Investigation into Columbia fireman’s death continues

Buildings are being checked.

By Alan Burdziak

Monday, February 24, 2014 at 2:00 pm

The Boone County Medical Examiner's Office conducted an autopsy Monday on the body of Columbia Fire Department Lt. Bruce Britt, who died after an apartment building walkway collapsed early Saturday, a spokeswoman for the county office said.

Britt, a 23-year veteran of the department, was fatally injured while trying to help residents at University Village, 601 S. Providence Road. Firefighters were dispatched to Building 707 of the University of Missouri apartment complex at 4:41 a.m. Saturday.

A memorial service is planned for 10 a.m. Thursday at The Crossing church, 3615 Southland Drive in Columbia.

Columbia Fire Chief Charles Witt said at a news conference Saturday that Britt became entrapped after a section of an outdoor, second-floor walkway collapsed. Britt was taken to University Hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Other details are scant as investigators piece together what happened. University police Capt. Brian Weimer said his department closed its investigation after foul play was ruled out based on an examination of the scene and witness interviews. Christian Basi, an MU spokesman, said he had no new information to release this morning on the cause of the collapse. Columbia fire Battalion Chief Brad Fraizer did not return calls seeking comment.

MU is responsible for inspecting all of its buildings. Basi said the complex, which was built in the mid-1950s, was inspected in the last couple of years, but he had not been able to determine an exact date. MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin said Saturday that all buildings on campus and all buildings owned or leased by the university will be inspected and that residential inspections were underway.
MU officials were meeting this morning to determine how the inspections will proceed, Basi said.

University Village is on-campus housing for students with children, graduate students and undergraduates older than 21. Renovations were planned in the late 1980s and 2008, but Basi said he did not have information on whether any renovations were completed. "Our focus right now has been on the students and residents and making sure all their needs are met," he said.

Loftin and city officials, including Mayor Bob McDavid and City Manager Mike Matthes, expressed their condolences over the weekend.

About 75 people gathered Saturday evening at University Village for a candlelight vigil to honor Britt, the first Columbia firefighter to perish in the line of duty since Dec. 1, 1986, when Donald "Hector" Crum was killed.

Weimer said MUPD held the scene until the investigation was over. Since then, MU personnel have put in supports to reinforce the walkway at Building 707.

The university allowed residents to return to collect belongings, and they have been offered temporary shelter elsewhere. Some are staying with friends and family, and MU is paying for hotel stays for others and offering assistance when necessary, Basi said over the weekend.

MU Faculty Council requests two minutes of silence Thursday to honor fallen firefighter

MU responded to Saturday's walkway collapse at University Village apartments by reinforcing all elevated walkways on the property and calling for structural inspections of all buildings owned or leased by the university. MU leadership also asks that faculty observe a moment of silence Thursday in remembrance of Lt. Bruce Britt who died from injuries received while responding to the
COLUMBIA— A memorial service for Columbia firefighter Lt. Bruce Britt, who was killed after a walkway collapsed at University Village early Saturday, has been scheduled for Thursday morning at The Crossing.

The MU Faculty Council is encouraging faculty to observe two minutes of silence at 10 a.m., when the service is scheduled to begin at the church near the intersection of Grindstone Parkway and Rock Quarry Road.

"At the moment of his death, Lt. Britt was assisting MU students in the evacuation of their apartment complex," said Craig Roberts, the council's chairman of university policy, in a news release.

Britt was a 23-year veteran with the Fire Department and the first Columbia firefighter to be killed in the line of duty since 1986.

On Thursday, a procession is scheduled to begin at 8:45 a.m. from Memorial Funeral Home, 1217 Business Loop 70 W. Firefighters and other public safety personnel are expected to join the procession to the church.

In a Saturday news conference, MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin announced that the university's residential facilities had been inspected for safety after the collapse. He also announced that MU had hired a structural engineering firm to check on the safety of all buildings leased and owned by MU starting Monday.

Members of MU's Department of Residential Life and building engineers addressed residents of the MU-run University Village apartments after the deadly walkway collapse.

Frankie Minor, Department of Residential Life director, said the university is still waiting on answers as to what caused the collapse and fielded a bevy of questions from concerned residents.
"We don't have all the information," Minor said. "We want to make sure we're doing a thorough analysis of what happened, but we're relying upon the experts to critically analyze this, to come up with the most accurate representation of what happened."

Residents living in the affected building have been evacuated, but they were able to retrieve essential items from their apartments Saturday night and Sunday morning. Minor said they have temporarily been placed at other campus facilities or in hotels.

Wooden structures have been placed beneath walkways on all buildings in the complex as a temporary preventive measure. The structures were recommended by engineers to guarantee safety and could remain in place for the next six to eight months.

"We're waiting on their analysis and their report to determine what corrective measures might need to be taken," Minor said. "Our bottom line concern is safety and security."

Built in 1956 and virtually unchanged since, the two-story brick University Village apartments were designed to house graduate students and students with families. The MU Department of Residential Life has been considering renovating or rebuilding University Village since 2008.

Residents at the meeting Sunday expressed concern about the safety of their homes, and many questioned Minor about when a timeline of further action would be determined. Some wondered about the future of University Village given its age.

"My guess is by the end of the semester, you'll know what the future of this place is," MU Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Cathy Scroggs said at the meeting.

Other residents were undecided if they would continue to live at the apartment complex.

Betsabé Castro Escobar and her fiancé, Víctor De Jesús Reyes, were among the residents living in the collapsed building and are unsure whether they will remain at University Village.

"I have the same feeling as every resident here," Escobar said. "I believe this could be avoided and something that could be worked on previously before tragedy happened."
University of Missouri freshman accused of rape

By the Tribune's staff

Monday, February 24, 2014 at 3:19 pm

University of Missouri police arrested an 18-year-old student on suspicion of second-degree rape Monday morning, Capt. Brian Weimer said in a news release.

MUPD officers were dispatched at 12:08 a.m. Monday to Laws Hall on a report of a sexual assault that occurred early the previous morning, Weimer said. The victim, who is a Mizzou student, told police the suspect is an acquaintance.

Police located freshman Vincent T. Nuño and arrested him at about 7:43 a.m. Monday in Laws Hall. In addition to second-degree rape, he is also suspected of possession of intoxicating liquor as a minor. Nuño is being held at the Boone County Jail on a $4,800 bond.

Freshman male arrested for second-degree rape

By Mark Kim

MU Police Department officers arrested freshman Vincent Nuño at Laws Residential Hall and charged him with second-degree rape and possession of intoxicating liquor as a minor Monday.

At 12:08 a.m. MUPD received a phone call reporting a rape in the hall, according to a MUPD news release. The victim, who is also a MU student, said the rape took place in the early morning on Sunday.
The victim said Nuño was an acquaintance of hers.

Officers found Nuño in Laws and brought him to the department for questioning later that morning, according to the news release. After questioning Nuño, he was eventually arrested at 7:37 a.m. Nuño’s bond is set at $5,000.

The investigation of this incident is ongoing.

MU police arrest freshman on suspicion of rape

Monday, February 24, 2014 | 6:16 p.m. CST

BY WENDY PENNINGTON

COLUMBIA — Police arrested an MU freshman Monday morning on suspicion of rape.

Just after midnight, MU police received a report of a rape in Laws Hall. The female victim, also an MU student, said an acquaintance raped her early Sunday morning.

Police arrested Vincent T. Nuño at 7:43 a.m. Monday at Laws Hall, according to the arrest report.

Nuño, 18, was being held in Boone County Jail on a $30,000 bond for suspicion of second-degree rape, a class C felony. Second-degree rape is sexual assault with the knowledge that the victim doesn't consent. A first-degree rape is when the victim is incapacitated, unable to consent or when the perpetrator uses "forcible compulsion."

Nuño was also cited on suspicion of possessing liquor as a minor.
WASHINGTON -- The drafting of new campus safety rules under the Clery Act is reigniting some of the debate over what standard of evidence colleges should be required to adopt in campus disciplinary proceedings involving sexual assault.

Education Department officials on Monday released their first proposal for new campus safety regulations to conform with changes Congress made last March to the Clery Act. The proposal spells out how institutions must handle new, expanded crime reporting requirements, such as including instances of domestic violence, dating violence and stalking in their published crime statistics.

The department’s proposal would also require campus disciplinary proceedings to comply with guidance by the Education Department’s Office for Civil Rights, which in 2011 told colleges they must use a “preponderance of the evidence” standard for campus disciplinary proceedings involving sexual assault. The administration said that colleges must use that standard -- as opposed to the higher, “clear and convincing” evidence standard that many institutions had been using -- in order to be in compliance with Title IX, the federal law barring sex discrimination by educational institutions.

Some individual rights organization criticized that 2011 guidance, calling it unfair and unjust for accused students to face a lower standard of evidence. Victims’ rights and campus safety advocates, meanwhile, praised the administration’s interpretation of Title IX and have argued that the lower evidentiary standard is needed in order to combat the problem of sexual violence on college campuses.

During debate on the Campus SaVE Act over the past several years, many of those campus safety advocates pushed Congress to codify the Obama administration’s guidance on the evidentiary standard into federal law. But, at the insistence of individual rights organizations, such a provision was stripped from the final version of the Clery Act changes that passed the House and Senate and signed into law by the president.

The Clery Act is silent on evidentiary procedures but it now requires colleges to provide “prompt, fair and impartial” campus disciplinary proceedings. In defining what constitutes “prompt, fair and impartial,”
Monday’s proposal from the department says that the proceedings must “comply with guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights.”

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education on Monday decried that proposed language as a “bait and switch” and accused department officials of showing a “galling” disregard for the Congressional intent of the Clery Act changes and limits on the rule making process.

Joe Cohn, the foundation’s legislative and policy director, said that by requiring campus disciplinary proceedings to comply with guidance from the Office for Civil Rights, the department would, in effect, codify in regulation the “preponderance” evidence standard that Congress specifically rejected in its recent changes to the Clery Act.

“The negotiated rule making process does not empower negotiators to sneak into law substantive requirements that were debated and rejected by Congress,” Cohn said. “Negotiated rule makers were not elected by the public. They must not replace Congress’s will with their own.”

FIRE said that the department and negotiators on the rule making panel who supported the change were contradicting Congressional intent and exceeding their rule making power.

S. Daniel Carter, a campus safety advocate, meanwhile, said that the proposed rule tracks Congressional intent by deferring the standard of evidence issue to be decided at the sub-regulatory level -- that is, through the guidance issued by the department’s civil rights office.

Carter, who directs the 32 National Campus Safety Initiative at the VTV Family Outreach Foundation and is a member of the negotiating panel, said he disagrees with FIRE’s interpretation of the draft.

Education Department officials, in opening the rule making session last month, said that the negotiating panel was only meant to address Clery Act requirements.

“The requirements of Title IX, including those set forth in the April 4, 2011 Dear Colleague Letter on sexual violence, remain unchanged, and schools must comply with them as before,” the department wrote in a PowerPoint presentation.

Still, even if the department’s rule making is focused on the Clery Act and not Title IX, it would be possible for the administration to establish an evidentiary standard consistent with the one it has said exists in Title IX.

Erin E. Buzuvis, a professor at Western New England University School of Law and an expert in Title IX law, said that although the department’s rule making under the Clery Act would not change Title IX itself, it could possibly elevate the preponderance of the evidence standard into regulation.

Buzuvis, who had not reviewed the department’s proposal, said that agencies often engage in “incorporation by reference” to adopt the standards of another part of law elsewhere.

“If the department were to incorporate by reference [its guidance on Title IX evidentiary standards], which is a practice that agencies engage in all the time, those requirements do become binding and have the force of law.”
Still, she said she believes the Education Department has the clear authority to promulgate rules about the standard of evidence under the Clery Act. The fact that Congress ended up not including such a standard in the final version of the new version of the Clery Act, she said, does not endorse any particular standard but rather leaves it up to the agency to decide.

“I think the Clery Act left the department no choice but to create a standard of evidence,” she said. “It’s just such an obvious question when it comes to looking at what the hearings are going to look like: what standard of evidence is going to be used?”

The department’s rule making panel on the campus safety issues will continue its meeting Tuesday and another negotiating session is slated for next month.

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Barriers among options for College Avenue safety project

BY SAMUEL HARDIMAN

COLUMBIA — The game students have called "Frogger" will soon get a new set of rules.

Two top-rated draft plans call for a barrier down the middle of College Avenue between Rollins Street and University Avenue designed to funnel foot traffic to two crosswalks.

Those options are among eight plans for improving safety on a stretch of College Avenue that saw 20 accidents involving pedestrians and motorists from 2005 to 2012.

The public can review the plans and offer input from 4 to 7 p.m. Tuesday in the mezzanine conference room at the Daniel Boone City Building. The draft plans can be found on the project's website.

The preferred alternatives, called "A" and "B," both include vertical barriers and two crosswalks: one between Wilson Avenue and Rosemary Lane, and the other between Wilson Avenue and Bouchelle Avenue.
Plan A's vertical barrier would be a wall with a wrought-iron fence on top in an attempt to match the aesthetic of MU's "White Campus," according to the project plans. Plan B's barrier is a wrought-iron fence sitting on a raised median.

The design team thought a vertical barrier was the best way to prevent pedestrians from jaywalking and increase safety on the five-lane street, Mike Schupp, a representative for the Missouri Department of Transportation on design efforts, said.

“Most of the design team felt from past experience on similar projects that unless you put up some kind of physical barrier, people will find a way to get across it,” Schupp said.

The two top-rated plans and three others would prevent left turns onto and out of Bouchelle Avenue, Rosemary Lane and Wilson Avenue. That would mean more use of the intersections at University Avenue and Rollins Street for East Campus residents. Three of the plans would allow left turns.

"If we open the left turn lane, it creates an additional crossing lane for pedestrians that wouldn't be regulated by H.A.W.K. signals," Columbia Public Works spokesman Steve Sapp said.

The signals Sapp refers to are High-Intensity Activated Crosswalks, otherwise known as H.A.W.K. signals. The crosswalks use a pedestrian-pushed button like conventional crosswalks, but instead of using red, yellow and green lights to control traffic, they use a combination of solid and flashing red and yellow lights to warn motorists about pedestrians. Each plan, except for one, features the same two H.A.W.K. signals.

Every day, hundreds of students who live on East Campus and houses on fraternity row cross College Avenue between Rollins Street and University Avenue without a crosswalk. Almost 19,000 cars travel daily down the same stretch.
The crossing often involves walking across two lanes of traffic, pausing in the turn lane that runs down the middle of the road and waiting for an opening in traffic to make it to the other side.

Other draft plans for the project include a raised median in the middle of College Avenue to give pedestrians a safe haven while crossing the street; one includes only the two mid-block crosswalks. Another plan features a stoplight and three crosswalks at Wilson Avenue.

The plans being displayed Tuesday are just suggestions and could change based on public feedback, Sapp said.

“We're in the discussion phase still. We're trying to find out how we're going to enhance safety but accommodate the interests of those that live and use the corridor,” Sapp said.

A design team rated the plans using 10 criteria on a low, medium and high scale and then converted those ratings to numerical values in order to judge them against each other, Cliff Jarvis, capital improvement projects supervising engineer for the city, said. The specific ratings and criteria are available with the details of each plan on the project's website.

After the public input meeting, the designers will make adjustments to the plans based on public feedback and present the final proposed design to the public and Columbia City Council, Jarvis said.

Senate panel considers changes to eyewitness procedures
Monday, February 24, 2014 | 11:59 p.m. CST; updated 6:50 a.m. CST, Tuesday, February 25, 2014
BY BAILEY OTTO

JEFFERSON CITY — The Missouri Senate Judiciary Committee is considering a bill that would compel law enforcement agencies to enumerate specific procedures for gathering eyewitness testimony.
The only specific mandates in SB 732 are videotaping most interrogations and preserving biological evidence for a standard amount of time based on what type of material it is.

Beyond these conditions, however, the bill doesn't oblige law enforcement agencies to adopt any particular procedures for eyewitness testimony — but there are plenty of suggestions, such as administering a photo lineup by an officer who either doesn't know who the suspect is or doesn't know which photo the witness is viewing.

Josh Kezer and Bill Ferguson, Ryan Ferguson's father, were among the parade of victims, prosecuting attorneys, public defenders and professors who testified Monday night in front of the senate committee.

Kezer and Ryan Ferguson were each convicted of murder and imprisoned for years in Missouri before having convictions overturned or vacated and being released.

Kezer spent 16 years in prison for the murder of Southeast Missouri University student Angela Mischelle Lawless. He was exonerated in 2009 after a Cole County judge ruled that prosecutors withheld essential evidence.

Kezer is convinced that had this bill been law years ago, he would never have been arrested.

"I'd like to make myself very clear: I'm not here for me. I'm here for Angela Mischelle Lawless," he said. "I'm here because witness identification was misused in my case."

Paul Litton, a law professor at MU, stressed that this bill is pro-victim and pro-public safety.

Litton was chairman of an assessment team that put together a study for SB 732. The task force made recommendations for minimizing the risk of wrongful convictions. Litton said that 75 percent of wrongful convictions involve mistaken identification.

But Kim Case pointed out that because of the current criminal procedures in Missouri — especially the procedures for eyewitness testimony — her four assailants are in prison today.
She was followed by four men on a spring day, kidnapped and held captive for 16 hours.

In her case, a line-up worked. She doesn't want the current procedures changed. She's afraid that important evidence will be excluded in these cases.

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**Dogecoins help send Jamaican bobsled team to Sochi Olympics**

Monday, February 24, 2014 | 7:17 p.m. CST

**BY DANIEL ROE**

COLUMBIA — When the Jamaican bobsled team fell short of funds to go to the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, the team turned to electronic fundraising.

They found support in a cryptocurrency, or digital exchange medium, called **Dogecoin**, and the **Dogesled fund** accumulated the equivalent of more than $80,000.

You're probably wondering: What is Dogecoin, and how does it work?

Dogecoin was officially created in early December, along with the **promotional video** that features the coin’s slogan "To the moon!"

Initially conceived as a joke, Portland programmer Billy Markus and Australian marketer Jackson Palmer needed a symbol of philanthropy and jest to exemplify their vision of the Internet.

The cryptocurrency is characterized by the amiable dog — a Japanese breed called shiba inu — on its face. In Internet meme form, Doge **features a word cloud of intentionally rearranged phrases superimposed on the face of the dog.**

What the canine-inspired coin community lacks in venture capital investors and blue chip financial status, it makes up for in fiscal fervor – constantly finding new mechanisms of exchanging coins and raising money for philanthropic pursuits.
Bitcoin is a digital currency that can be transferred between parties without a bank, credit card or other centralized authority. Here's what you need to know about these currencies:

**What are cryptocurrencies?**
Cryptocurrencies, such as Dogecoin and mainstream competitor Bitcoin, act as an electronic means of exchanging funds. While normal fiat currencies such as the U.S. dollar can also be exchanged electronically, cryptocurrencies have the distinct characteristic of being nearly untraceable.

Luke Besser, co-founder of the University of Missouri Investment Group, trades Bitcoin. He said he thinks the independence of cryptocurrencies makes them an attractive asset for people who value economic freedom.

“I think it’s nice for citizens to have a way to store their money without the government being able to touch it,” Besser said.

**How do they work?**
You can get Dogecoins two ways. You can purchase them with a digital wallet or "dig" for them online. Purchasing Doge requires opening a wallet and purchasing them with Bitcoins.

Digging, or mining as it is referred to by other cryptocurrencies, can be likened to printing money.

People searching for Doge know ahead of time how many coins they could find during any particular dig. Dogecoins exist in blocks, but to dig them up, people have to find them by collaborating with other users. A community thread on the website Reddit explains trading and digging in detail.

Dogecoins can also be exchanged directly between wallets or virtual tip jars with no transaction fee, a popular practice of Twitter and Reddit users looking to tip each other.

**How much is Dogecoin worth?**
Currently, it takes about 1,500 Dogecoins to make up one dollar. In comparison, competitor Bitcoin, the cryptocurrency with the highest net value, typically costs between $300 and $800 per coin.

**What can you do with Dogecoin?**

Internet users can exchange funds in Doge, commonly in low-value sums. Virtual tip jars may be set up to give and receive Doge for helpful information or just good faith. **MU economics graduate student Jeremy Thiele said fee-free virtual tip jars (such as Reddit’s) are one of Dogecoin’s several advantages over dollars.**

“The great thing about cryptocurrencies is that they are easy to set up and do small values,” Thiele said. Dogecoin is also a popular method of crowdfunding. The [Dogecoin Foundation](https://www.dogecoin.com/) uses Reddit’s crowdfunding partner [crowdtilt.com](https://www.crowdtilt.com) to collect large sums of Doge for charitable causes. This month, the Doge4Kids program has raised more than **20 million Doge, or $30,000**, to provide service dogs for children in need.

**What’s the difference between Dogecoin and Bitcoin?**

With a market capitalization of more than $7 billion, Bitcoin is often used as a store of value between investors. Bitcoin is also more applicable in commercial use, with web retailers such as Overstock.com accepting the cryptocurrency.

Bitcoin’s high value is partially due to the fact that mining will eventually be cut off, meaning the coin will gain value with increasing demand.

The founders of Dogecoin intend to limit digging, but plan to allow new coins to be dug up for the foreseeable future. The greater supply of Doge will maintain its low per-unit value, which is ideal for low cost online exchanges.

Dogecoin’s light-hearted nature differentiates it from the negative attention Bitcoin received from its involvement in Silk Road, the online marketplace that conducted illicit sales of drugs, weapons and other contraband.

**What does the future hold for Dogecoin?**
It’s hard to say. While Dogecoin's market capitalization has quickly risen to $62 million since its inception, skeptics note that its comparatively low value and lack of presence in traditional business transactions give the coin an uncertain future. Besser is one of the skeptics. Although he said he doesn’t think Dogecoin will succeed in the global marketplace in the manner of Bitcoin, he remains fond of the shiba inu’s modest principle.

“I like the fact that it exists because people are having fun with it, and I think people get really rich off that too,” Besser said.