MU snags worldwide nuclear fusion conference

Controversial field sees more interest.

By Karyn Spory

Monday, July 15, 2013 at 2:00 pm

In 1991, Mark Prelas, a professor of nuclear engineering at the University of Missouri, was forced to stop his research on low-energy nuclear reactions, also referred to as "cold fusion," after the scientific community deemed the discovery of the tabletop nuclear reaction was a fluke.

Today, not only is Prelas revisiting the potential of low-energy nuclear reactions — or LENR — but next week, MU will host the 18th International Conference on Condensed Matter Nuclear Fusion.

The process known as cold fusion, a reaction creating unexplained heat effects, was discovered by two Utah researchers, Martin Fleischmann and Stanley Pons, more than two decades ago. However, scientists were later unable to duplicate the results, so the possible energy source was written off by many experts.

Founded with a $5.5 million donation last year from apparel tycoon and Jones Group founder Sidney Kimmel, MU's new Sidney Kimmel Institute for Nuclear Renaissance has allowed Prelas and a team of researchers to revisit tabletop fusion and try to understand the mechanics of the science.

"What we're doing is developing tools to just look at very basic things occurring in this event," Prelas said.

"The fact that we're seeing something here that we don't understand — I see it as a huge opportunity for basic physics research to try to understand why we don't understand it," said Robert Duncan, vice chancellor of research at MU and co-chairman of the upcoming conference.

Duncan said the conference has grown as a result of people continuing to work to explain the mysterious form of excess heat. He said although the conference will feature companies looking
to make reactors that will produce energy from the basic understanding of LENR, for now MU's researchers will continue to investigate just how this energy forms.

"I would like to understand the underpinning physics because once you understand what's going on, you have a way of predicting and designing things that may be useful," Duncan said.

Annette Sobel, assistant to the provost for strategic opportunities and program organizer for the conference, said this is the first time the conference has taken place in the Midwest.

She said she and Duncan went to South Korea, the site of last year's conference, and pitched MU — with its research reactor and the Kimmel Institute — as the perfect academic hotbed to host the 18th annual conference.

Sobel said the conference will be a good way to promote not only MU but also the region. "We have Ameren, the emphasis on alternative energy to include biofuel and also the fact this region is engaged in work in small modular reactors," she said.

Sobel said the entire condensed-matter community, which includes at least 30 countries, will be represented at the conference. The conference will run from Sunday through next Friday.

This article was published in the Monday, July 15, 2013 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "MU snags worldwide nuclear fusion event: Controversial field sees more interest."

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Posted in Education on Monday, July 15, 2013 2:00 pm.
MU to host international nuclear fusion conference

The University of Missouri is hosting an upcoming international conference on low-energy nuclear reactions.

The Columbia Daily Tribune reports that the university will host the 18th International Conference on Condensed Matter Nuclear Fusion.

Annette Sobel, assistant to the provost for strategic opportunities and program organizer for the conference, said this is the first time the conference has taken place in the Midwest. Sobel says the entire condensed-matter community, which includes at least 30 countries, will be represented at the conference.

The conference runs from Sunday through next Friday.

Robert Duncan, vice chancellor of research at MU, says the conference has grown as a result of people seeking to explain the heat form.
MU farm event's popularity flourishes

MU farm event draws from around the globe.

By Laura Mazurak

Monday, July 15, 2013 at 2:00 pm

Blue skies and mild weather welcomed about 180 agriculture industry professionals to the University of Missouri's Pest Management Field Day last week in an event that has burgeoned in popularity in recent years.

The annual event, held Thursday at Bradford Research and Extension Center on Rangeline Road, featured presentations by MU faculty members on topics relevant to agrichemical dealers and industry representatives. The featured topics included chemical resistance, herbicide programs and new crop technology.

The field day at MU's research farm has grown significantly in the past several years, said Kevin Bradley, associate professor of plant sciences and organizer of the event. Last year the field day had 105 registered attendees, and Bradley estimated that Thursday's event had 50 more participants than in years past.

Although the field day's target audience is from Missouri, Thursday's event attracted visitors from Argentina, Peru and Denmark, plus a group of 20 from Brazil.

"We try and put on a good program that's relevant to our clientele," Bradley said, noting that quality presentations and increased public relations efforts could account for the uptick in attendance. "We're getting some attention."

Research presented at the field day is increasingly pertinent to the industry professionals in attendance because of the growing herbicide and pesticide resistance that has complicated pest management in recent years.

"It seems there's always going to be a new pest problem," Bradley said.

Danish attendee Mette Walter included the field day in her visit to a U.S. subsidiary of her Denmark-based employer, Cheminova, a pesticide and herbicide supplier.

"It's a good opportunity to see the crops and our products," Walter said.
She added that the field day also provided an opportunity to check out other chemicals on the market and to receive input for future products.

Bruce Knoernschild, an account manager at DuPont, said he has attended various plant science field days off and on since 1978.

"This is the most people I've seen in 15 years," Knoernschild said. "There's a lot of young people."

Knoernschild said he sees the field day as an opportunity to network with fellow professionals as well as support MU, which is his alma mater.

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Posted in Education on Monday, July 15, 2013 2:00 pm.
Missouri's Jay Nixon wears many hats — governor, sky traveler, veto-er. To these, we may now add: pitchman.

You may have seen Nixon popping up on your computer screen or TV this summer, pushing enrollment at Western Governors University, an online school less than 20 years old.

WGU offers classes and degrees to students who learn at the computer, on their own schedule. “Students advance by showing what they’ve learned,” Nixon says in a video. “Rather than logging time in class.”

As you might imagine, the ads have caused some ivy-walled grumbling.

It’s one thing for a state to offer an alternative to the University of Missouri or UMKC or Penn Valley, higher-ed types say. It’s quite another for its governor to publicly imply that “logging time in class” is somehow a bad thing.

At most schools, logging time in class is pretty much what you do.

Still, professorial complaints about Nixon’s ads have been muted, mostly because his advertising skills may be a bit rusty. At the end of May, WGU says, just 439 Missouri students (165 in Kansas) were enrolled, a small portion of the university’s 40,000 student body.

But Nixon, and WGU, are obviously on to something.

It isn’t a secret that the Internet has blown up entertainment, journalism, retailing and government. Education is likely to be next.

As The Star’s Marã Rose Williams and others have written, massive online open courses — MOOCs — are exploding at universities across the country. Lectures from top professors can be recorded and distributed, with little cost or effort, to hundreds of thousands of viewers and students. Tests are easy to process. Time and distance are less of a factor for teacher and learner alike.
At the same time, legislators and taxpayers continue to balk at ever-increasing subsidies for traditional universities — while students and their parents howl at tuition hikes that have outstripped inflation for decades.

The ongoing beef over student loan rates is only partly about debt. It’s also about the massive cost of higher education, without a job on the other side of graduation.

So it isn’t a leap to believe brick-and-mortar professors will soon face the same brutal price pressure as brick-and-mortar reporters and sales people.

Fred Logan, head of the Kansas Board of Regents, tells me his colleagues are thinking hard about the future of online higher education. Missouri is also studying the issue, I’m told.

They may need to pick up the pace. You and I spent years logging time in class. Our children, and their children, won’t.
Supporting the theme parks and attractions in the tourism hub of Branson, Mo., are thousands of hourly workers manning the ticket counters, cleaning hotel rooms and waiting on tables.

These residents, living among the Ozark Mountains in Taney and Stone counties, often lack health insurance. Three years ago, a group of volunteers opened a clinic in a donated building with donated medical equipment to care for them.

"It was just a matter of us saying we wanted to provide this for our community because we thought it was the right thing to do," said Rick Tallon, who volunteers as a dentist at the clinic.

But for the past two months, the Faith Community Health clinic has been idle. Trying to provide care with busy physician volunteers has been unreliable and sporadic, Tallon said. "We have 500-plus patients on the waiting list."

A new Missouri law providing more freedom for physician assistants to care for patients could change that. Advocates hope the change will alleviate the shortage of primary care doctors in Branson and across the state — a shortage expected to worsen as the Affordable Care Act expands health care benefits to millions more Americans, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported (http://bit.ly/13dFcav).

Currently, physician assistants must be supervised by a doctor located within 30 miles of where they practice, and a doctor must be present 66 percent of the time they are caring for patients — the second-most restrictive state law in the country.

That will change Aug. 28 when the supervising doctor will be allowed to be up to 50 miles away and will have to spend only half of a day on site for every 14 days the physician assistant practices.

Easing restrictions on physician assistants, who have more than two years of postgraduate study, is lauded as an affordable way to improve care for residents who are geographically isolated or see long waits at understaffed clinics.
"Allowing physician-PA teams to tailor medical care according to the needs of their patients and communities can only lead to better access to care in rural and underserved areas," said Paul Winter, a physician assistant at Missouri Baptist Hospital and president of the Missouri Academy of Physician Assistants.

The legislation is breathing life into the struggling Faith clinic in Branson, which plans to use grants from the Missouri Foundation for Health and the CoxHealth Foundation to pay a physician assistant to staff the clinic full time.

"This is going to give us the opportunity to have someone in there who can take care of a high number of patients without having to have a physician there" two-thirds of the time, said Tallon, who also serves as the clinic's board chairman.

Physician assistants can perform physical examinations, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret lab tests, prescribe most medications, perform procedures, assist in surgery, and provide patient education and counseling. The supervising doctor outlines their duties based on experience and skills. They are nationally certified and state-licensed.

Physician assistants have a bachelor's degree and complete a physician assistant training program, which averages 27 months and includes 2,000 hours of clinical work in different specialties such as pediatrics and psychiatry. Primary care doctors have more than 15,000 hours of clinical training.

The Missouri State Medical Association, along with other state doctors' groups, supported easing supervision on physician assistants.

"We need to be able to get high quality medical care to these remote areas with a low volume of patients and no doctors," said Dr. Stevan Whitt, chief medical officer for the University of Missouri Health System, who testified in favor of the law. Physician assistants can staff satellite clinics, make house calls, visit nursing homes or make hospital rounds.

By 2015, the Association of American Medical Colleges predicts a national shortage of 33,100 primary care physicians because medical students are choosing other specialties with better pay and hours, and older primary care physicians are retiring.

These much-needed providers, however, leave Missouri in droves. The state has two physician assistants training programs: at St. Louis University and Missouri State University in Springfield. Half of the graduates go to states with fewer restrictions and more jobs, university officials say.

Missouri has only 11 physician assistants per 100,000 residents, compared to the U.S. rate of 24, according to a recent report by the Missouri Foundation for Health, an independent philanthropy working to improve access to health care. Only three states have lower rates.

"That's just fewer providers overall to take care of Missouri residents," said Caroline Chang, an assistant professor in SLU's department of physician assistant education. "We're hoping that this new legislation is going to vastly improve that problem in our state."
In urban areas, clinics serving the uninsured and Medicaid patients have a hard time attracting primary care doctors because of the pay.

Dr. Robert Taxman works with two physician assistants at an urgent care center on Delmar Boulevard operated by St. Louis ConnectCare, a network of specialty providers serving those lacking insurance. He sees hiring more physician assistants as an affordable solution to treating a patient population that has doubled over the past few months.

"We see the trend as only likely to increase over time. The more patients you have, the more caregivers you need to take care of them, and when the physician is overloaded, the quality of care drops," Taxman said.

Physician groups, however, have not always been supportive of easing restrictions on physician assistants. Doctors are feeling pressure from the Affordable Care Act, which stresses prevention and better management of chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease through a team approach. Reimbursements to hospitals will be based on health outcomes.

"Our regional health care system will be penalized for not doing things to keep people healthier ..," said Whitt with the University of Missouri Health System. "Your job is also to take care of them before getting sick, which most people think is ideal, but it is hard. So you must take care of people at their site, at their home or in their town, as opposed to our current system, where you come to us in our urban centers."

Physician assistants are ideal for that, he said, especially with the latest advancements in telecommunication. Doctors can easily collaborate with physician assistants and advance practice nurses in remote areas from their office.
Walmart on Campus to open at the Lofts near MU

Monday, July 15, 2013 | 6:09 p.m. CDT

BY Lakshna Mehta

NO MU MENTION IN STORY

COLUMBIA — Of the 10 retail businesses opening at the new Lofts downtown building next to Chipotle on Ninth Street, Walmart will be one of them.

Walmart on Campus is a small-scale version of the regular stores with merchandise limited to basic groceries, convenience items and health and beauty aids.

Anne Hatfield, a Walmart spokeswoman, said the store will open in the first quarter of 2014.

Walmart on Campus stores range from 2,500 to 5,000 square feet, about one-third the size of a Walmart Express. Hatfield said there are three Walmart on Campus locations in the country thus far — on or near the campuses of the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Ark.; Arizona State University in Phoenix; and Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta.

Other businesses opening at the Lofts are International Tap House, Thai Express, Subway, Varsity Nails, Blenders, Fazoli's, Service Noodle, THM Investments and Certified Realty Inc., and Tigers Credit Union, which is open for business now, said Travis McGee, owner of the Lofts.

The other businesses will open between "late August and early September," McGee said.

"We want residents to be able to live, work and go to school downtown without having a vehicle as a specific need," he said.

In addition to Tigers Credit Union, Varsity Nails and Blenders are the only local businesses that will be housed at the Lofts.
New Mizzou Hillel director plans to introduce new programs

Monday, July 15, 2013 | 6:32 p.m. CDT; updated 10:44 p.m. CDT, Monday, July 15, 2013

BY Isabel Casal-Nazario

COLUMBIA — Leading Mizzou Hillel is not a new task for Jeanne Snodgrass, but now interim has been dropped from her title.

Snodgrass started with Hillel, the campus Jewish center, in February as an interim director and was promoted to permanent director in June. The previous director, Brian Mitchell, left because of a new job opportunity in Arizona earlier this year.

Students and board directors reached the final decision after conducting a national search for a new director.

As the full-time director, Snodgrass is looking forward to using her past experience at the organization to work with students she has already met as well as building programs for new students.

For the past months as an interim director, she has led MU students on a Taglit-Birthright Israel trip. Birthright trips provide young adults with Jewish heritage the opportunity to visit Israel and explore holy sites and the local culture.

"I'm really excited. I had a great experience as an interim," she said Monday morning.

The organization already offers social and religious learning events to its members.

"We are currently in the process of introducing new programs — new programs targeted directly to specific student interests," Snodgrass said.

Snodgrass said "getting the word out" is also a priority as director. She hopes new programs will encourage students who have considered Hillel in the past to give it another chance.

Hillel is a nonprofit organization that seeks to provide a space for religious services, leadership development, programming and socializing for Jewish students from MU. Hillel also reaches out to students at Columbia and Stephens colleges.

At Mizzou Hillel, students have a way to meet new people and discuss and explore shared Jewish values, Snodgrass said.
Peter Stiepleman, a Columbia Public Schools administrator and member of the local Jewish community, said he looks forward to seeing Snodgrass transition to the permanent position.

"Jeanne (Snodgrass) brings a blend of experiences to her position," he said.