Small fire temporarily closes MU dining hall

Monday, August 26, 2013 at 3:56 pm

A small fire temporarily closed the dining facility at the Mark Twain Hall on the University of Missouri campus on Monday.

Columbia Fire Department personnel responded to a report of a fire at 515 S. Fifth St. at 1:16 p.m., according to a news release from Columbia fire Capt. John Metz. The fire was reported to be in the kitchen area of The Mark on 5th Street, the dining facility inside Mark Twain Hall, he said.

Firefighters arrived on the scene at 1:21 p.m. and discovered the fire had been extinguished by an officer from the University of Missouri Police Department. “The officer was on patrol a few blocks away when the fire was dispatched,” Metz said in the news release. “He arrived on the scene, investigated, and using a portable fire extinguisher from the dining hall, extinguished the fire.”

The fire was in the control unit on a commercial kitchen freezer, Metz said, and damage was confined to the freezer. Firefighters spent about an hour removing smoke and fire extinguisher dust from the kitchen and dining area, he said.

The cause of the fire was deemed an electrical malfunction, and damage was estimated at $9,000. The dining hall, which seats approximately 230 students, was expected to reopen at 4:30 p.m. for dinner.

Three fire engines, a ladder truck and a rescue squad responded to the incident, Metz said. There were no injuries.

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Posted in Local on Monday, August 26, 2013 3:56 pm.
Students eating lunch at The MARK on 5th Street evacuated the dining hall Aug. 26 following a minor fire involving a commercial kitchen freezer.

Firefighters from the Columbia Fire Department arrived at the dining hall at 1:21 p.m., according to a department news release. When they arrived on the scene, the fire had already been put out by an MUPD officer with a fire extinguisher from the dining hall, according to the release.

There was no major damage to the facility except for the freezer that caught fire after an electrical malfunction occurred in its control unit. Damages from this fire will cost the school about $9,000 to repair.

The problem was quickly resolved and there were no reported injuries. In addition to the police officer, three fire trucks came to the scene along with a ladder truck and rescue team.

“It was a small appliance and (the fire was) put out quickly,” MU spokesman Christian Basi said.

Basi said the incident occurred at random and no one is at fault. University officials will still investigate the incident.

“Whenever an incident like this happens, we will always examine the evidence,” Basi said.

The MARK on 5th Street reopened for dinner at 4:30 p.m. the same day.
Test burn on grass for fuel program raises issues

A project to use a giant grass grown for a biofuel under a federal program is back on the drawing board after several problems arose during a test burn.

The perennial grass, called miscanthus giganteus, is being grown in three regions in Missouri and Arkansas for the project after a subsidiary of Columbia-based MFA Oil received $14.6 million in 2011 from the federal Biomass Crop Assistance Program to pay farmers to grow the grass, which has been used as a biofuel in Europe.

During a test burn in October at Columbia's municipal power plant, some of the grass pellets disintegrated after they absorbed moisture and others combusted more quickly than the coal they were mixed with, which caused "large fireballs" before they entered the plant's stoker, The Columbia Daily Tribune reported Sunday (http://bit.ly/1dI3gH9).

"If we conducted future test burns, the focus of modification will have to be, really, on the durability of the fuel," Columbia Water and Light Director Tad Johnsen told the city council earlier this month. "It really didn't survive very well in the environment cohabitating with coal."

Supporters of the project say it is a way to produce a more environmentally friendly fuel while providing a way to increase farm income.

"I think we all hope we can figure this out because this is locally produced, carbon-neutral energy, and it would help the local Midwestern economy if it would work," Mayor Bob McDavid said at the council hearing.

Jared Wilmes, MFA Oil's biomass project coordinator, said the problems were caused mostly by the "age and the structure of the existing boiler system at the power plant."

**MFA Oil biomass hopes to conduct a test burn at the University of Missouri's coal power plant, which has new boiler equipment dedicated for use with biomass crops.**

"We fully anticipate that will be much more successful," Wilmes said.

Newer equipment with a lower boiler temperature and more protection from the elements would work, Wilmes said.

"The thing we’d be excited about looking at with the city is probably more of a dedicated facility that is something similar to what the university has," Wilmes said.
Dick Thien, who helped develop USA Today, dies

14 hours ago  •  Associated Press

ST. LOUIS • Richard “Dick” Thien, a veteran journalist who played a pivotal role in developing USA Today for Gannett Co. Inc., has died. He was 73.

Mr. Thien died Friday (Aug. 23, 2013) of natural causes at Missouri Baptist Hospital in Town and Country, his son, Mark Thien, said Monday. Mr. Thien was a two-time cancer survivor.

In 1981, Gannett’s CEO, Al Neuharth, chose Mr. Thien to be one of five prototype editors for USA Today, the nation’s first national general-interest newspaper that made its debut the following year. USA Today immediately made a splash with its colorful look, frequent use of graphics and shorter, tighter stories, setting a trend followed by many newspapers around the world.

Mr. Thien was described in the book “The Making of McPaper: The Inside Story of USA Today,” as “a gruff, cigar-chewing type who barked like an old-time city editor.”

The Associated Press named Mr. Thien one of the 12 best editors in the country in 1986. It was among many awards he won in a career that spanned more than four decades.

Mr. Thien grew up in St. Louis and graduated from the University of Missouri School of Journalism in 1963.

He worked at newspapers in several states and was a longtime coach in the Chips Quinn Scholar program for young minority journalists.

He also taught journalism at the State University of New York in Binghamton, the University of Kansas and at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he earned a master’s degree in journalism in 1998.

Mr. Thien was a first lieutenant in the Army in the 1960s.

Visitation is 3-8 p.m. Thursday, with a funeral service at noon Friday at Kutis Affton Chapel, 10151 Gravois Road. Interment will be at Sunset Cemetery.

Among the survivors are his wife of 50 years, Elaine; three children; and three grandchildren.
City replaces coffee sessions with ward-specific meetings

Officials want some feedback.

By Andrew Denney

Monday, August 26, 2013 at 2:00 pm

This week, the city of Columbia will conduct a meeting with First Ward residents, the first in a series of public engagement sessions the city plans to hold each month and in each of the city's six wards to help residents learn more about issues and projects affecting their wards and to allow them to speak their minds.

The meetings are intended to replace the "coffee with the city manager" sessions that City Manager Mike Matthes began not long after he started working with the city in 2011. Those also were intended as a way to engage with residents and address their concerns.

Over time, attendance at the sessions began to dwindle, and Matthes began to hold the meetings less often. Additionally, First Ward Councilman Fred Schmidt said the meetings mainly were attracting many of the same residents "over and over again." He said city leaders have proposed the ward "check-in" meetings in the hopes they will attract residents who haven't had much or any involvement with the city government in the past.

"It's always interesting to see new people," Schmidt said.

Schmidt said the meeting will feature presentations from city staff on issues affecting the First Ward, and the topics covered will depend on how many attendees the meeting attracts. He said likely topics will include crime, the ward's stormwater infrastructure and traffic-calming measures.
Among city staff expected to be one hand at the meeting are Columbia Police Chief Ken Burton and Assistant Public Works Director Dave Nichols, Schmidt said.

**The First Ward is the most geographically compact of the city's six wards, encompassing the central city, the University of Missouri campus and single-family residences west of downtown.**

It is bordered by Interstate 70 on its north side, College Avenue and Paris Road on its east, Stadium Boulevard and West Boulevard on its south and Silvey Street on its west.

The 2010 census reported more than 14,600 residents lived in the ward, which at the time was the lowest population of the city's wards. Since the census, though, the ward has seen a wave of new residential development, and not just large apartment complexes catering mostly to student renters.

Pricey loft apartments better suited to young professional types are popping up in the second floors of downtown commercial properties, and loft apartments are under construction adjacent to the city's under-construction parking garage at Short Street.

Formerly dilapidated single-family homes west of downtown are getting fixed up or torn down and replaced, allowing new residents — sometimes aided by financial assistance programs offered by the city and local not-for-profits — to move in.

Adam Saunders, a member of the board for the North Central Columbia Neighborhood Association, said he and members of the association plan to attend the First Ward meeting.

The configuration of the central-city area allows easy transit by pedestrians, he said, but there are portions that could be improved to make it more accommodating to pedestrians, particularly near commercial developments along Providence Road.

"We want to maintain what we have but also make improvements elsewhere," Saunders said.

Because of its relative density, the First Ward faces issues that are somewhat unique among the city's six wards, Schmidt said, but those issues tend to have a communitywide impact, as residents from across the city come to the downtown area for work, education, shopping and recreation.

The First Ward meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. Wednesday and will be held in conference rooms 1A and 1B at City Hall, 701 E. Broadway.

This article was published in the Monday, August 26, 2013 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "City meetings scheduled for all six wards: Officials want some feedback."

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