distractions stemming from the investigation to take away from the work at the medical school.

Churchill became interim dean of MU's School of Medicine in 2008 succeeding Dr. William Crist, according to a previous Missourian report.

Churchill came to MU in 1987 as chair and professor of radiology from Loyola University in Maywood, Ill., where he completed medical school, residency and fellowship training.

As dean, Churchill oversaw more than 675 faculty members, 1,500 staff members and 1,000 medical students, residents, fellows and other students completing advanced degrees.
Before the Friday news conference, the UM System Board of Curators met in a closed-door meeting. Williamson said he did not know if the resignations in the medical school were the reason for the meeting, but "would not be surprised" if they were.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Kansas City said they could not comment on the investigation, citing U.S. Department of Justice policy.

*Missourian Reporter Alli Inglebright contributed to this report.*
UM's decision to shutter university press draws criticism
By Tim Barker

University of Missouri President Tim Wolfe's decision to close the system's press isn't going over well in some circles.

In what might best be described as a clash between academic luxury and economic hardship, critics say the new president has lost sight of the university's educational mission in his quest to trim the system's budget.

The move has spawned a "Save the University of Missouri Press" Facebook page with nearly 1,100 supporters, letters and emails, and warnings from alumni who say they'll drop their support for the school.

Among those is Thomas Strong, a Springfield attorney and University of Missouri-Columbia law school graduate, who said he has given "tens of thousands of dollars" to the school.

"There is no excuse for it as far as I'm concerned," Strong said. "What's wrong with our priorities if the only thing we know the University of Missouri for is its athletic program?"

The closing, announced last week, fits in with Wolfe's strategic plan for the system, which has seen a decline in state financial support in recent years. The system said it spends $400,000 a year subsidizing the press. Wolfe has not specifically addressed the closing, but said the system is re-evaluating "activities that are not central to our core mission."

A system spokeswoman said Wolfe was unavailable for comment because he was traveling Thursday and in meetings all day Friday.

The plan to phase out the press, starting this summer, has drawn criticism from alumni, authors and others in the world of academics. The Association of American University Presses issued a statement, calling the decision to shutter the respected 54-year-old press 'shortsighted' and urging the system to reconsider.

Ned Stuckey-French is an assistant professor at Florida State University and author whose book "The American Essay in the American Century" is being published by the Missouri Press.
Stuckey-French, who also is one of the Facebook page administrators, said the unit serves a valuable role in the state, publishing oral histories, guidebooks and biographies, among others. "A lot of these books are not going to be published elsewhere," Stuckey-French said.

That's a message that resonates with Rep. Mike Lair, R-Chillicothe, chairman of the House Education Appropriations Committee and a former history teacher who has taught with books published by various university presses.

Still, he said decisions like this should be left to the UM System, which chose to hire a president with a business background.

"We can't micro manage these folks," Lair said. "With that mind, I cannot say anything against his decision."
Wolfe explains UM Press decision, says better model sought

By JAN ESE SILVEY

Friday, June 1, 2012

University of Missouri administrators are hashing out ways to create a new and sustainable model to operate a university press.

But any future press won’t look like the current operation. Discussions are under way about how to operate a new type of university publishing house.

"We believe the publication of scholarly work is important," UM President Tim Wolfe told the Tribune, speaking publicly for the first time since announcing the closure of UM Press last week. "We’re working very diligently on what" the new press "will look like."

Details are unclear, but Steve Graham, associate vice president of academic affairs, compared the proposed business model to the way The Missouri Review now operates. The Missouri Review is a highly-regarded literary magazine edited by an English professor who uses graduate students and interns to assist with editing.

Although any proposed press is expected to have digital and other components, books also could be printed, and there is "significant interest" in continuing to publish books by regional authors that preserve Missouri’s history, he said.

Wolfe, a former software company president, compared the move to Wal-Mart setting up a successful store in the same location where an independent store went bankrupt. The same products were sold, he said, but Wal-Mart’s business model was more successful.

The analogy wasn’t comforting to Bruce Miller, a Chicago-based publisher’s representative who is leading a campaign opposing closure of the current UM Press. He argued that UM Press already is successful but said he would need to hear more details about the new plan before opining. Miller started a Facebook page, "Save the University of Missouri Press," that had more than 1,000 supporters as of this morning.
Ned Stuckey-French, who is in the English department at Florida State University, also is waiting for more details.

"I'm encouraged but will want to see what it's going to be," he said. "I want to see the proportion of student interns to trained professionals on the staff."

The current 10 UM Press employees are not expected to be involved in any new operation. Wolfe said he does not yet know how the UM System will use the press's current building off LeMone Industrial Boulevard.

Talk of closing the current press began early this year when the UM System was facing a 12.5 percent reduction in state funds. Although the cut did not materialize, Wolfe said chancellors and provosts on all four UM campuses agreed the press as it now operates is not a priority.

The system provides the UM Press with a $400,000 annual subsidy. In addition to the subsidy, the press has operated with a deficit, although press employees who asked not to be identified said the press was not expecting to operate with a deficit in the coming fiscal year.

Wolfe said he was not aware of that but said it will not change the fact the system pays a subsidy.

Past efforts to make the press sustainable have failed, Graham said. He noted that former UM President Gary Forsee had asked press staff to whittle down the subsidy to a smaller amount, which was not accomplished.

Wolfe acknowledged he has never visited the UM Press or spoken to the employees, nor did he consult with faculty about closing the current operation. He argued that the matter involved specific employees, limiting his ability to talk about it with outside groups.

In addition to consulting with chancellors and provosts, Wolfe said he sought advice from former MU Chancellor Richard Wallace.

"I don't feel the best decisions come in a vacuum," he said. "It's important to collaborate with bright people, and that's exactly what I did."
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Another record-breaking freshman enrollment predicted for MU

By Megan LaManna
June 1, 2012 | 5:08 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Each year, MU's freshman classes get bigger and bigger.

As of Friday, the university collected 6,702 deposits from incoming freshmen. That is 354 more deposits than it had at this time in 2011 and 434 more than it had in 2010.

"Deposits are a really good indicator of how many students might be here in the fall, because deposits indicate a commitment," MU spokesperson Christian Basi said.

Enrollment deposits were due for the incoming freshmen May 1.

"So typically, once we get past the month of May, we have a pretty good idea of which students have committed to coming," Basi said.

The Division of Enrollment Management estimated that if past yield rates continue to hold, 6,450 freshmen will enroll for the fall semester.

Basi said with this year's increase in freshmen, the university has to make sure the schools and colleges are equipped with enough classrooms and professors to accommodate the new students. The College of Engineering, Trulaske College of Business and School of Health Professions had the highest increases in enrollment deposits, with 124, 99 and 57, respectively, according to the Division of Enrollment Management.

The applications and deposits from Illinois students have increased even more than those of Missouri students. Applications from Illinois are up 1,203, and deposits are up 275, whereas Missouri applications have increased by 93, but the deposits have decreased by 89.

In addition to its higher volume, the new freshman class has a 10 percent increase in deposits from students with an ACT score of 30 or higher.

Supervising editor is Jake Kreinberg.
Budget bets on lottery revenue

*Fiscal stability calls for real investment.*

By MARY STILL

Sunday, June 3, 2012

As the dust settles on the legislative session, it has become clear that a balanced state budget for next year depends on a $35 million increase in lottery revenue. Our budget is premised on encouraging working Missourians to put their hard-earned dollars and their hopes for the future on this game of chance. There is something unseemly about building a budget in this manner — not to mention the gamble of it all. We are betting on the come, and if we fail, we certainly face withholdings.

**Although there have been lots of high-fives over the fact that the University of Missouri was not cut, we are not out of the woods yet, as withholdings are still a very real possibility. Additionally, there are other stubborn facts about this budget that are hard to ignore.**

State funding for the University of Missouri for fiscal year 2013 is $49 million below what it was in 2001, more when factoring inflation. During that same period, tuition has soared 83 percent at four-year colleges and 52 percent at community colleges.

Elementary and secondary school funding is $440 million below the state’s legal mandate. This will result in a $344,000 state cut to Columbia schools and a system where our students are shortchanged by $1,600 to $2,800 per pupil compared to schools of similar size in St. Louis and Kansas City. This disparity will continue until the foundation formula for distributing money to our schools is fully funded.

Early education services to children were cut by more than $9 million, including Early Head Start and programs that help to improve the safety and quality of day care.

Certainly, our Boone County delegation fought for every cent under the current constraints. That is commendable, but it is also our obligation to push every day for the funds that are needed to support one of the top 100 research universities in the world.

If Boone County representatives don't demand better, who will?

I am pleased that the cigarette tax will be on the ballot in November and can raise close to $500 million. Missouri has the lowest cigarette tax in the country, and the benefit will be increased revenue
desperately needed as well as improved health of our citizens. Research clearly shows that a higher price deters teenagers from smoking.

There are many other avenues to increase revenue, including an Internet tax that would have the added benefit of leveling the playing field for many Columbia businesses that currently operate at a significant tax disadvantage. These are taxes owed that are not being collected.

Additionally, it is time to take a hard look at our many tax credits, including the economic development tax credits and credits for low-income housing. Though these credits serve a purpose, they also significantly reduce the resources available to our state to make quality investments in our schools and infrastructure.

I continue to believe that the best incentives to attract business are quality public schools, affordable higher education and a quality of life in our community. This requires a real investment in our state, not crossed fingers and a hope that more people will play the lottery.
MU Engineering Professors Off to Train Iraqi Counterparts

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) Engineering professors from the University of Missouri are headed to Iraq to help train their counterparts in the rebuilding nation.

The school’s College of Engineering has received a U.S. State Department grant to work with professors at Iraq’s University of Technology while it seeks accreditation. The school is located in the northern Iraq city of Erbil.

The Missouri contingent will work on course development in the Iraqi school’s industrial engineering program. The professors will also help with training in the fields of nanotechnology and renewable energy.

The Iraqi scientists will visit Columbia later this summer.

Missouri is one of eight American universities participating in the program through the International Research and Exchange Board.
MU receives grant to help Iraqi engineers

By JANESIE SILVEY

Saturday, June 2, 2012

The University of Missouri's College of Engineering has received a grant to help Iraqi educational institutes recover after decades of tyranny and war.

The U.S. Department of State awarded $1 million to MU, which is one of eight American universities participating in the International Research & Exchanges Board’s University Linkage Program.

The money pays for a three-year partnership that allows MU professors to work with Iraq's University of Technology.

"We will help rebuild Iraqi educators' capacity to train tomorrow's engineers," Vladislav Likholetov, assistant professor of chemical engineering and project leader, said in a statement.

"The MU group will benefit, too. In the modern world, engineering programs must be international, or they become irrelevant. The Iraqis have ingenuity and perseverance forged by isolation from the international community and the hardships of war. It will be enriching to learn from their perspective," Likholetov said.

Likholetov and a team of researchers will fly to Erbil in northern Iraq in mid-June to conduct a three-day intensive seminar to help the university pursue certification from the Accreditation board for Engineering and Technology.

Later, a group of Iraqi engineering faculty will visit MU.

The partnership focuses on four initiatives: to develop and improve industrial engineering curriculum for the University of Technology; develop energy-rated courses and train faculty; train Iraqi scientists in nanotechnology; and develop a career center and professional development program.

MU was hand-picked, said Lori Mason, project director of the International Research & Exchanges Board, because it "not only had the capability to provide what the Iraqi university wanted, but that also had interest in a long-term partnership."
MU professors traveling to Iraq to help university train engineers

By Jessica Salmond
June 2, 2012 | 6:28 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Vladislav Likholetov, an MU research assistant professor and director of international partnerships, will lead a team to Iraq to strengthen the education of the country's future engineers.

MU engineering professors have teamed up with Baghdad's University of Technology through the University Linkage Program, which is administered by the International Research and Exchanges Board and funded by the U.S. Department of State through the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

MU's College of Engineering received a subgrant from the International Research and Exchanges Board to develop a project to help the University of Technology's engineering education. The grant will provide $1 million over three years, Likholetov said. After it expires, he said he hopes the universities will continue to communicate.

"The intent is to make this a long-term, sustainable relationship," Likholetov said.

Likholetov, the project leader, specializes in the global spread of technology information through educational partnerships, commercialization and research collaboration.

The team of seven College of Engineering faculty and staff will fly to Iraq on June 17 to meet a partner team of 20 faculty members from the University of Technology in Erbil. The MU team will then hold a three-day seminar aimed at updating the engineering program offered by the Iraqi university, Likholetov said.

"Historically, Iraq has been a very advanced country in education," Likholetov said. However, Iraq's educational system was isolated because of the myriad of problems the country has experienced in the last decade, he said.
Now, as the country slowly settles down, the University of Technology is looking for ways to catch up. To aid them in their efforts, Likholetov helped develop four areas in the University Linkage Program that the project will address.

- **Area one:** Update the curriculum for industrial engineering. Linsey Barker Steege, an MU assistant professor of industrial and manufacturing engineering, will help the University of Technology develop courses in this area, such as engineering management.

- **Area two:** Create two new courses in energy efficiency and renewable energy sources. Sanjeev Khanna, an MU professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering, will work with the Iraqi university to provide training and develop these classes.

- **Area three:** Train engineers from the university in nanotechnology. The university possesses equipment for the field, but no one can currently operate it. In fall 2012, engineers from the University of Technology will travel to Columbia to go through intensive training with MU’s College of Engineering and learn to operate the equipment. Shubhra Gangopadhyay will guide the visiting engineers through this training.

- **Area four:** Begin a career and professional development program for engineering students. Because of the government’s previous involvement in the university, engineers were selected for jobs by the government upon graduation. As government involvement loosens, students need to learn basic skills, like how to write a resume and how to apply for a job. Meredith Shaw, head of the College of Engineering’s career services office, will work with the Iraqi team to develop this program.

The seminar will feature a workshop in which the MU team will help the other university gain certification from the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology. Achieving this certification will be a big step in updating the engineering program. Larry David, a retired industrial engineering professor and expert on the accreditation board, and Scott Kovaleski, an MU associate professor of electrical and computer engineering, will collaborate with the University of Technology to achieve the certification.

Likholetov and the other professors involved in the project have done lots of communicating with their counterparts in Iraq since January, when the project officially began, he said.

"We have the chance to finally talk face to face," Likholetov said.
But the process of developing the project wasn't without complications, Likholetov said. Communication is challenging due to language and cultural barriers, let alone the unreliable internet in Iraq that makes Skype conferences difficult.

Kifayah Abbood Al-Saffar, a visiting professor of industrial and manufacturing engineering from Baghdad, has been a key component in overcoming differences and difficulties, Likholetov said. She is currently at MU but will return to her country to help the team during the project.

*Supervising editor is Hannah Cushman.*
SEC solidarity

MU contingent impressed with league's unity.

By DAVE MATTER

Sunday, June 3, 2012

Dave Martin/AP

DESTIN, Fla. — The collegiality of the Southeastern Conference is settling in quickly at Missouri. It will be on full display Tuesday in, of all places, Atlanta. At the JW Marriott Buckhead hotel, campus leaders and coaches from Missouri and Texas A&M will gather for a joint reception to christen their maiden SEC voyage. More than 800 alums from the schools are expected to attend the event, billed as "Celebrating a New Era."

SEC Commissioner Mike Slive is among those impressed with the project.

"It's totally on their own initiative," said Slive, who will attend along with a party of SEC staffers.

The Tigers and Aggies were never so chummy as Big 12 Conference members for 15 years, but their joint SEC-ession changed that relationship forever. Shakespeare could have been channeling the Big 12 when he wrote, "Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows."

The SEC, a league that's lost just two members since World War II — Georgia Tech in 1964 and Tulane in 1966 — was never looking to expand last year, Slive reminded reporters several times here during the past week's SEC's spring meetings. Texas A&M initiated the talks, followed by Missouri.

But since then, Missouri has taken to the league's embrace.

"Everyone in the SEC," Athletic Director Mike Alden said, "has been great to us."

Arkansas Athletic Director Jeff Long and staff members attended a Missouri staff retreat earlier this spring to help with the Tigers' transition into the conference. Georgia, Mississippi and Florida have reached out, too.
"They automatically come from the perspective: It's what's best for the league," Missouri senior associate athletic Director Tim Hickman said.

That mentality pervaded over the past week in Florida, Alden said. Coming from the Big 12, where discord and chaos reigned the last few years — sometimes stirred by Missouri's grumbling — Alden was struck by the tenor and vision of the SEC meetings.

"What I love about it is, these schools aren't talking about living in the moment," he said. "They're talking about what's good for the league a decade from now, 20 years from now, 30 years from now. I'm not used to that. We're used to being in reactive mode versus proactive mode. I don't say that negatively. That's a fact."

But as Alden and staff witnessed in person last weekend, the SEC is a dual-natured beast of a conference. Missouri's three-game softball regional against visiting LSU was bloodsport disguised in ribbons and bows. The intensity at University Field spilled into the stands as raucous LSU fans gave Missouri a taste of the SEC's cutthroat competition.

"For softball?" Alden marveled two days later. "That was amazing to me."

Here in Florida, the intensity behind closed doors wasn't the same as, say, last season's BCS National Championship Game between LSU and Alabama — though Slive likes to say, "In this league, the First Amendment is alive and well" — but harmony sets in once meetings are adjourned.

"We may disagree and have healthy dialogues in the room, but then when the doors open, everyone's for the SEC and everyone wants what's best for the SEC," Mississippi Athletic Director Ross Bjork said. "The overall camaraderie and cooperation, I think, is something at a healthier level than it is across the country."

Campus leaders around the league point to one person as the source for that solidarity. The SEC was ridiculed a decade ago when it passed its crown to Slive, the former commissioner of Conference USA, an Ivy League-educated Jewish attorney from Utica, N.Y., who had no twang in his talk and not a Southern root on his bio. The son of a butcher, he played lacrosse at Dartmouth, practiced law and served as a judge in New Hampshire, worked in athletic departments in the East (Dartmouth, Cornell) and in conferences in the West (Pac-10) ... but seemed an odd fit for Dixie.

"The man is as Southern as snow tires," the Louisville Courier-Journal wrote when Slive was hired in 2002.

Who's laughing now? Slive has since helped clean up the league's renegade image, overseen record revenues and six consecutive BCS football champions, steadily managed the era of conference realignment and expansion and earned the clout to steer college football's playoff conversation, as he did all week in Florida.

"His leadership style is one of collaboration," Bjork said. "That's how he formulates every concept, every idea. What's best for the league and how do we collaborate?"
"He's one of the great leaders in all of college sport," Alden said. "Maybe all of sport. ... He has a sense of control in a positive way that he's able to manage very complicated issues in a positive way. It garners trust."

In the SEC, trust is earned different ways, but trophies and dollar signs help. The league announced Friday it will distribute a record $241.5 million to 12 members — not Missouri and Texas A&M — for the 2011-12 fiscal year. That's $20.1 million per school. To maintain that average next year when MU and A&M are part of the revenue pool, the league will have to make another $40 million. That's why the league is exploring renegotiations with media partners CBS and ESPN on their 15-year, $3 billion contract, as well as a possible SEC Network, similar to the lucrative Big Ten Network.

"If you look at the Big Ten, it's the same thing," Alden said. "Ohio State, Michigan and Penn State talk the same way like they do in the SEC. That's something that's a culture. That's built over years. That doesn't mean Alabama doesn't want to win and doesn't want to beat your brains in every day.

"But when they're in that meeting and they're saying, 'We're willing to take less than we can make on our own because it's good for the league,' it's been built over time."

Missouri's leaders insist that's a clear and welcome change from life in the Big 12.

"That's for sure," Alden said.
MU roundtables keep alumni in touch

By JAKE HALLIDAY

Saturday, June 2, 2012

Living in Columbia, there is no shortage of information about the University of Missouri. The campus is right here. Whether we work for the university, are alums or just live here, staying in touch with the latest goings on at MU is downright easy.

Recently, I learned firsthand about Mizzou Corporate Roundtables, which are organized to keep alums and business leaders in St. Louis, Kansas City and Springfield connected and up to date on developments at MU.

In May, I participated in roundtables in Kansas City and Springfield. I was impressed with the attendance and by the polished staging of the events by MU’s Office of University Development and Alumni Relations. In each case, there were about 200 or so attendees gathered for an early breakfast meeting to hear about initiatives at MU.

Each roundtable is hosted by a member of MU campus leadership. Vice Chancellor for Research Rob Duncan served in that role for the Kansas City and Springfield events that I attended.

As the invitees assembled, they seemed to enjoy catching up with each other. Duncan took the podium and introduced the program: initiatives at MU to translate biomedical innovations from the world of university research to the commercial world so that they can reach and benefit patients. He then called on Paul Dale to explain the MU Biodesign and Innovation Program and on Rebecca Rone and me to present the Coulter Translational Partnership Program.

It was a thrill to meet and speak with so many MU alums at the events, each propelled in his or her profession by their time at MU. All keen to reminisce.

It struck me that MU is a balance of traditions and values that are unchanging and initiatives that reflect the evolving role of a modern research university in a changing world. The pace of change at MU is particularly dramatic in dimensions such as research volume, innovation, new venture creation, business incubation, entrepreneurship and technology commercialization.
Especially in this era of the Internet and social media, congratulations to MU for hosting events throughout Missouri to get the word out in face-to-face interactions and to MU alums and business leaders across the state for their eagerness to stay connected in person to learn what is new at MU.

Jake Halliday is CEO of the Missouri Innovation Center, operator of the MU Life Science Business Incubator at Monsanto Place.
Venus Will Pass Between Earth and The Sun Tomorrow

Stargazers and astronomy buffs are being invited to the University of Missouri's campus observatory tomorrow to watch a rare planetary passage.

The Laws Observatory on the Columbia campus is hosting a public viewing of Venus' passage directly between the earth and the sun.

The planet will be able to be seen as a black disc moving across the face of the sun - an astronomical event that won't take place for another 105 years.
Probably once in your lifetime: Venus transits across the sun Tuesday

By Claire Porter
June 3, 2012 | 6:00 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — You’ll never see this again.

This spring’s series of celestial events wraps up Tuesday with a transit of Venus across the sun that will not occur again until the year 2117.

MU astronomers and the Central Missouri Astronomical Association are hosting a viewing event starting just before 5 p.m. and lasting until sunset Tuesday at Laws Observatory on the fifth floor of the MU Physics Building. They will have telescopes equipped with filters and solar glasses available to view Venus as it passes between the Earth and the sun.

Just like last month’s partial solar eclipse, eye protection is necessary to safely view the transit. Welder’s glasses equipped with a number 14 or darker hood or specially made solar glasses, which will be available at the observatory for free, are necessary for naked eye viewing. Projection methods can also be used to view the transit.

Pinhole projections are made by poking a hole in a stiff piece of paper or cardboard using a pin. With your back to the sun, hold the piece of cardboard so the sunlight shines through the hole. This creates a projection which can be seen on another piece of paper held below the hole.

Unlike that blowout furniture sale advertised every month or that skydiving trip your friends want you to take, the transit of Venus truly only occurs once or twice in a lifetime, only two times in a century.

Because of Venus’s tilted orbit, it does not pass directly between earth and the sun with each orbit. Transits that are visible from earth occur in 8-year pairs. Each pair is separated by more than 100 years, according to NASA.
Angela Speck, professor and director of MU's astronomy program, will host a talk following the transit explaining why a transit isn't visible every time Earth orbits the sun. She will also explain how astronomers used the transit to measure the size of the solar system for the first time.

"The transit is a way in which we can actually measure distances to planets and distances to everything else. It's really important, especially historically," Speck said.

Speck's talk will be held in room 114 of the Physics Building after sunset.

Tuesday's transit is the second half of this century's pair. The first transit of the pair occurred in June 2004. If you missed the 2004 transit, Tuesday will be the last chance to see the event for another 105.5 years. The next transit will not occur until Dec. 11, 2117.

The total path of Venus across the sun will take almost seven hours, according to NASA. However, only the first half will be visible in the U.S., because the sun sets before the transit ends.

Unlike last month's partial solar eclipse, which obscured almost half the sun in Columbia, Venus's silhouette will only appear as a tiny black dot creeping across the upper right corner of the sun, according to Speck's description. Then it will disappear into space again.

"While this isn't exactly a visually stunning event like a total solar eclipse, it is nonetheless a literal 'once-in-a-lifetime' event (or twice if you saw the transit of 2004)," according to the U.S. Naval Observatory's website.

The transit should begin at approximately 5:04 p.m. in Columbia. This is the moment that Venus touches the outer edge of the sun, called ingress exterior. At 5:22 p.m., Venus should be fully inside the solar disc, called ingress interior. The planet will continue to cross the sun well after sunset at 8:29 p.m.

As of Friday, the National Weather Service predicted sunny conditions for Tuesday and mostly clear skies for Tuesday evening. If clouds get in the way, NASA's webpage for the transit has a list of webcasts available.

*Supervising editor is Jake Kreinberg.*
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

FastCAT transit proposal set to go before Columbia City Council

MU Mention on Pg. 2

By Tony Puricelli
June 3, 2012 | 6:00 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — The proposed FastCAT Express bus route appears to be on the policy fast track.

Mayor Bob McDavid said it is important to have the route in place by the time students return in the fall and to tailor marketing toward students. McDavid announced his plans for the downtown and campus loop on May 24.

If approved, the route is slated to start operating Aug. 15.

Initial details about the proposed route, including hours of operation, costs for semester-long passes and plans to have televisions in the buses tuned to ESPN, are part of an agreement with Jon and Nathan Odle, the developers of Brookside on College.

The proposal will go before the Columbia City Council on Monday.

The overall cost of the route would likely be between $300,000 and $400,000 per year, McDavid said. He said the cost depends on the quality of the service provided.

A single bus running non-extended hours would cost about $100,000 per year to maintain. Additional hours could bring that cost up to $200,000.

The contract with developers requires at least two buses for the route. The mayor said he envisions three or four buses running on the route during the day.

"I'd be tickled pink if there were four buses running on the FastCAT loop during peak times, and if demand is good enough, that's what we'll have," McDavid said. "Then you would have buses coming by every five or 10 minutes, so you'd never have to wait."
The new city budget for fiscal year 2013 is due to the City Council in August for final approval in October. For this proposal, however, City Manager Mike Matthes plans to ask for an amended version of the current budget in July. This would allot funding for the new route so that it would be implemented in August.

Matthes also said he intends to recommend to the City Council that a new sales position be added to the fiscal year 2013 budget. The new official would be in charge of increasing the system's customer base. "Seventy-five percent of our riders are students right now," Matthes said.

However, a majority of those students live off campus. Matthes would like to see more students living on or near campus riding the bus. "That's who we need to convince to try the service," he said.

McDavid has spoken to the owners of Brookside on College since a fire caused $7 million in damage to the complex at Walnut Street and College Avenue. He said they are still committed to the FastCAT route.

The mayor said he's looking for a similar commitment from other apartment complexes such as the ones along the Black and Gold bus routes on Old 63 and Providence Road.

**Black and Gold riders would be able to board FastCAT buses to shuttle around campus at no additional cost. McDavid said. The routes would connect at the MU Student Center.**

Complexes that fall along these routes, such as The Reserve and The Grove, have been approached about purchasing FastCAT passes for their residents and will be approached again, McDavid said. Under the proposal, these complexes would be able to purchase semester passes at a group rate of $62.50 per student.

McDavid said the intent is for all routes to connect to the FastCAT loop at some point. Buses coming from the west could converge at the Fifth and Walnut streets parking garage. The Black and Gold routes in the south could join FastCAT at the MU Student Center. Bus routes from the north and east could converge with FastCAT at the intersection of College Avenue and Walnut Street.

The whole purpose is to create a bus route that "actually goes where people live and work," McDavid said.
"Each route is important, but this one will be the showcase route," he said.

Matthes said this is part of a new concept of thinking of the transit system in terms of individual routes instead of the network as a whole.

"It kind of shifts your focus when you think about it that way," Matthes said. "It’s enabled us to become more entrepreneurial."

The agreement going before the City Council states that the city would reserve the right to charge passengers an additional fee for entering other routes from FastCAT buses. McDavid and Matthes both expressed a desire to keep the entire transit system open to FastCAT riders, however.

The FastCAT deal takes the place of the Odles’ previous plan to provide private shuttles for residents of their downtown properties. Instead, McDavid said he wanted a downtown route that would be open to all Columbia residents and help revitalize the transit system.

For their part, the Odles have agreed to purchase $80,000 in passes for residents and pay $10,000 to advertise on FastCAT buses each year for the next five years. This agreement would be automatically renewed each additional year unless one party opts out.

The Brookside owners were unavailable for comment.

*Supervising editor is John Schneller.*