Hearing students' needs

By Karyn Spory

Max Murch came to the University of Missouri because he wanted to uphold family tradition.

"Pretty much all of my family members have come to Mizzou, and I thought I could share that tradition," said Murch, who is a senior and majoring in general studies.

However, Murch's experience has been a little different. Murch is deaf, and when he first transferred to MU in 2011, he found the transition a little difficult.

"It was very difficult because a lot of people spoke very fast, and I had a hard time understanding what they were saying," he said.

Murch said he could tell people would get frustrated when he couldn't understand them, and he would be afraid to ask them to repeat themselves. However, over time Murch said he has made a "true" group of friends and found increased confidence, which helped to make communicating with the rest of the world easier.

Murch has been deaf since birth and wears hearing aids, which he says helps him to hear "what matters." Murch can read lips — if people speak slowly enough — but relies on an interpreter in class. Murch, however, speaks for himself.

Last year, Murch was one of 22 students who identified themselves as deaf or hard of hearing through disability services at MU. Although that number isn't an increase from previous years, it has remained constant, which is why the university decided to create a full-time deaf services coordinator position last summer.
Barbara Hammer, director of disabilities services, said in an email that the position initially was created to save money as the university had to contract out each time an interpreter is needed, as well as to help create a more welcoming environment at MU.

Angela Graves, who has worked for the past year as the deaf services coordinator, said she feels the position has been serving its purpose well. "I think it's helpful for the students who are deaf or hard of hearing to have somebody on campus that they can go to," Graves said.

Graves' position is two-fold — 20 hours a week, she is out interpreting in classes, meetings or events around campus, and the other half of her week is coordinating services such as interpreters or captionists for the deaf and hard of hearing students. Graves also works with professors who might have never worked with a deaf student before.

Graves said with the creation of her position, she thinks it will allow for more deaf and hard of hearing students to make MU their first choice.

"The deaf world is a very small world, so if you had somebody come to MU and have a good experience, they're going to tell their deaf and hard-of-hearing friends about it," she said.

Murch said he has noticed a change since the creation of Graves' position.

"In the past year, I've seen more involvement and more action to persuade deaf people to come to MU," he said.

Murch ended with some advice aimed toward the deaf but that could be applied to anyone looking to be a Tiger: Don't be afraid to be who you are, someone will be willing to talk to you.
Bradford Research Center holds field day, teaches visitors about organic farming

COLUMBIA — Bradford Research and Extension Center became an outdoor classroom Thursday for nearly 150 Missouri farmers and gardeners interested in the booming organic agriculture industry.

Both conventional and organic farmers and gardeners gathered Thursday afternoon for the first ever Organic Production Field Day at MU’s Bradford research farm. Visitors were given tours of the center’s research plots, where they learned about the latest organic vegetable and grain crop management techniques.

“We wanted to interact with organic farmers in the state and get their ideas and input,” said Kerry Clark, senior research specialist at Bradford Farm. “We also want to share our own organic research and relay what we’ve found.”

Bradford Research Center, located about 6.5 miles east of Columbia, initiated several organic grain crop projects in 2012, which are still being studied this year. The center has been attempting to secure an organic research grant for years from the United States Department of Agriculture, and it won such a grant in 2011.

The grant gave the center about $742,000 to improve organic cropping systems while reducing negative environmental impacts.

“When we landed a grant, by God, we landed it,” Bradford Superintendent Tim Reinbott said. “It’s enabled us to do quite a bit.”

The USDA awarded 23 grants to research and extension programs in 2011, totaling $19 million, but Reinbott speculated that only about 5 percent of all applicants were awarded funding.

Four organic vegetable projects and five organic grain crop projects are underway now at Bradford. But, the opportunity for most farmers to grow completely organic crops is rare. Many of the farmers at Thursday’s event balked at the idea of becoming USDA certified organic.

“We raise organic cattle, and we try to grow our vegetables organically,” said Doug Elliott, a Brunswick farmer attending the event, “but insect troubles make it hard to grow without pesticides.”

Although Elliott’s cattle are raised organically, he said he can not afford the time or money to become a certified organic farmer.
Bob Schrunk and Craig Witteveen, who farm and raise livestock near Stet, also spoke of the
difficulty and expense of organic farming.

“I try to raise grass-based dairy cattle and use manure instead of commercial fertilizer,”
Witteveen said. “I’m interested in learning more about using cover crops to reduce weeds and
grow my vegetables more organically. But I don’t know if the cost of organic certification is
worth it. It’s probably about $2,500.”

“It’s the cost, it really is,” Reinbott said about the lack of certified organic farmers. “You’ve got
to pay a certifier, and you’ve got to have explicit, very well-kept records.”

Actual certification fees and costs vary from a few hundred dollars to several thousand,
depending on the certifying agent and the size, type and complexity of the operation. Typically,
those seeking organic certification must pay fees for the application, annual renewal, assessment
of annual production or sales and inspection, according to the USDA’s National Organic
Program. However, once certified, the USDA can reimburse up to 75 percent of certification
expenses.

Reinbott said the organic certification process takes at least three years for many operations.

While giving visitors a tour of Bradford’s organic grain crops and cover crops, Clark explained
that the federal grant allowed the center to experiment with making organic farming more
economical.

“We probably have more organic fields than most of you,” she said to a group touring the farm.
“But we’re researching so that we make the mistakes and you don’t have to.”

Bradford Research Center’s organic experiments include building soil health and reducing weed
growth. Improving soil health increases the soil’s ability to capture and retain rainwater, which
leads to continued crop growth even during a drought. In order to improve soil health,
researchers at Bradford are testing various methods of no-till farming with cover crops.

When land is tilled, the amount of water and nutrients in the soil decreases, which can lead to
erosion. No-till allows the soil to retain more organic matter but also allows weeds to grow.
Therefore, cover crops are used as a mulch to provide a shading effect that decreases weed
growth. Researchers are also testing which mix of grasses and legumes result in the most
successful cover crops.

“It’s challenging (to switch to organic farming), but if done correctly, a farmer is better off
economically in the long-run,” Clark said. “It can also lead to healthier soils and higher yields.”
Aspen Heights behind schedule; 600 tenants put in temporary housing

MU MENTION PAGE 2

By Andrew Denney

Thursday, August 1, 2013 at 2:00 pm Comments (1)

A student apartment complex under construction in south Columbia is putting up 600 tenants in hotel rooms and other student housing complexes because the project is behind schedule and their units are not ready.

Austin, Texas-based Aspen Heights is making other arrangements for the tenants as their units, which were supposed to be ready by Aug. 17, are finished up. Some tenants are being put up in hotels, while others are staying at Brookside Downtown, The Cottages and The Grove. The tenants are being told that units would not be available until the middle of September.

"We take full ownership over the delays in construction," said Stuart Watkins, a spokesman for Aspen Heights, which is building a complex just off Grindstone Parkway near Highway 63 that was supposed to have 972 beds ready by yesterday. The developer has said that construction was delayed this year by heavy spring rains and a shortage of available labor for a city with several major construction projects underway simultaneously.

Aspen Heights had told some tenants in July that their units would not be ready by the end of the month, when tenants were expected to pay their August rent, but Watkins said that was before the developer had found that some of the units set to be completed by that deadline would not be finished on time.

Watkins said leasing for Aspen Heights' Columbia complex opened in October and the company knew as early as February that it might run into trouble finding the right amount of laborers to have the entire complex ready by the time that tenants' leases began.
The tenants who are being placed in temporary housing are still paying rent to Aspen Heights but are being compensated by the developer with gift cards: Tenants staying in hotel rooms are being offered $400 gift cards, those finding other living arrangements themselves are being offered $600 gift cards and those taking temporary housing in other apartment complexes are being offered $800 gift cards.

But despite the developers' attempts to curry favor with tenants who must find alternate housing arrangements, tenants have expressed anger with the fact that they were not told earlier that they would need to find alternative housing and that they have had difficulties getting in touch with company representatives.

Taylor Vogel, a University of Missouri student who signed a lease to live in the Aspen Heights complex, said in an email to the Tribune that she didn't know her unit would not be ready until about 9 p.m. the evening before.

"I don't even want to live at Aspen Heights if this is how they deal with this huge mishap," Vogel said. Some tenants who have taken to social media to vent their rage over the construction delays have referenced a similar situation that occurred at The Grove, a more-than-600-bed student apartment complex also in south Columbia, when it opened to tenants for the fall 2011 semester. Construction delays for Campus Crest Communities, the developer for The Grove, resulted in 140 tenants looking for alternative housing as their units were being completed.

When completed, Aspen Heights' complex in Columbia would be its ninth in the United States, according to the developer's website, and its first in the area.

Its other complexes are found in the Southeast United States, Stillwater, Okla., and San Antonio, Texas.
MU researcher develops spider bite test to avoid misdiagnoses

By Karyn Spory

Thursday, August 1, 2013 at 2:00 pm Comments (5)

Rolla dermatologist William Stoecker said he sees about two patients with spider bites each month during the summer, but spider bites are rare after the leaves fall. Over the years, however, he has noticed more patients coming in complaining of spider bites when they're actually suffering from other ailments.

Stoecker, who has been practicing for 33 years, said most misdiagnosed spider bites are really staph infections, but he has seen worse. "I've seen doctors and nurse practitioners" misdiagnose "herpes simplex, shingles and skin cancers" as spider bites, he said.

Stoecker said the alarming misdiagnoses made him want a more definitive test. **He reached out to Jonathon Green, an associate professor of animal science at the University of Missouri.**

Green said part of his job is setting up methods to detect the presence of compounds. **Previously, Green had set up ways to measure proteins produced by the placentas of cows to determine whether an animal is pregnant.**

"We had a skill set that allowed us to measure fairly small amounts of these proteins and distinguish them from all the other proteins that are in blood," Green said.

After speaking with Stoecker, Green then applied the same basic principles to detect venom around the area of a spider bite.

"I was very skeptical it was even possible, just given the amount of material that was there," Green said.

Green started with a biopsy approach. "We quickly decided that wasn't going to work in a clinic," he said.
Green and his team went back to the drawing board and started trying a less invasive technique.

To test for venom, Green moistens the suspected bite area with saline and then swabs it. The swab has another buffer added to it, a mixture of salt and detergent to help lift the venom off the swab, and then the material is recovered in a centrifuge. The swab is then tested to see whether any antibodies or proteins that make up a brown recluse spider are discernible.

Green said with the swabs, he is usually able to detect if 5 to 10 picograms of venom is present in the affected area. To put this in context, a nanogram is one-billionth of a gram. A picogram is another thousand times smaller.

Green and Stoecker have had success with their tests and would like to see them in emergency rooms and dermatologist offices. They are seeking FDA approval.
Bill Bradley's land in Crystal City for sale for $8.95 million

CRYSTAL CITY • Rumors swirled for years that Bill Bradley, a hometown hero who played professional basketball, served in the U.S. Senate and sought to be president, would sell his farmland to a developer seeking to build an iron ore smelter in town.

It appears those rumors can be put to rest. The land won’t be used for a smelter, but it could be used for a port.

The 358 acres known as the Hug Farm is for sale with a price tag of $8.95 million — $25,000 an acre.

The listing describes the Crystal City property as “riverside agricultural land,” but it is zoned for industrial use. The parcel is part of a strip of Jefferson County along the Mississippi River, where leaders have pinned high hopes for industrial development.

Plans for a smelter have languished for years. Developer Jim Kennedy signed a lease with Crystal City in 2007 for land off Bailey Road, where the Pittsburgh Plate Glass factory had operated for 119 years before it shuttered decades ago.

But Kennedy’s plans never came to fruition. Now the smelter plans are in the hands of Pea Ridge Resources Inc., a partnership between the Canadian commodities supply chain firm MFC Industrial Ltd. and Overland-based Alberici Constructors.

Robert Niemeier, director of special projects for Alberici, said his group has no interest in the Hug Farm land because the site it leases from the city gives it control to railroads and the river, which they need for a shipping and processing facility.

The Jefferson County Port Authority is looking at the land, said Janice Luchan, the group’s director of operations and development.

“Whether or not that’s attainable or achievable, it’s in consideration with several other locations,” she said.

Roads would need to be built on the Hug Farm property, which was pinpointed as a potential port location in a study, Luchan said.
Bradley declined an interview with the Post-Dispatch, as did Don Weis of CBRE, the real-estate brokerage firm listing the property.

Bradley grew up in Crystal City and went on to play for the New York Knicks and serve three terms as a senator from New Jersey.

The Crystal City High gym served as the backdrop for his announcement in September 1999 that he was seeking the Democratic nomination for president.

Bradley has mentioned the Hug land in interviews through the years. In his 1996 memoir, “Time Present, Time Past,” he wrote that he and a friend bought the land from the glass factory in the early 1970s.

“I keep my share of it for sentimental reasons,” Bradley wrote.

He described the land as the bottomland between the bluffs along the river where he did cross-country training in the fall before basketball practice began.

“Every time I’m in Crystal City, I drive down the alley behind City Hall, just west of Hug Farm, or to the parking lot of the town library, just north of it. I get out, look the property over, and estimate the acreage in soybeans or corn,” he wrote.

“When I bought the farm, I knew I was buying a permanent place in Crystal City. From time to time, somebody shows an interest in buying the property, but I doubt I will ever sell it, because of its powerful place in my memory.”

But he has been much quieter on the subject in recent years. He declined to comment in a 2008 Wall Street Journal story about his land possibly being used for a smelter.

The land is listed in records as the Hug Farm Partnership. Its owners are Bill Bradley and Vasso Fleisher, according to the Missouri secretary of state.

Vasso Fleisher is the widow of Larry Fleisher, who headed the National Basketball Players Association’s players union. Larry Fleisher died in 1989, and Bradley was quoted in his New York Times obituary as saying he was “one of the most effective labor leaders of the last three decades.”

At $25,000 an acre, it seems doubtful that a farmer is the target buyer for the land, said Ron Plain, a professor of agricultural economics at the University of Missouri.

That price is more than double the highest amount ever paid for an acre of Missouri farmland, he said, but added that location of land zoned as industrial becomes a huge factor in its value.

“For that kind of price, they’re counting on some other attribute of it making it worth that much,” said Plain.
Burger costs rising with beef supply at 21-year low

CHICAGO • U.S. beef production is plunging to a 21-year low after surging feed costs spurred ranchers to cut herds, signaling record prices for consumers and higher costs for buyers from McDonald’s Corp. to Ruth’s Chris Steak House.

Production in the United States will decline 4.9 percent to 10.93 million metric tons in 2014, retreating for a fourth year, the government says. Analysts estimate the nation’s cattle herd as of July 1 was the smallest for that date since at least 1973.

Ranchers still haven’t recovered from last year’s drought that sent grain costs to a record and spurred them to slaughter more cattle. While feed costs are now slumping as U.S. farms prepare to reap the biggest corn crop ever, it takes more than two years to raise enough animals to expand supply. Retail ground-beef prices in June were up 13 percent from a year earlier and near a record set in January.

“The drought has really affected the cow herd,” said Tucker Hughes, 65, a rancher in Stanford, Mont., who predicted the number of animals he retains for breeding may drop as much as 20 percent over the next two years. “Some people had to downsize their herds. When you get these droughts, you have to reduce your numbers.”

McDonald’s, the world’s largest restaurant chain, probably will pay 2.5 percent to 3.5 percent more for beef this year, according to Jack Russo, a St. Louis-based analyst at Edward Jones & Co. That’s more than the forecast 1.5 percent to 2.5 percent increase in total commodity costs that Chief Financial Officer Peter Bensen predicted on a July 22 conference call.

While the Oak Brook, Ill.-based company will consider charging more for food, competition and price-sensitive consumers mean “we have less pricing power in 2013 versus a year ago,” Bensen said.

Wholesale beef prices dropped 12 percent since reaching a record $2.1137 a pound on May 23, as the acceleration in slaughtering boosted supply, government data show. Prices probably will exceed that peak next year, said Ron Plain, a livestock economist at the University of Missouri in Columbia.

Global meat prices rose 2.1 percent in June, the most in nine months, while the overall cost of food dropped 0.9 percent to the lowest since February, United Nations data show. Retail ground beef averaged $3.382 a pound in June, the second-most ever behind the record of $3.407 in January, Bureau of Labor Statistics data show. Prices will top the record next year, said Steve
Meyer, president of Paragon Economics in Adel, Iowa. The government estimates consumers will pay as much as 3.5 percent more for beef in 2014.

Beef costs for Ruth’s Hospitality Group Inc., the Heathrow, Fla.-based steakhouse owner, have climbed 17 percent over two years, according to Arne Haak, the company’s chief financial officer. Things aren’t expected to get any better in 2014 and 2015.

Higher prices are curbing demand, with U.S. beef shipments tracked by the government down 2 percent this year through May. The dollar’s rally to a three-year high in July is also eroding the appeal of U.S. exports and China and Russia are restricting meat with ractopamine, a feed additive that some U.S. producers use to increase lean muscle.

Cheaper feed and the easing drought conditions in most places may encourage ranchers to expand. Corn futures on the Chicago Board of Trade are now 44 percent lower than the record reached in August. The USDA rated 44 percent of pasture and rangeland in good or excellent condition in the week ended July 28, compared with 17 percent a year earlier.

“There’s an awful lot of people wanting to expand,” said Steve Foglesong, 56, who raises 9,000 head of cattle and farms 1,800 acres of corn and soybeans about 65 miles southwest of Peoria, Ill. “The market signals are kind of there.”

An expansion would initially be bullish for prices because cows would be retained for breeding rather than slaughtered, said Chris Hurt, a professor of agricultural economics at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind.

It takes about 30 months to boost beef production, according to CattleFax, an industry researcher in Centennial, Colo. Calves have a nine-month gestation and take about 20 months to reach slaughter weight. Cattle in the U.S. are raised from birth on pastures for about a year, when they weigh 500 pounds to 800 pounds, and then are sold to feedlots. The animals then consume mostly corn until they are 1,200 pounds to 1,350 pounds and are sold to slaughtering plants.

Returns have varied across the supply chain. A feedlot that put a 750-pound steer on a corn-based diet for about five months and then sold it at 1,300 pounds for slaughter lost $148 a head on average in 2012 and as much as $306 in July, based on cash prices, said Lee Schulz, a livestock economist at Iowa State University in Ames.

While calf producers made money, many culled herds because the drought parched pastures, Schulz said. About 67 percent of Texas, the largest cattle-producing state, remained in “severe drought” on July 23, up from 33 percent a year earlier, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.