MIZZOU WORKING ON MEDICAL SCHOOL EXPANSION PLAN

November 28, 2013 11:58 am

The University of Missouri is looking for a building in Springfield between Cox South and Mercy hospitals as part of a plan to establish a clinical campus in the city that would expand the medical school.

The 5,000- to 6,000-square-foot building would house about a dozen full-time employees and would be relatively small because medical students coming to Springfield would be spending most of their time in the city's two major hospitals, the Springfield News-Leader (http://sgfnow.co/18HNj2g) reported.

"Those two health systems are going to be the campus," said Weldon Webb, the associate dean for rural health at the university's medical school.

While planning continues for the medical school's expansion, there's no consensus on how the $40 million price tag for the overall project would be funded beyond what's already being provided by the state, the university, CoxHealth and Mercy, and private contributions.
Of the total cost, $36 million would go toward expanding the medical school on the university's Columbia campus.

"It can't happen in Springfield if it doesn't happen in Columbia," Harold Williamson Jr., executive vice chancellor of the University of Missouri Health System, said earlier this week at a meeting hosted by the university.

Springfield and university officials said it took a cooperative effort to obtain $10 million in state funds for the program during the most recent legislative session.

The $10 million is expected to be an annual apportionment for the project, Webb said, though he cautioned that state funding can be precarious.

In response to a prediction by the Association of American Medical Colleges that there will be a national shortage of 90,000 physicians by 2020, the university has devised a way to eventually add 32 slots to its annual admission of 96 students. In the most recent year, 1,700 people applied.

Steve Edwards, president and CEO of CoxHealth, said his hospital will need to hire about 250 doctors over the next five years, including replacing retiring doctors.

The health care system is facing a choke point caused by baby boomers, born from 1946 to 1964, he said, noting that those 65 and older use seven times more health care than those younger than 65.

Although the University of Missouri School of Medicine is a relatively small school, it leads the state in the number of physicians who practice in the state — 46 percent of its grads stay in Missouri, Webb said.
MU reschedules maintenance on research reactor

Posted: Dec 02, 2013 4:51 AM CST Updated: Dec 02, 2013 4:51 AM CST

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) - The University of Missouri has pushed back a two-week maintenance project on its research reactor because of a disruption in the supply of radioactive isotopes used to detect and treat some medical conditions.

The maintenance was scheduled for this month, but MU Research Reactor director Ralph Butler says it's been moved to January.

Recently, some of the international reactors that supply key isotopes have experienced unplanned shutdowns. The University of Missouri reactor also provides isotopes for medical applications, and pushing back its maintenance project ensures their supply while international reactors return to full operation.

Butler says the school takes its role of meeting patient needs "very seriously."
MU to announce chancellor pick in 'days'

By Karyn Spory

Friday, November 29, 2013 at 2:00 pm

Two weeks after Brady Deaton stepped down as chancellor of the University of Missouri, it looks like the naming of his successor is merely days away.

The UM Board of Curators met for an executive session Wednesday morning via phone. This was the second time the board had convened in closed session in the past 12 days; the prior meeting was Sunday. State law allows public entities to gather in closed session to discuss certain items, such as personnel issues or pending lawsuits.

**UM System spokesman John Fougere said he could not comment on anything that happened during the executive session, but he did hint at a timeline for the chancellor search.** "It is safe to say that the search for a new MU chancellor is nearing a conclusion," Fougere said in an email today.

Fougere said an announcement is coming soon. "It should be in just a few days," he said.

MU officials first hoped to have the new chancellor announced by Deaton's retirement on Nov. 15. At the time, UM President Tim Wolfe, citing the current market and the attractiveness of MU to prospective candidates, said it was an ambitious but doable goal. Wolfe said during an open forum in July to discuss the chancellor search that the university would not sacrifice quality for time.

General Counsel Steve Owens is serving as interim chancellor until the new chancellor can take his or her place in Jesse Hall. Owens was interim president for the system during the search that brought Wolfe, a Columbia native, back to the city to work for the university.
New MU online degree program is focused on veterinary medicine

By Karyn Spory

Sunday, December 1, 2013 at 2:00 am

The University of Missouri is adding another online program, this time in veterinary medicine.

In January, classes will begin for a new online master of science in biomedical sciences with an emphasis in veterinary medicine and surgery, according to C.B. Chastain, director of undergraduate biomedical education and professor of veterinary medicine and surgery.

Chastain said the 30-hour program was designed for veterinarians and veterinary technicians with a bachelor's degree who want to earn a master's degree without having to relocate or leave their jobs.

"We have a graduate program for veterinarians on campus for biomedical sciences with an emphasis in veterinary medicine and surgery and by going online we're able to make the courses easier" for students "to take than currently possible with conflicts with hospital schedules," Chastain said.

Chastain said the online courses are asynchronous, which means they can be taken at whatever time best fits with a student's schedule. The program focuses on the scientific principles of veterinary medicine and surgery, and the online courses will be taught by the same faculty that teaches on campus.

Chastain said the basic requirements to become licensed as a veterinarian or veterinary technician would have been done in the work before the online segment. However, for the courses that require skill preparation, Chastain said that could be done by submitting videos of their skill requirements or on-site mentors in their local area.

Chastain said they've had more than 40 inquiries about the program.

Stacy Snow, interim director of marketing for Mizzou Online, said the funding for this program became available in February when MU announced an "internal grant" where the university took reserve funds from Mizzou Online and asked the campus community what programs they would like to move online.
At the time, MU announced an investment of $2.5 million to launch 16 new online degrees and program certificates. Snow said the requirement to create the new online programs was that they already had to be existing programs. She said the master of science in biomedical sciences fit into the criteria and was then created into an online degree offering.

Snow said as technology continues to improve, the number of people wanting online courses and programs will increase. That will help students and the university's bottom line.

"From a business prospective at the university, it's a way to build more revenue," she said.
The UM System Board of Curators held its last fall semester meeting Nov. 21-22 at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

**Potential Tuition Raise**

The proposed budget for fiscal year 2015 could lead to 3 percent increases in both non-resident undergraduate and graduate tuition.

MU’s budget proposal includes additional fees for the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, College of Education, College of Engineering, College of Arts and Science, School of Health Professions, School of Journalism and the Sinclair School of Nursing.

Tom Richards, UM System interim vice president of finance, said these changes are not without feedback.

“All of the proposals will be getting input from the students,” he said. “The question is whether there will be an actual formal vote or a townhall meeting, but all of them will have some sort of student input.”

Combined room and board rates may also increase at each campus.

A proposal for MU to increase its room and board cost by 3.3 percent, housing by 4 percent and dining by 2 percent will be sent out in January.

A potential Department of Health Management and Informatics course fee of $30 per credit hour would raise $63,000 at MU to update and expand classroom equipment.

A Truman School of Public Policy course fee of $40 per credit hour would raise $120,000 at MU to establish an office of career and alumni services to help Masters of Public Administration and doctoral students.

The College of Veterinary Medicine would increase tuition by 6 percent for Missouri residents and 2.5 percent for non-residents.

The Board of Curators will vote on the proposal at its meeting on Jan. 30-31.
**MU Fiscal Year 2015 State Capital Appropriations Requests**

The finance committee unanimously approved a request from MU for permission to submit an appropriations request to the state under the terms of the 50-50 Capital funding match program in fiscal year 2015, Richards said.

The grant would go toward renovations to Lafferre Hall and the Fine Arts facilities, the business school’s Applied Learning Center addition and a teaching winery within CAFNR.

Richards said MU raised roughly $6.1 million in pledges for Lafferre Hall from donors and is now asking for a match in that amount from the state, which Richards said would result in approximately $12.1 million.

The fine arts facilities received $2.7 million in pledges, and also asked the state to match funds for a total of $5.5 million.

The teaching winery has received $1.5 million in commitments for a $3 million total in what Richards called a “discrete project.”

The Applied Learning Center is an addition to the existing facility at business school, and its total cost is estimated to be $77.5 million. So far $10.7 million has been raised, and a match would bring the total to $21.5 million.

The curators granted permission, but did not vote to formally approve the plans.

All projects are part of the MU strategic plan created in 2011.

**MU School of Medicine Expansion**

The Board of Curators finance committee unanimously approved a request to expand the budget for the MU School of Medicine.

The total project budget will now be $35 million.

"We want to increase the current class size of about 96 students to 120 per year," Richards said. "It’s a sizable increase and drives the space requirements."

The expansion will add approximately 75,000-85,000 square feet to the existing building in the form of three floors on top of the building and a tower in front.

Richards said the discussion does not concern a particular funding plan.

“We are not bringing forward a funding plan right now," he said. "We are just trying to fast track this project as much as we can to fulfill the intent of the legislature, which is to educate more doctors.”
Other actions

The Board of Curators meeting also involved these actions:

- MU will drop full out-of-state tuition rates for online-only students. Jim Spain, vice provost for undergraduate studies, said the online-only student population at MU spans 42 countries, all 50 states and all 114 Missouri counties.
- MU’s College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources was acknowledged for its maintenance of 113 extension offices that support all Missouri counties.
- From 2003 to 2013, MU has increased its student population by 32.5 percent last year, according to the annual enrollment report. During the same time period, the UM System as a whole increased its student population by 27.3 percent.
- UM System President Tim Wolfe said the search for a new MU chancellor is drawing to a close.
- The Board of Curators unanimously nominated Don Downing and Donald Cupps as the next chair and vice chair of the board, respectively.
The Antlers
Managing morality

By HENRY J. WATERS III

Saturday, November 30, 2013 at 2:00 am

Moral police always operate on slippery ground. Since no objective criteria exist for measuring what is too much, authoritarians who would say "no" start from a tricky premise. They will interfere with free speech, aiming to create an "acceptable" atmosphere.

Those who push the envelope never know just how far they can go. Sometimes they go too far. They invoke the wrath of too many people, operating in some vague way outside the limits.

The Antlers, the sometimes hilarious, sometimes offensive unofficial Mizzou basketball spirit squad, reached the zenith of their presence back when Coach Norm Stewart roamed the sidelines. Back then the Antlers were 20-, 30-, 40-strong, filling a highly visible section of the old Hearnes building and too often speaking nastily to visiting players and coaches, using pejorative terms to describe their mothers — stuff like that. They would taunt to the point that Stewart and other moral arbiters of the campus would speak out against their antics, a precursor to an inevitable official clampdown.

Since those golden Antler days, things have changed. They try to hold forth in a new, cavernous, more sanitized venue. Now sparse in number, they do not create their presence of old. A photo in Wednesday's Tribune depicted seven members, still sporting black shirts with large "A" emblems but looking rather lonely, I thought.

Not lonely enough, however, for the University of Missouri gendarmerie, which, for the second game in a row, summarily ushered the tiny but offensive group out of the arena, frog-marching the outliers for crossing that unknown line and leading the Antler "Grand Poobah" to meet with an MU conduct committee to seek acceptable limits.

Having made fun of the moral police, I now hasten to assert they do have a legitimate role. It didn't take a Puritan to find fault with the most outrageous Antler emanations of old. Mizzou should be a welcoming place for visitors. College sports, Antler style, needed a bit of polishing.
But now, when the Antlers are teetering, let us find the golden mean. Let the Antlers learn to be hilarious without being nasty. Let them ditch sex and ad hominem assaults. But let them be boys up to a point.

It would be good for Mizzou spirit if a large and boisterous Antler contingent would show up for every game. We could once again wonder what “the Antlers will do this time” without cringing, anticipating they will be marched out. Both sides have an obligation to make it work.

HJW III
Missouri Athletic Director Mike Alden initiated conversation to censor The Antlers, a famed student-loyalist group that has been ejected from two consecutive basketball games, student government officials said Tuesday.

“We have high expectations for our students and our staff at the University of Missouri,” Alden said Monday. “Our core values are respect, responsibility, discovery and excellence, and it’s critically important that we represent those values every day in everything we do. We just want to make sure that folks are representing the institution with class.”

Alden, speaking at a intercollegiate athletics committee meeting almost two weeks ago, took issue with the group and some of its provocative chants and approached Missouri Students Association President Nick Droege and Vice President Zach Beattie to organize a meeting with Antlers “Grand Poobah,” or president, Emmett Delaney and members of the university administration in the coming weeks.

“It was Mike Alden who brought it (The Antlers) up,” Beattie said. “He didn’t mention their name, but we all know who they are.”

At the next meeting, attended by both Droege and Beattie, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Cathy Scroggs, Assistant Director for Campus Activities Kathy Murray and an athletics representative, Delaney was presented with a list of cheers deemed inappropriate and officials warned if athletics staff deemed any actions “subjectively inappropriate,” the group would be dismissed as a whole from an event.

That list, released by Mizzou Athletics, includes chants “Mister mister sister fister” and “Just like last night, put it in the hole,” among others. Neither Droege nor Beattie could pinpoint the document’s exact origin within the athletic department, but each confirmed its authenticity and said it did not come from team officials.

“Just because it’s not on the list, they’re still not acceptable,” Droege said. “I hope they looked at that list and anything that mirrors those comments are taken out.”

Droege said he offered help setting the group up with university-facilitated diversity training or green dot training. Beattie, a member of the “Comedy Wars” improv troupe, offered help coming up with less inflammatory cheers and signs.
Saturday, the group was ejected before the Tigers’ (5-0) win against Gardner-Webb began. Delaney said some dozen members had just completed an age-old chant, “Scum, scum, scum, go back to where you’re from and die,” a group tradition dating back to its founding in the 1970s. Delaney said the group changed “die” to “cry” to accommodate university requests.

University police told Delaney the group was ejected for “a pattern of unruly behavior.”

Monday against IUPUI, they were ejected with 12 seconds remaining in the first half after the chant “Pelvic thrust, churn the butter, step to the right, cop a feel.”

Police told Delaney afterward the chant was sexualized.

Droege and Beattie did not attend either contest. Most students are away from campus for Thanksgiving break.

“They definitely knew they were going to be watched very closely,” Beattie said. “There was no ambush.”

Both said the decision to eject the group came from event staff at the game and was predicated upon the group’s actions each day.

“There must have been something that staff subjectively determined was inappropriate,” Droege said.

Beyond disorderly conduct, Beattie raised that The Antlers, with matching uniforms and well-coordinated chants and signs, look like a university-sponsored entity to the untrained eye. Though not discussed at either meeting, Droege said he agrees.

“An organization that looks that organized does give the outside perspective that they represent the university,” he said.

Droege said he hopes tensions defuse over the remainder of the holiday and will look to act as a mediator between The Antlers and the athletic department and administration once all parties return to Columbia.

“I really do want to serve as a support for them as they move forward,” he said. “The Antlers have a tremendous impact on games and help our team, but there’s two or three comments that overshadow that impact.”
The path to success is linear, as conventional wisdom has it: You get a good education, make a thoughtful choice about a career, and diligently climb the ranks until you are rewarded with money, power, and personal fulfillment. In truth, life is often more like a slinky, full of twists and turns that challenge you to pull back, regroup, and reinvent yourself.

In his engaging and well-researched biography of Dale Carnegie, Steven Watts tells the story of the self-help guru's roundabout path to becoming one of the most influential voices of the 20th century. Self-Help Messiah: Dale Carnegie and Success in Modern America is both a historical narrative of the rise of the therapeutic culture in America and an inspirational text on the possibilities of reimagining your life at every turn.

Known as the godfather of the personal-success industry for his 1936 bestseller, How to Win Friends and Influence People, Carnegie's biography has often been told as a Horatio Alger tale of rags to riches. Born on a farm in Missouri and raised in a poor, pious home, he was shamed as a young man for his ill-fitting clothes and big ears, until he discovered that his gift for oratory could help him gain popularity and a paycheck.
Yet it wasn't that simple: Carnegie struggled, failed, and reinvented himself numerous times. Watts, a professor of history at the University of Missouri at Columbia, describes those efforts in richer detail than previous biographies, allowing the reader to identify with Carnegie's very human struggle.

Watts shows that Carnegie was a product of 20th-century capitalism who understood the powerful link between selling consumer goods and selling a feeling of importance and happiness. At 19, after graduating from his teaching college, where he'd won awards for public speaking, he became a traveling salesman. After a rough start, he was successful at sales, but after a few years, gave up his lucrative job in the Midwest to follow a dream of acting in New York City. He wasn't a hit in the theatrical world, so within a few years he was selling once more—this time, cars.

That career wasn't the right fit, either. To pick up a bit of extra money, Carnegie applied to colleges to teach public speaking. New York and Columbia Universities weren't interested in his services, but the YMCA offered him an opportunity to teach night classes to adults. There he combined his oratory and theatrical and sales skills to draw a following.

As World War I broke out, Carnegie was voraciously reading the work of New Thought psychologists and preachers like the Rev. Russell H. Conwell, Elbert Hubbard, James Allen, and Orison Swett Marden. Embracing their message of the power of positive thinking and personal presentation, he honed his classes to focus on the importance of sincerity, enthusiasm, and expression as a way to impress others and succeed in the corporate world. His advice—personal presentation matters as much as hard work, and everyone craves recognition—both reinforced the individualist impulse of the American dream and added a modern focus on image and personality, which were becoming pervasive in the age of advertising.

"Personality—with the exception of preparation—is probably the most important factor in public address," Carnegie said. To sharpen it, and to escape the poverty of the Depression, required a changed mental attitude. Like many at the time, Carnegie saw the Depression as a test of the resilience of the American dream.
Scholars like Micki McGee (Self Help, Inc., 2005) and Donald Meyer (The Positive Thinkers, first published in 1980 and reissued this year) have explored Carnegie's role in creating our self-help fallacy: that individual attitude can overcome social factors. Watts does not engage with any such Marxist critiques. Rather, he delivers a generally positive description of the wide reach of Carnegie's practical advice. In addition, Watts offers a nuanced view of Carnegie's role in the American shift from advice literature focused on morality and virtue to modern self-help, with its often more superficial bromides. For Carnegie, both virtue and personality were necessary for success. Indeed, when Carnegie spoke of his own life, he routinely mentioned the "blessing of faith and a sturdy character" instilled in him by his mother. By the early 1920s, Carnegie's YMCA classes had become popular enough to offer his own correspondence courses. But he received criticism for using composite characters in his advertisements and for exaggerating (or fabricating) stories of his childhood to attract audiences.

To present himself in the best possible light, Carnegie went so far as to "improve" his own name. Born Dale Carnagey, in 1925 he changed the spelling and pronunciation to match that of millionaire Andrew Carnegie. Watts attributes that decision to preemptive embrace of the success of the business giant, and also to a rejection of Carnegie's childhood poverty and a devotion to positive thinking (to get the "nay" sound out of the middle of the name).

It wasn't until the Simon & Schuster editor Leon Shimkin attended a 1934 lecture by Carnegie and approached him about writing a book that the possibilities for really disseminating the practical advice became a reality. How to Win Friends and Influence People was written as an action book: Based on core principles such as "be a good listener" and "encourage others to talk about themselves," the advice was taken up by millions. Orders came from theological seminaries and bordellos alike.
A century after Carnegie began teaching the importance of making people feel appreciated, the centrality of self-confidence, and the individualistic attitude that you, too, can be a success if you approach people in the correct way, his courses are still being taught nationwide. Indeed, I assign How to Win Friends and Influence People to my students, and each semester students tell me about the speeding tickets avoided, essay extensions offered, and roommate relationships improved by his seemingly simple advice.

And yet we should see that Carnegie can also be an inspiration for those who aren't on a linear path to reinventing themselves. For young adults, the underlying message of his life is comforting: You, too, can take chances, fail, and pick up skills along the way to eventually discover your purpose.

Watt's historical narrative is also a caution to those who write Carnegie off, as academics often do, as obvious or superficial, and miss the social and psychological power of his work.

*Christine B. Whelan is a visiting assistant professor of sociology at the University of Pittsburgh and the author of Generation WTF (Templeton Press, 2011) and Why Smart Men Marry Smart Women (Simon & Schuster, 2006).*
HIV-positive women participate in MU project

The Associated Press

Posted: Monday, Dec. 02, 2013

COLUMBIA, Mo. Women living with HIV gain strength from photographing their experiences.

That's the conclusion of a study by University of Missouri researcher Michelle Teti and colleagues from the University of Memphis, Kansas City's Truman Medical Center and the University of California, San Francisco.

The researchers instructed women in three urban areas to document how having HIV affected their lives. In small group settings, the women discussed the images. They also had opportunities to publicly display their photos.

Teti interviewed the women afterward and learned that taking the pictures seemed to help them appreciate the present, gave them hope and provided motivation.

The National Institutes of Health partially funded the study. The findings were published in the Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care.
MU program helps people deal with grief after a pet’s death

New program aids in healing.

By Karyn Spory

Saturday, November 30, 2013 at 2:00 am Comments (2)

For many pet owners, losing a companion animal is just as difficult as losing a human family member.

Francesca Tocco, a doctoral candidate in the University of Missouri Sinclair School of Nursing and the MU Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction, understands the hurt that comes with the death of a pet. That's why she's working as a pet grief counselor at the MU Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital to help pet owners and train students at the MU College of Veterinary Medicine how to support their clients.

"Socially, we're at that … point where animals are no longer just utilities, securities or a hunting tool — some people have transitioned into making them family members or best friends," she said. "But sometimes you can't talk as freely about the loss of your cat as you can with the loss of your mother or father. … I'm someone they know will grasp that this is a significant loss."

The program Tocco designed is called Together In Grief, Easing Recovery, or TIGER. It began last spring after the inaugural Companion Animal Memorial Event, which was put on by the MU Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital and MU Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction to help pet owners celebrate the lives of their deceased animals and help with the grieving process. The Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction, founded in 2005, is a collaboration between the MU Sinclair School of Nursing and College of Veterinary Medicine.

Tocco, who has a background in clinical social work, came to MU to work on her doctorate and saw an opportunity to do something after the veterinary medical school identified the need for a grief program. She said MU had a grief program about a decade ago, but once the founding physician left the hospital the program stopped.

Tocco said most of the time clients hear about the program and initiate contact, but sometimes if it seems the owner is having a difficult time, the physician will refer them to Tocco. She is the only grief counselor in the program and said she's talked with clients about a wide range of
topics including how to talk to children about the loss of a pet, how to memorialize the bond with an animal and the difficult decision of euthanasia.

Rebecca Johnson, director of the Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction, said companion animals are recognized as family members. "When we lose them it's a very difficult experience, and" we "believe it's important to help our clients, the pet owners, who are going through this difficult experience by providing this kind of service," she said.

Johnson said because MU is a teaching hospital, it is very important the students are provided with optimal learning experiences. "This is one of the experiences that veterinary medical students, after they graduate, will encounter very commonly — the loss of companion animals," she said.

The program is free to clients of the hospital. For information, email mucvmvmthgriefsupport@missouri.edu.
Missouri ag projects to receive USDA aid

Friday, November 29, 2013 at 2:00 pm

JEFFERSON CITY (AP) — Programs that help Missouri's wine producers and urban gardeners are among those sharing $300,000 in federal funding.

State officials said the money comes from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

The largest grant — nearly $60,000 — will help Missouri State University research ways to make the Norton grape more resistant to fungal disease.

The University of Missouri's Grape and Wine Institute is receiving nearly $34,000 to help wine grape growers make good decisions about harvest and management.

Nearly $30,000 is going to the Kansas City Community Gardens. Money also will be used to research methods to improve production of nuts, berries, vegetables and flowers throughout the state.
Neurofibromatosis patients find support community helps them navigate the disorder

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

MU mention pg. 2

Sunday, December 1, 2013 at 2:00 am Comments (1)

The world spotlight shined briefly last month on the image of a man whose face was disfigured by massive bumps and nodules as Pope Francis embraced him in St. Peter’s Square. The accompanying news accounts referred to the man as “sick,” and social media sites displayed the photographs with references to a man with boils, a skin disease or a condition similar to leprosy.

Few of those sites got it right.

The man has neurofibromatosis, or NF1, a genetic disorder — neither a disease that is contagious nor a condition that can be cured. Yet it’s far more common than other somewhat widely recognized genetic conditions.

“I jokingly say to the residents we train, ‘It’s the most common disorder that you’ve never heard of,’ ” said David Gutmann, director of the Washington University NF Center.

NF encompasses a set of distinct disorders that cause tumors to grow along various types of nerves and can affect the development of non-nervous tissues, such as bones and skin. NF causes tumors to grow anywhere on or in the body. The NF spectrum includes NF1, or von Recklinghausen disease; NF2; and schwannomatosis. NF can cause paralysis, impaired vision, deafness, learning disabilities and attention deficits, autism, seizures and even cancer, though most associated tumors are benign.

Neurofibromatosis affects more than 100,000 Americans; this makes NF more prevalent than cystic fibrosis, Huntington’s disease and Tay Sachs combined.

NF1 is most visibly associated with its namesake tumor, the neurofibroma. For a person living with NF1, one of the most difficult aspects of the disorder is uncertainty about the number of neurofibromas he or she will develop.
Descriptions of people with NF go back hundreds — if not thousands — of years. Some scholars have speculated certain ancient Greek statues and Parthian coins depicted individuals with NF1.

**A VISION FOR LOCAL CARE**

The images of the pope and the man with the bumps on his face are among the more profound examples of NF1 tumors that can also grow inside the body. But the images aren’t new to a small support group that meets at 6:30 p.m. the third Thursday of every month at Columbia Public Library. The group has set up a Skype account for those who can’t or would rather not attend in person.

“It’s a very, very common disorder,” said Christina Thomas, a Fulton mother of four — three of her kids have NF1 — and an energetic advocate of the local NF support group. “Not too many people are aware of it.”

NF1 affects 1 person out of every 2,500 to 3,000 people. Fifty percent of people with NF1 were born to parents with NF1, while the other 50 percent were the first person in their family with the condition.

**At the genetics clinic at Children’s Hospital in Columbia, two to four new NF1 patients are diagnosed every month, said Catharine Harris, an associate professor of child health and director of the Division of Genetics, Metabolism and Dysmorphology within the Department of Child Health at the University of Missouri School of Medicine.** Half the cases of NF are limited to one person in a family; the other half involves multiple family members, Harris said.

Some health systems, including Washington University, have entire centers dedicated to NF. At the Washington University NF Center, 12 or more new people will be diagnosed each month with NF1. Gutmann said research there has led to the discovery of new therapies for brain and nerve tumors in NF1 and NF2. There is no dedicated NF center in Columbia.

A person with NF could see a few or several of these specialists: geneticist, neurologist, orthopedist, dermatologist, ophthalmologist, audiologist, spinal surgeon, psychiatrist, oncologist, nephrologist, endocrinologist, cardiologist, neuropsychologist and neurosurgeon. However, Gutmann said it is important that care be coordinated by a single physician expert in NF.

Thomas hopes the local support group can bring more public awareness to NF, provide a place for individuals with NF to find support and lead to a local NF clinic.

**Harris said MU Health Care offers all of those services and will work with families to coordinate visits with the specialists. But Thomas said that offer has not been extended to her and other families that must go to St. Louis to have all their appointments in one day.**

**Mary Jenkins, public relations manager with MU Health, said large population centers have enough patients with NF that it is possible to schedule a defined clinic time that is a “one-stop shop” where all the specialists are at the same clinic.**
“Although we are expert in caring for patients with NF, we do not have a large enough population of patients with NF to justify a special clinic,” Jenkins said in an email.

Thomas suggested a local NF clinic would only have to be available on certain days of the week or certain days of the month.

“It’s a vision of the chapter and the support group to have something like that,” she said. “We would like to stay right there and have that same quality of care as you could find in St. Louis.”

**CAFÉ AU LAIT**

Thomas grew up with the NF1 disorder all around her. Her father’s face was covered with bumps, and his mother and some of his siblings had them, too.

“I hardly had any friends,” Thomas recalled, adding that her friends and others in the community ostracized her dad or poked fun.

“I never recall asking about them” about the spots and bumps, she said. “I just accepted them for who they are.”

Growing up, Thomas was told the brown spots on her body were called café-au-lait spots — they look like spilled coffee with cream — and that they were not birthmarks. She said no one talked much about the bumps or the spots. Thomas, 42, was a junior in high school in the late 1980s when she was completing an assigned reading for biology class and came across the term “café-au-lait spots” and its connection to neurofibromatosis. She considers that revelation the moment she was certain she had NF1.

The self-diagnosis was confirmed later, and it disqualified her from enlisting in the Air Force in 1994 because NF1 can lead to vision, hearing and other deficiencies.

Thomas is fairly certain her parents knew the truth long before she discovered it for herself.

“Looking back, I feel they didn’t know how to explain it to me because they themselves didn’t have much information on NF,” she said.

The same was true for the research and medical community, Gutmann said.

“Thirty years ago when I was in medical school, we didn’t know how to make the diagnosis accurately,” Gutmann said. “We didn’t know much about the genetic connection — didn’t know how to test drugs, to tell if a promising drug would work.”

However, progress over the past 20 years has been fruitful.

“We’ve seen an amazing amount of progress,” Gutmann said. The mutant genes have been identified, and some treatments that were initially discovered in mice are now in clinical studies with people with NF1 and NF2.
The research can also lead to understanding other disorders common in the general population, including adult and childhood brain tumors, breast cancer, autism, attention deficit, epilepsy and learning disorders.

**HELPING CHILDREN UNDERSTAND**

Christy Ridgel’s mother was certain her daughter was not properly bathing little Ruth, now 7. Ridgel, like Thomas a Fulton mom and a member of the local NF support group, said Ruth’s café-au-lait spots are an early indicator of NF1.

“When we first got the diagnosis, we didn’t know that,” Ridgel said. “The first thing that comes to everybody’s mind is that we weren’t keeping her clean.”

Parents of children with NF1 sometimes hear from teachers and other adults not familiar with NF1 that their kids aren’t clean. That misperception among other children can often lead to another painful reality: bullying.

Thomas said her daughter, Kassie, has come home from school “almost to the point of tears.”

“One day, they said, ‘Let us see your spots. What are those?’” Kassie said near the end of the last school year. “I’m not all that comfortable telling them because I think they’re gonna tease me.”

Being teased, she said, “makes me feel kinda sad.”

Now she wears a button that reads, “Just Ask,” and she gives a ready answer about NF.

“It’s a condition like spots — and they can make like bumps on your face,” she said. Kassie has also been teased about her lisp, which could be related to the speech-delay and learning-delay aspect of NF.

But her best friend doesn’t even ask about NF and the spots.

“She just plays it cool and stuff,” Kassie said.

Thomas has been asked to present information on NF1 to a high school genetics class, and she is looking for a time to do that. Thomas now is a substitute teacher for seven school districts.

Ruth Ridgel was teased in kindergarten and first grade, but she and her mom recently visited Ruth’s second-grade class to talk about her spots and NF.

“They’re still asking her questions,” Ridgel said, “but not picking on her.”

**HOPE RUNS IN THE FAMILY**
Even better news is the result of Ruth’s most recent MRI. Previously, specialists spotted what might have been the start of a tumor in Ruth’s brain.

“They said we wouldn’t see her walk down the aisle” to get married, “much less graduate,” Ridgel said. She is still resentful about the “cruel” way the diagnosis was presented. It offered no hope and set the family up for limited expectations for a good quality of life.

But a new neurologist — Gutmann — reviewed the MRI scans and found no such tumor.

“They said that can happen,” Ridgel said. “We breathed a big sigh of relief that day.”

But they will be vigilant about any changes in Ruth’s motor skills, behavior, ability to learn and other cues.

“With the tumors, it’s hit-and-miss. We don’t know where they’ll develop,” Ridgel said. “We’ll find out more in the next five to six years as she goes from being a little girl to a young lady.”

The Ridgels have three other children: Scott, 10, Roy, 6, and Christopher, 3. So far, Ruth is the only one with a positive diagnosis.

“We’re watching for the markers,” Ridgel said, “but it’s not like an everyday thing.”

Christy and Marvin Ridgel are being tested to see whether they have the gene.

Thomas is a “third-generation NFer” because there is evidence that the gene is a family trait. Her oldest son, Jerry, 24, has a leg-length discrepancy, had spinal surgery for scoliosis and has bumps, or neurofibromas, on his back. He also had some speech and learning delays. Stephen, 13, has abundant café-au-lait spots, some learning deficits, had a speech delay and just last week was diagnosed by Gutmann with a neurofibroma on his abdomen. Stephen also has a form of spina bifida that causes an odd gait. Kassie, 10, has not developed any tumors. Thomas’s middle son Johnathon, 22, does not have NF1.

Thomas has an internal neurofibroma beside one knee and another on her forearm near her wrist. She is uninsured and waiting to find out whether she qualifies for a discount or subsidy to help purchase a health plan on the state’s federally run online marketplace.

She could have the fibroma on her arm removed but fears that she would lose the use of her thumb. She worries that the neurofibroma beside her right knee could eventually cause her to lose the bottom part of that leg.

“At times it feels like I have a racquetball stuck to the backside of my knee,” she said. Moving her leg to go up or down stairs or to get in and out of the bathtub is difficult and often incredibly painful.

**STRENGTH IN NUMBERS**
The ad-slick images of physical attractiveness and sultry models — ironically, some with well-placed moles on the upward arc of a smile — play out on a constant loop in today’s culture. While NF1 sometimes causes unbearable nerve pain, society is capable of inflicting immeasurable emotional pain.

Jennifer Davis, a social worker who serves as moderator for the support group, does not have NF1 but helped get the group started on behalf of a friend who wanted to find others with the disorder. Davis said another woman who attends the support group was told by a customer where she works that she was “too ugly to be alive.”

Perhaps not surprisingly, her friend — the group’s official founder — preferred to stay home and to limit interaction with others. But Davis would not let her friend hide herself.

“She consistently wanted to be invisible,” Davis said. “I found that intolerable. That’s not an OK way to live.”

The online Neurofibromatosis Network Support Community provides a daily digest of posts ranging from questions about the latest treatments to humor and games. Recently, one young woman in the Philippines said she was going to end her life to end the pain of humiliation. She was a schoolteacher and was being mercilessly teased by her students. Hundreds of others begged and pleaded with the young woman to reconsider. The woman eventually let the online community know their words and encouragement — and similar stories — changed her mind.

The local support group is a place where people with NF1 can discover “they’re not alone,” Thomas said.

Gutmann also encourages support groups. One key to living with NF1 is to find the support of others and become “a community of well-resourced individuals,” he said. “Just because you’re given a diagnosis doesn’t mean that it should define you.”

Thomas, who is active in Fulton’s Cornerstone Apostolic Church, is especially interested in connecting with those who were recently diagnosed or fear the future.

“We want everybody who gets a new diagnosis to know that we’re normal. We’re not freaks,” she said, repeating: “You can have a normal life. You can have a productive life.”

Thomas also repeats a saying that’s popular in the NF community.

“I have NF,” she said, “but NF doesn’t have me.”
Roy Ferguson takes a deep breath as he turns the doorknob to his teenage daughter’s bedroom. He doesn’t come in here unless he has to.

The room is spotless. The four-poster bed is made, the purple comforter pulled tight under two fluffy pink pillows. A picture of his daughter, Emily, and two friends in gingerbread man costumes sits on a white desk. On top of the dresser is a framed red varsity volleyball jersey for Kirkwood High. He is surrounded by memories.

“You know, Em got off easy,” Ferguson says later. “It’s the people who got left behind who suffer.”

Emily was 19, a sophomore at the University of Missouri-Columbia, when she died Dec. 7, 2012. After a night of heavy drinking, she drove the wrong way on Interstate 70 and collided with a delivery truck. Her blood-alcohol level was three times the legal limit.

Nearly a year later, Ferguson, 53, is struggling with Emily’s death. He hasn’t stopped feeling that he failed as a father, even as he is still raising his 17-year-old son, Sam, Emily’s brother. He is divorced from Emily’s mom, Susan Fauser, who declined to comment for this story. He knew his daughter wasn’t perfect. He also thought she knew better. Since she died, Ferguson has promised himself that he would live a life that honored her. He’s still trying to figure out how.

He started a foundation in her memory called 4emily.org, which intends to use social media to reduce the risks of college drinking. Four out of five college students drink, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. He hopes to reach some of these students in a presentation he’s giving at MU about the foundation. First, he needs to pick out some photos of his daughter. He wants the students to see that, just like Emily, they aren’t invincible. Ferguson settles on 52 images — Emily in her Brownie uniform, Emily falling off her bike and Emily dressing up as a nerd at a party. And then the 53rd: Emily’s grave.

**FINAL HOURS**

The night of Dec. 6 remains a blur. Emily’s best friends Shay McAlister and Kelly Donovan, now both 21, struggle to piece it together. The next morning, Emily planned to drive home to Kirkwood to study for finals, but she first went to a sorority Christmas party with her best friends. Shay and Kelly can recall only assorted images: drinking vodka and juice at the “pregame,” a standard college gathering to imbibe before a party; listening to a playlist of rap and pop music and taking shots of Burnett’s, a flavored vodka.
Sometime before 10 p.m. that night, Emily texted her brother, “Already hammered. I haven’t eaten at all today so it’s bound to be bad. Also did awful on my accounting final. Drinking my sorrows away.” He replied: “Ehhh good luck.”

At the bar where the party was held, the women danced, caught up with friends and had a few more drinks. Eventually, Shay and Kelly became separated from Emily. They weren’t concerned, knowing that she was with other friends. Emily could have ridden a bus back to Greektown, a section of campus where most fraternity and sorority houses are located. Ferguson thinks his daughter might be alive if she had. Instead, Emily probably walked more than half a mile from the bar to her favorite fraternity.

Emily had been drinking since she was a junior in high school. It was something she and her dad fought about. Ferguson remembers that ever since she was young, Emily had a large circle of friends. She told her dad she was going to drink if her friends were.

Emily got a ride from the fraternity back to Shay’s sorority house, where she planned to spend the night. It was just after 1 a.m., and she didn’t know the door code. She called Shay around 1:30 a.m. and again 40 minutes later.

As she recalls that night, Shay slumps down as if a weight is pushing on her shoulders. “This is what kind of sucks,” she says. Shay met a guy at the fraternity, so she spent a few hours dancing with him and didn’t check her phone.

Meanwhile, back at her sorority house, Kelly realized she hadn’t heard from Emily. She texted her around 2 a.m. “Emily? Did you get home OK?” No response. She texted her again around 3:30 a.m. “Emily?” She assumed Emily had gone to bed.

Shay got home around 4 a.m. and fell asleep.

**THE ACCIDENT**

Emily’s father believes she felt emboldened enough by the alcohol to drive home that morning instead of waiting until later that day. She had driven to Kirkwood dozens of times before, but this was different. It was past 2 a.m., and she had a 0.254 blood-alcohol level. (The legal limit is 0.08.) Her dad thinks Emily drove at least 30 miles down Interstate 70 before she realized her books were still in Columbia.

She pulled off somewhere after mile marker 161 in rural Callaway County and turned around. Investigators believe Emily made a U-turn and drove back down the off ramp. Instead of driving in the westbound lanes toward Columbia, she was driving in the eastbound lanes toward St. Louis. Emily, in her silver Nissan XTerra SUV, was driving the wrong direction.

Dan DeLuca, a veteran FedEx driver, spotted the SUV traveling the same direction he was on the opposite side of the divided highway. He flashed his brights and honked his horn. DeLuca kept pace with the vehicle for 10 miles. He called 911 twice and begged the operator to send help. At 3 a.m., just before a curve in the road, a white Morey’s Seafood delivery truck headed toward Emily.
Both vehicles were traveling about 65 mph, according to police, when they collided head-on. The SUV spun down the asphalt. Flames engulfed the truck. The truck’s driver, Charles Mills II of St. Peters, jumped onto the grass shoulder.

DeLuca saw the fireball, pulled over and ran across the median. The SUV looked like a smashed sardine can. He saw the empty driver’s seat bent into an S. The engine lay 61 feet away.

DeLuca looked around for survivors. He noticed a figure lying beneath two white crosses already placed on the shoulder. Mills had landed between them. Emily was on the road nearby, having been ejected from her vehicle. She was pronounced dead at 3:17 a.m.

Hours later, Ferguson awoke to the sound of a knock on the red front door of his Kirkwood home. He opened it to find two state troopers. Ferguson’s mind raced. Sam had just started driving. Emily was in Columbia. The troopers told him someone had crashed a vehicle registered in his name at Mile 151.4 on Interstate 70. The driver had Emily’s cellphone and ID.

After the accident, Mills, 39, was taken to University Hospital in Columbia with serious injuries, according to police. His attorney later said Mills would have no comment. Emily was carried on her father’s insurance, which means the potential liability for Mills’ injuries transfers to Ferguson and his insurance company. No lawsuit has been filed, but any settlement could take years.

SEARCH FOR ANSWERS

Ferguson arrived at MU’s Ellis Auditorium in Columbia just after 7:35 p.m. on Oct. 29. The mostly female audience in the 243-seat auditorium was standing room only, just as Emily’s funeral back home had been months earlier. This would be Ferguson’s first public speech since he gave his daughter’s eulogy. He walked through the doors wearing a camel-colored suit jacket, a white button-down and blue jeans. Shay and Kelly sat in the front row.

“You know, this is about Emily, who was, um, a pretty fun-loving person, so please smile and help me get through this,” he said, looking at Shay and Kelly.

After Emily died, Ferguson spent months trying to understand what happened. He told the audience that he obtained the police reports and bought books about the college drinking culture. He met privately with the university chancellor and other school officials. Ferguson also tried to forget, turning his energies to extremes such as snowboarding down a mountain and training with a mixed martial arts fighter.

Now, at the suggestion of a school official, he was standing in front of a crowd talking about his daughter. As he went through the pictures he had carefully selected, Ferguson explained how community members donated money to Mothers Against Drunk Driving and a fraternity held a charity event in Emily’s name. But he didn’t feel like it was enough.

MU is considered to have one of the best alcohol prevention programs in the country, according to the National College Health Improvement Program. The university offers a sober driving service, STRIPES, and a comprehensive campaign to promote safe and responsible drinking. But, as Ferguson learned from the school’s Wellness Resource Center, each year one to four students die from alcohol-related driving accidents.
Ferguson hopes to change these statistics through 4emily.org and its social media competition. He remembers that Emily was always tied in to what her friends were doing through tweets and texts. If the standard presentations and interventions weren’t effective in changing the college drinking culture, Ferguson hoped a social media approach could be. He asked the audience, full of students who seem to be in constant connection with their social networks, to help him devise an app or device that could address the risks of college drinking. The winner of the competition would receive $2,500.

“It saddens me that so much of what was Emily is gone now, which is natural if you think about anybody who’s been dead for a period of time,” he said later. “You know: her cellphone, her car, her bank account, her clothes just slowly go away. I’m hoping this might have some enduring legacy for her.”

A year after her death, Emily’s friends have started to forget what she looked like. They can’t remember how tall she was, whether it was 5 feet 3 or 5 feet 5. They debate whether her eyes, which were big and captivating in the iPhone selfies she took, were blue or bright green. But they still remember the way she made them feel. By helping promote the foundation, they feel like they’re paying tribute both to Emily and to her dad, who used to load up his minivan with their pink pillows for weekend visits to his house when they felt homesick.

This desire to remember is also why her friends sometimes still talk about Emily in the present tense. The way she smiles. The way she laughs. And then they correct themselves. The way she laughed.

After the presentation, dozens of students waited to talk to Ferguson. Shay stood toward the back of the line. She gave him a long hug when she reached him. “I know that wasn’t easy,” she told him. “I’m so proud of you. I’ll see you sometime soon.” Shay left. The crowd dispersed. Ferguson packed up his bag. He faced the drive back to Kirkwood. It was a drive he had made many times, but this time was different. This time, he was alone.
Several events scheduled in conjunction with World AIDS Day

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Saturday, November 30, 2013 at 2:00 am

Five local organizations have teamed up to sponsor several events next week in conjunction with World AIDS Day, which is tomorrow.

The events culminate at 6 p.m. Thursday with the presentation of "A Boy, A Girl and A Virus," at the University of Missouri Bond Life Sciences building. An HIV-positive man and his girlfriend, who is not infected with HIV, will share their story.

Andrea Waner, public information officer for the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services, said the program will be sponsored by the health department, Rain, Trail to the Cure, the Bond Life Sciences Center, and MU's Sexual Health Advocate Peer Education, or SHAPE.

The program features Shawn, a hemophiliac who contracted HIV after receiving HIV-positive blood during a blood transfusion at the age of 7, and Gwenn, an HIV activist. The couple will tell their story about falling in love and using their relationship as a platform to talk about the issues of safer sex, intimacy and medical realities of HIV.

Waner said the presentation is done "in a relaxed and funny manner."

Other events connected to World Aids Day include three options for free walk-in AIDS testing — from 9 a.m. to noon Monday at the local health department, 1005 W. Worley St.; 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Wednesday at the MU Student Center, room 2206, 901 Rollins Road; and 1 to 4 p.m. Thursday at the health department. A candlelight vigil is planned for 5:30 p.m. Monday at Broadway and Ninth Street.
MU team vies for final spot in PricewaterhouseCoopers tax competition

Facebook voting will determine last entrant.

By Karyn Spory

Sunday, December 1, 2013 at 2:00 am

A team of students from the University of Missouri Trulaske College of Business is hoping that a "Hunger Games"-themed video will help ensure the odds are ever in their favor of making it to the finals of a PricewaterhouseCoopers tax challenge competition.

Last month, team Green Machine — Xiaoke "Jessica" Cui and Megan Libbert, both graduate accountancy students; Hai Kim, a senior accountancy major; Kenny Cygeirt, a junior business administration major; and Hanna Ingram, a freshman business major — competed against teams from other UM System campuses in Challenge, PricewaterhouseCoopers' tax competition.

Their winning presentation was recorded and sent to a panel of judges who selected finalists, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers' website.

The judges selected four finalists — teams from the University of Delaware, the University of Florida, the University of Southern California and the University of Virginia — and left the fifth finalist spot to be determined by a vote on Facebook. Green Machine, the MU team, is up against other semifinalists — teams from the University of Bentley in Waltham, Mass., and the University of Georgia.

Cui said more than 4,000 students from 89 universities competed in the Challenge, where students have to come up with solutions for real-world tax policy issues. Cui said this year's scenario involved a fictional Northeastern state that is dealing with plummeting fuel tax revenue. Governments use fuel tax revenue to pay for maintenance and repairs of roads and other infrastructure, and many are seeing revenue decline.

The teams have to come up with solutions. Kim said he would not offer details of his team's solution because he hopes to present it in the finals of the competition in Washington, D.C., next month.

"It's been at least a decade since a Mizzou team has made it this far in this competition, so it's something that will be really good for the university … and of course the team has worked so
hard and it's great seeing hard work rewarded," said Rachel Wilson, professor of accountancy and the faculty advisor for the team.

Wilson said this was the first time PricewaterhouseCoopers has let the public pick a finalist.

"I think it's an interesting idea," she said, adding that opening it up on social media might get more schools to participate in the future. "I think this is also a good lesson to the students how important social media is and how to utilize your contacts and your network."

Each of the semifinalist teams submitted a one-minute video. As of last night, MU had 7,944 votes. Bentley had 7,400 votes, and Georgia had 851 votes. Voting is taking place through Dec. 8.
Downtown businesses see benefit of MU football success

By Alan Burdziak

Saturday, November 30, 2013 at 2:00 am

Although some downtown bars and restaurants are expecting only slight increases in Mizzou football-related sales over last year, there is one thing that has grown exponentially with the team's 10-1 record: excitement.

There was a lot of hype when the University of Missouri moved from the Big 12 to the Southeastern Conference before the 2012 season. The SEC was said to have more fans who would travel to Columbia and spend money in bars, restaurants and hotels. After a promising start — Georgia fans flocked to town for the Tigers first SEC home game — excitement faded somewhat as the team went 2-6 in SEC play.

This year, however, the Tigers have a 6-1 record in the SEC and are aiming for the SEC title. That equals excitement but not necessarily more sales flowing into downtown establishments.

"I think they overhyped it a little bit," said Rusty Walls, manager and co-owner of The Heidelberg Restaurant.

Homecoming weekend is always the busiest time of the year, he said, because of the influx of alumni. What's more important, he said, is how well the football team is doing. "Especially at the end of the year, it makes a big difference if you're winning or not," Walls said.

There are myriad factors that contribute to the crowds and sales on football game days, said Doug Stockton, manager of Quinton's Bar & Deli: weather, the opponent and the Tigers' record, among others. He said he expects more excitement today but not necessarily more cash changing hands when he compares this year's sales to last year's.

"I think it's the excitement that builds from a winning program," Stockton said, "just the frenziness of the crowds, how early they get here, how late they stay."

Although Toby Epstein, general manager at Shakespeare's Pizza on Ninth Street, expects sales to be up compared to last year, he said it is on pace with normal year-to-year averages. The popular pizza place is always packed on football game days, he said.
"We can only make so many pizzas," Epstein said. "We can only fit so many people in here."

Fans from SEC schools have been spotted around town in varying numbers since late August 2012. Last year, Georgia fans invaded Shakespeare's the night before the game, Epstein said. This year, South Carolina and Florida fans accounted for the largest visiting crowds, said Rick Robertson, owner of Booches.

When Georgia came to Columbia in 2012, it was the biggest weekend Booches has ever had, Robertson said, but he added that a winning team does more for sales. "That helps more than anything," he said.

Dallas resident and Texas A&M graduate David Hamilton was at Shakespeare's last night with his wife and twin daughters — one a freshman at A&M and the other at MU. He and his wife, Julie, have traveled to Columbia and College Station, Texas, several times this year.

The success of both teams makes today's matchup meaningful, Julie Hamilton said. "Both teams have great reputations and both kind of made names for themselves in the SEC," she said.
We keep coming up with ways to get ourselves in trouble with the things we post online.

In recent months, we’ve watched a local community college student get arrested after posting what was seen as a threatening comment about her school’s financial aid office. Another local man was charged with making a terrorist threat after authorities saw no humor in Twitter posts containing references to the World Series and bombs. And then there was the Michigan woman who lost her job and received death threats after posting images of herself dressed as a Boston Marathon bombing victim for Halloween.

Tasteless? Sure. But are these punishable offenses? And where do we draw the line between free speech and our society’s desire to feel safe and unoffended?

It’s easiest, perhaps, to examine the safety aspect of the equation, since we have laws designed to tell police and prosecutors when to go after those who use the Internet to make a threat. Only, it’s a little like the pornography debate — where the definition varies, based on who’s doing the watching.

That ambiguity opens the door for overreaction when it comes to policing what we say and do online, said Michael Carroll, director of the program on Information Justice and Intellectual Property at American University’s College of Law.

“There’s a lot of interpretation that has to take place,” Carroll said. “It’s hard to interpret a tweet. 140 characters doesn’t give you a lot to go on.”

And yet that’s exactly what police are asked to do when they see a tweet by someone who might just be blowing off steam or expressing dark humor — both hallmarks of free expression.

“People should be provocative. You get a lot of hate speech. You see suggestions to do things that are anatomically impossible,” Carroll said. “That’s what living in a free speech society means. You’ve got to be able to roll with it.”

A TRUE THREAT

There’s a fuzzy gray line sitting between a frustrated outburst and what’s considered a true threat. Deciding when someone has crossed that line is one of the tougher challenges faced by police in this digital world.
From a legal perspective, it basically comes down to whether a reasonable person would perceive a threat as real.

“Is it credible? Does it put a person in fear for their life or physical well being?” said Dan Isom, former St. Louis police chief and now a professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. “It is somewhat subjective.”

Isom and others say a threatening comment, taken by itself, shouldn’t be enough to land someone in jail. It’s more about context and past behavior.

Consider one of the nation’s first cases involving an Internet threat. It took place in Florida in 2000, when Michael Ian Campbell, 18, was sentenced to four months in prison for threatening Columbine High School — the site of a mass shooting several months earlier.

The judge reportedly made it clear in sentencing that he wanted the case to serve as a deterrent to others. But it didn’t help Campbell’s case when prosecutors offered evidence that he’d made another threat by telephone some 20 months before the Columbine rant, in which he warned he would “finish what begun.”

Yet even without that earlier threat, Isom said it would be difficult to disregard that sort of inflammatory comment.

“Based on what’s been happening, we have to take any type of threat seriously,” he said.

UMSL’s own police department deals with this subject a few times year — particularly around the start of a new semester, when campus tensions are running high.

Chief Forrest Van Ness said the department never had any chargeable threats reported by students, but it has seen a few comments that prompted officers to get in touch with students and, sometimes, their parents. It’s like an early-warning system that helps the angry or frustrated student realize they’re stepping into dangerous territory.

“A few more words here or a few more letters there and it might reach the level where the prosecuting attorney’s office gets involved,” Van Ness said.

And in the end, it matters little whether the person making a threat actually intends to do anything about it.

“Federal law looks at the intent to hit the send button, not the intent to commit the crime,” said Sandy Davidson, a communications law professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia. “It’s like when you go to the airport. The TSA doesn’t have a sense of humor.”

PUBLIC SHAMING

Neither, apparently, does the public when it comes to things like the Boston Marathon bombing.

Alicia Lynch, the Michigan woman who posted a photo of herself in October dressed as a bombing victim, has watched her life get shredded by online vigilantes. She lost her job. She’s been threatened with rape and death. Her family has been threatened.
And all because of a questionable Halloween costume choice.

Andy Sellars, a fellow with the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, sees the Lynch story in two distinct pieces.

First came the costume and Lynch being called out by an outraged online community. Nothing wrong there: “The right of freedom of speech is not the right to speak without criticism,” Sellars said.

But then came the extreme backlash from those who didn’t know when to stop.

“The public should be getting called out for taking that reaction too far,” he said.

Of course, there’s no way to regulate the kind of public condemnation that drives people like Lynch into hiding.

And it’s not a behavior that can be blamed on the Internet, which only amplifies what’s already there, said Steve Jones, a communications professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

“People take a certain glee in shaming other people,” Jones said.

Yet he sees hope for a kinder, gentler Internet just over the horizon. It will come as our children grow up in a world that has a better understanding of the consequences of online missteps that never go away, he said.

“It’s not going to stop their behavior, but it will cause them to reflect on that behavior,” Jones said. “We’re hitting Facebook’s 10th anniversary. We haven’t had this stuff that long.”