Details start to emerge about target of weekend manhunt who committed suicide

By Alan Burdziak

Monday, May 12, 2014 at 1:55 pm Comments (18) Updated: 1:55 pm, Mon May 12, 2014.

Although Columbia police aren't releasing many details about the investigation into a man found dead of an apparent suicide Saturday morning after a large-scale manhunt, some information about him is beginning to emerge.

Zane S. Black, 36, might be tied to as many as 15 incidents of burglary and sexual assault targeting college-age women going back to June. **Student workers found him dead Saturday morning at Trowbridge Livestock Center on Ashland Road after he hanged himself from pipes in a hallway, University of Missouri Police Capt. Brian Weimer said. An autopsy was scheduled for today.**

Columbia police Officer Latisha Stroer said "several detectives" are investigating the 15 crimes that could be attributed to Black but declined to share any details.

Black was hired as a staff nurse at University Hospital in August, Mary Jenkins, a hospital spokeswoman, said. She said she couldn't say much more because of privacy concerns.

"While university policy limits info released on employees … I can tell you MU Health Care employees must pass criminal background checks before they are hired," Jenkins said this morning. Black was a 2013 graduate of MU's Sinclair School of Nursing.

A flier sent to the Tribune indicates Black recently went missing and that his family was trying to find him. Handwriting on the flier from a person claiming to be Black's wife urged people to call her number and listed a number for Black's identical twin brother. The person claiming to be Black's wife put a description of Black and several photos on the flier, which, in typed print, said he was in danger, with the words "of harming himself" written in pen below.

Black rode his bicycle everywhere, the flier said.

Local agencies had never arrested Black. The Columbia Police Department, MUPD and Boone County Sheriff's Department all said there were no records of their agencies arresting him. He
had never been booked into the Boone County Jail, either, sheriff’s Detective Tom O'Sullivan said.

"We don't have any records of dealing with him," O'Sullivan said.

Black is not listed on any civil, traffic or criminal cases statewide on Case Net, the Missouri court system's online records database, nor were there any federal criminal or civil records under his name on the online database PACER, or Public Access to Court Electronic Records.

Police in November released information on nine incidents downtown or in East Campus they thought were related because the methods and the suspect description were similar. The man entered through unlocked doors, raped a woman in one case and assaulted another woman. In several cases, he got into bed with women as they slept.

After police put out details, it seemed the man halted his spree. Then a spate of similar crimes began May 1, with the culmination coming Friday evening after Black fled on foot when officers tried to make contact with him. It started when a woman on Friday identified Black as a man she saw peeping into her bedroom window May 1 in the 2500 block of Bluff Boulevard. Black was seen just before 8 p.m. acting suspiciously near the Grove Apartments on South Rock Quarry Road when the manhunt ensued. Columbia police, sheriff’s deputies, MUPD officers, canine units and a Missouri State Highway Patrol helicopter all were called in to aid in the search, which was scaled down after about four hours, though some officers continued to look for him Saturday morning.

Black fits the suspect description in most of the crimes this year and last: a white or Middle Eastern male about 6 feet tall with an athletic build. Since May 1, a man attempted to rape a woman on Lenoir Street, sexually assaulted a woman early Friday morning at The Domain at Columbia, 3100 E. Stadium Blvd., and broke into apartments at The Domain, among other crimes. Stroer said in a news release Friday that the six most-recent events were related and that police believed, because the method and suspect description were similar, they are connected to the nine break-ins last year.

Shortly after a burglary at about 2:45 a.m. Nov. 3 in the 1400 block of Anthony Street in which a man entered an unlocked residence and crawled on top of a woman, police tried to stop a man who fit the culprit's description as he rode a bicycle in the area.

At that time, police said the man was about 5 feet 10 inches tall and white. The man successfully eluded police that night.
Target of manhunt, who was found hanged Saturday, was MU nurse

Monday, May 12, 2014 | 8:32 p.m. CDT; updated 9:46 p.m. CDT, Monday, May 12, 2014
BY THE MISSOURIAN STAFF

COLUMBIA — The man who killed himself after a weekend manhunt and who police suspect committed a series of violent break-ins and sex-related crimes was a staff nurse at University Hospital and a 2013 graduate of MU's Sinclair School of Nursing.

The body of Zane S. Black, 36, was discovered by MU students in a hallway at the Trowbridge Livestock Center on Saturday, MU Police spokesman Capt. Brian Weimer said in a news release Sunday. Weimer confirmed Monday evening that Black hanged himself from pipes in the building's hallway.

Black's body was found hours after he eluded law enforcement during a four-hour manhunt Friday night in the woods northeast of the 3100 block of Rock Quarry Road. Black allegedly ran from police who tried to approach him after receiving a call about a suspicious person in the area. Black had been spotted near The Grove, a student apartment complex on Rock Quarry Road.

The Columbia Police Department reported Black missing on Thursday, Missouri State Highway Patrol Sgt. Paul Reisch said. On Friday, someone began posting missing-person fliers around campus with photos of Black, saying he was in danger. The flier listed the telephone number of his wife, Brandee Black.

Police called Black earlier Friday after a woman said Black watched her through a window of her home on Bluff Boulevard while she undressed on May 1. They told Black they wanted to talk to him about that incident and others in the area.

Black also lived on Bluff Boulevard. Records at the Boone County recorder of deeds’ office indicate Zane Black and Brandee Black bought the home in 2010.
Brandee Black declined to comment on Monday night but said she was preparing a statement.

Zane Black was suspected in a series of six break-ins or attempted break-ins, as well as sex-related crimes, that occurred from May 1 through May 9. Four of those incidents occurred in the 3100 block of East Stadium Boulevard, which matches the address of The Domain apartment complex.

Police said the crimes, as well as the suspect descriptions, also were similar to a spate of nine incidents that occurred in the East Campus area from June through November 2013.

Black’s Facebook page indicates he graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2001, and he later worked at fire departments in Charlotte, N.C., and Mentor, Ohio. Representatives of the Charlotte and Mentor police departments said they were unaware of any contact with the Columbia Police Department about Black.

Zane and Brandee Black attended Unitarian Universalist Church for a time in 2011 and 2012, the Rev. Molly Housh Gordon said, but they had not been affiliated with the church since.

"Our prayers are with everyone affected by this tragedy," Gordon said.

Brad Johnson, spokesman for the Sinclair School of Nursing at MU, said Black graduated in 2013 and has had no further involvement with the school.

Black worked as a staff nurse in the operating room at University Hospital.
A former University of Missouri football player has been charged with felony rape.

University police say a female acquaintance accused 20-year-old David Sowell of a May 9 sexual assault in his Campus View apartment. The privately-owned apartment complex is used by the university as overflow student housing.

Sowell is a sophomore from suburban Chicago. He briefly played defensive back for the Tigers last year as a walk-on but was dismissed from the football team early in the 2013 season for unspecified disciplinary violations.

Sowell was arrested by campus police early Saturday. He remained in the Boone County Jail late Monday on a $100,000, cash-only bond after an initial court appearance earlier in the day.

Online court records did not list an attorney for Sowell.

Read more here: http://www.kansascity.com/2014/05/13/5020106/former-missouri-football-player.html#storylink=cpy
Ex-Mizzou football walk-on accused of rape

By David Morrison

Monday, May 12, 2014 at 2:00 pm Comments (6)

David Sowell, a walk-on cornerback with the University of Missouri football team during spring and fall camp last year, was arrested on suspicion of first-degree rape Saturday, the MU Police Department said in a release.

Sowell, 20, is being held in the Boone County Jail on a $100,000, cash-only bond.

MU police Capt. Brian Weimer said police responded to a call on Campus View Drive at 11:58 p.m. Friday. A female victim alleged she had been raped by Sowell, an acquaintance.

Sowell was taken to the MU Police Department, interviewed and arrested around 4:30 a.m. Saturday on suspicion of first-degree rape, a felony.

Sowell's first court appearance was a video arraignment scheduled for 1:30 p.m. today.

The university's online directory lists Sowell as a sophomore in the College of Business.

Football team spokesman Chad Moller said Sowell, a 5-foot-10, 185-pound defensive back from Marian Catholic High School in Chicago Heights, Ill., was with the football team during spring camp and into fall camp last August.

He was dismissed from the team for a violation of team rules about a week into fall camp last year, Moller said.

The dismissal did not stem from any legal issues.
Colleges raise questions about sex assault surveys by McCaskill, White House

BY CHUCK RAASCH CRAWASCH@POST-DISPATCH.COM 202-298-6880

NO MU MENTION

WASHINGTON • Colleges and universities are raising questions about efforts by the White House and Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., to conduct surveys on how the institutions handle sexual assaults on their campuses.

The latest friction arose Monday, when McCaskill wrote the American Council on Education (ACE) asking about that organization's recent legal webinar providing guidance on how institutions should respond to McCaskill's sexual assault survey of 450 universities. In her letter, McCaskill said she is concerned the legal advice may cause a "chilling effect on institutions' participation in the survey."

The chief legal council for the ACE, which represents 1,600 college and university presidents and 200 related associations, said her organization was merely giving broad guidance to institutions unaccustomed to congressional inquiries.

"No one was discouraged in any way from responding to the survey, and there was no advice given on how to answer specific questions," said Ada Meloy, ACE's top legal counsel. She said her organization offered the webinar after it had "heard from quite a few of our members who received the survey, and some who only read about the survey, and were concerned about what is happening."

The global law firm, Covington & Burling LLC, which often represents high-profile in high-profile cases, provided the webinar pro bono.

Meloy said it was the first survey that institutions of higher learning had received form the Senate since 2008, when more than 130 received questionnaires about their endowments.
"We have great respect for (McCaskill). and we are very concerned about the issue of sexual harassment on campus and our members are as well, but I don't think there is a basis for her concern that we in any way discouraged" participation, Meloy added.

McCaskill asked for a list of the schools that participated in the webinar so that "inaccurate information" that may have come from it can be corrected.

President Barack Obama recently announced steps to address sexual assault on campus. One recommendation, which may require either an executive order or legislation, would mandate that all colleges and universities respond to a 2016 survey on sexual assault on their campuses. This would be separate from McCaskill's current survey of a smaller pool of schools. McCaskill has expressed support for the White House's proposal.

But Meloy said a survey mandated by the White House raises "unfunded mandate" questions for colleges already struggling financially. She also questioned the difficulty in responding for community colleges, which deal with disparate populations and non-traditional, part-time students.

"I am concerned about whether it is appropriate for a survey to be mandated for every higher education institution, and how that survey would be developed and overseen, how frequently it would need to be done," Meloy said.

When the survey proposal was announced last week, Vice President Joe Biden said that he understood that some schools might resist reporting for fear of damaging their reputations.

"It doesn't matter," Biden said. "We need to provide survivors with support, and we need to bring perpetrators to justice."

Taking selfies seriously

BY DOUG MOORE DMOORE@POST-DISPATCH.COM 314-340-8125

It takes only a few seconds scrolling through Philip Hitchcock’s Facebook page to realize the guy likes to take a selfie.

Those taken in the last few months show him in Berlin, him with his new love, him without a shirt.

Several without a shirt.
Hitchcock is what you might call an aficionado of selfies. Next month, he is staging what may be the region’s first exhibit of the digital self-portraits.

Hitchcock, who runs an art gallery on Cherokee Street in St. Louis, joins a growing group of artists and academics who are investing serious thought to the selfie — even if he can’t resist shooting his own.

“I’m smart enough to know that it can seem incredibly shallow, narcissistic and vain,” said Hitchcock, of his impressive collection of selfies.

But, as he put it, “everyone, everywhere does it.”

That would seem to be the case.

President Barack Obama was seen taking a selfie with prime ministers from the United Kingdom and Denmark during a memorial service for Nelson Mandela in December. Ellen DeGeneres set a record for most retweeted selfie in March after posting on Twitter a photo of herself and a bevy of actors at the Academy Awards.

Last month, Vice President Joe Biden posted his first selfie on Instagram, a shot of him with Obama. And a few weeks ago, Pope Francis walked into a crowd at St. Peter’s Square following a Palm Sunday service to pose for a few selfies.

SEE SELFIES OF CELEBS, PRESIDENT, READERS

What once was an act reserved for teenagers and attention-starved celebrities such as Kim Kardashian has seemingly been commandeered by world leaders.

Still, results of a survey by the Pew Research Center released in March show that 55 percent of millennials — those ages 18 to 33 — have posted a selfie on a social media site, compared with 26 percent of all Americans.

So ubiquitous is the selfie that last year the Oxford Dictionaries declared selfie word of the year. And the video for a song titled #SELFIE has been viewed 103 million times since it was posted Jan. 29 on YouTube.

Self-portraits, of course, are not new, going back 175 years to when photography was a burgeoning technique.

The selfie is the frat party version of the self-portrait. With phones now doing double-duty as cameras, it takes just a few seconds to take a photo of yourself, then share it on sites such as Twitter, Facebook or Instagram.

The latter has proven especially popular because it comes with various filtering options to make smiles look brighter and skin look clearer.
“You can present a glorious life, a glorious relationship, the look of glorious parenting and you may or may not be living any of that,” said Jennifer Siciliani, a psychology professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

What selfies ultimately say about us was a hot topic at the Midwestern Psychological Association annual meeting in Chicago last year.

“We don’t have research on this yet, but there are people who are in the middle of studying it, looking at how people choose to present themselves,” Siciliani said.

Hitchcock says the inundation of selfies in our culture led him to his latest exhibit, which opens next month featuring cellphone self-portraits taken by about 50 people.

Hitchcock sees the selfie as more than a photo.

“It’s not only taking it but disseminating it almost immediately. It’s almost not complete until it’s been transmitted because it’s not just about who I think I am and how I want to be seen but who I think is seeing me,” he said.

**Cyndi Frisby, a strategic communication professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia, said that with selfies, “you’re your own public relations firm and can control the image of yourself.” The photo is often posted to elicit a response.**

“A certain number of likes or comments can translate into a massive increase in self-esteem,” Frisby said.

Frisby admits to using photos to gauge public opinion. Earlier this month, she posted a photo of herself on Facebook taken at a hair salon where she just got out of the stylist’s chair.

“I wanted to know how people were going to respond when they saw me at school,” Frisby said. She quickly got about 70 likes as well as a string of positive comments.

“‘So I must look OK’, I thought,” Frisby said. “And I don’t see myself with self-esteem issues.”

Stanley J. Strembicki, a photography professor at Washington University, started posting one self-portrait a day on a blog five years ago. They reflect his everyday life as an artist, a husband, a grandfather.

He just finished teaching a class called “Cellphones, Snapshots and the Social Network.” The first assignment was to take a selfie.
“The class gets into not only using cellphones to make art but using them as a means of distribution for the artists,” Strembicki said. “What does it mean in the larger context of the selfie movement?”

In addition, he and his wife, Rosemary, a psychodynamic social worker, have taught a class called “The Artist and the Sense of Self” at Washington U.

“On one side, we look at the photo from a visual standpoint and how it is structured, while she would say Freud would understand it this way and Jung would understand it this way,” Strembicki said.

Strembicki is among those that will be a part of Hitchcock’s exhibit at his PHD Gallery.

“The results are absolutely delightful,” Hitchcock said. “Some are comical, others autobiographical, others still are bona fide works of art.”

Art?

Well, sure, says Dan Younger, a photography professor at UMSL. It really depends on intent, he said.

But then again, you can never tell intent from a photograph, he said.

“As soon as I say this is art or this is not, there will be an argument about it,” Younger said of selfies. “I would let people decide for themselves. Is it a threat to the art of photography? I like that it’s out there and flung around.”

For Frisby, the debate over selfies is less about art than prudence.

“For every picture you post, what is your motivation?” Frisby said. “There is a fine line between it being a positive thing to being completely narcissistic.”

What that line is, no one is absolutely certain. Instagram debuted in October 2010 and in its first three years 35 million selfies were posted. As more apps come online offering photo sharing options, expect to see more selfies of your friends.

Lips puckered.

Biceps flexed.

Dressed to the nines, or barely at all.
7 ways pets improve your health

When you come home to a purr or wagging tail at the end of a stressful day, the sudden wave of calm you feel isn't just your imagination. Research suggests that your fluffy friend truly is good for your physical and mental health.

"Pets often provide unconditional acceptance and love and they're always there for you," said Dr. Gary A. Christenson, chief medical officer at Boynton Health Service at the University of Minnesota. "There is a bond and companionship that makes a big difference in mental health," not to mention the extra exercise you get from walks and playtime.

Read on to learn the surprising ways your pet can boost your health.

**Pets may lower your cholesterol**

**If you have a dog, those daily walks are helping to keep your cholesterol in check, says Rebecca A. Johnson, director of the Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction at the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine.** Plus, a survey by the Australian National Heart Foundation revealed that people who own pets, especially men, tend to have lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

**Pets help relieve stress**

Simply being in the same room as your pet can have a calming effect.

"A powerful neurochemical, oxytocin, is released when we look at our companion animal, which brings feelings of joy," Johnson said. "It's also accompanied by a decrease in cortisol, a stress hormone." Through her research with veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Johnson has witnessed the powerful effects of animals.

"One veteran couldn't leave his home without his wife until we placed a dog with him and in less than a week he was able to go around his town," she said.
**Pets may reduce your blood pressure**

It's a win-win: petting your pooch or kitty brings down blood pressure while pleasing your pet. Researchers at the State University of New York at Buffalo discovered that in people already taking medication for hypertension, their blood pressure response to stress was cut by half if they owned a cat or dog.

**Pets boost your fitness**

A dog is the best companion for a stroll—even better than a friend. Johnson—co-author of “Walk a Hound, Lose a Pound”—led a study at the University of Missouri that found that dog walkers improved their fitness more than people who walked with other people. A separate study found that dog owners walked 300 minutes a week on average, while people who didn't own dogs walked just 168 minutes a week. And a study in the Journal of Physical Activity & Health found that not only did dog owners walk more than non-owners, they were also 54 percent more likely to meet the recommended levels of physical activity.

**Pets reduce your cardiovascular disease risk**

Lower cholesterol, stress, and blood pressure levels combined with increased fitness may add up to a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. That's a theory supported by the American Heart Association. In 2013, the AHA reviewed numerous studies examining the effects of pet ownership on cardiovascular disease risk and concluded that having a furry friend, particularly a dog, is associated with a reduction in risk and increased survival among patients.

**Pets may prevent allergies in children**

If you had a pet as a kid, you may be in luck. In a study published in Clinical & Experimental Allergy, children who were exposed to pets before they were six months old were less likely to develop allergic diseases, hay fever, and eczema as they got older.

"In the first year of life, babies who are exposed to dogs in the household are more likely not to have allergies, asthma, and fewer upper respiratory infections," Johnson said. "If exposed at an early age to dander and allergens, we may be less reactive to them over time."

And kids who grow up around farm animals, dogs, or cats typically have stronger immune systems and a reduced risk of developing asthma or eczema.

**Pets relieve depression**

Pets can provide social support for their owners, who tend to have better overall wellbeing than non-owners, according to a study published in Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. And a large review of studies by the British Psychological Society found that dogs especially promote therapeutic and psychological wellbeing, particularly lowering stress levels and boosting self-esteem, as well as feelings of autonomy and competence.
“The calming presence and the social bond that pets bring can be very powerful," Christenson said. "Animals give something to focus on instead of the negative thoughts a depressed person is prone to have. When a pet pays attention to you, they're giving you unconditional love and acceptance."

Achievement gap, funding named biggest future challenges for Columbia Public Schools

Tuesday, May 13, 2014 | 6:00 a.m. CDT

BY CAROLINE BAUMAN

COLUMBIA — Breonna Brown, now a junior at Douglass High School, felt lost in crowded classrooms when her mother died suddenly three years ago. Shorty afterward, Brown transferred from Lange Middle School to what was then Jefferson Junior High School.

"When I came back after my mom passed away, I had gotten so behind," she recalled. "The class sizes at Lange made it to where teachers didn’t always know me or understand what I was going through. I think I may have failed seventh grade."

Brown said she struggled to get out of bed in the morning and had little desire to attend class or work toward graduation.

Instead of following classmates to Rock Bridge or Hickman high schools, Brown chose to attend Douglass High School. The alternative school generally has smaller classes than the main high schools and is oriented around helping students who have struggled in traditional settings.

She said she struggled with anxiety. "I couldn’t focus, and teachers just couldn’t give me the one-on-one I needed," she said. "So I made the decision to come to Douglass."

Brown’s story touches on one of the main challenges facing Columbia Public Schools: how to give every student an equitable chance to succeed.

"Our big work ahead is going to be in the area of enrichment for all kids, especially for those kids who come from fragile families, and achievement for all kids," said Peter Stiepleman, who will take over as superintendent for Chris Belcher in June.
Another key challenge, in Stiepleman's view, is how to fund a high level of education as the district grows in student population and expenses.

**Challenge No. 1: Equal opportunity to effective education**

**A widening achievement gap**

When six School District leaders were asked to name the biggest challenge facing the district, all said closing the gap in academic achievement.

"Addressing student achievement is not just a School District issue, it is an issue of poverty," said Jonathan Sessions, who was recently re-elected to the Columbia School Board. "Often people place a lot of blame on public education as the root of the cause. It's a community effort and is not something we can solve on our own."

Belcher, assistant superintendents Stiepleman and Jolene Yoakum, chief academic officer Sally Beth Lyon and School Board President Christine King expressed similar sentiments.

"While we may be proficient in terms of overall student performance, our 'super subgroup' continues to under-perform, and that's not OK," Stiepleman said. "From our perspective, that's our big goal."

*Each year, students in grades three to eight in Missouri take a test called the Missouri Assessment Program. In 2013, the percentage of Columbia Public Schools students passing the English language arts and mathematics tests varied for different racial and ethnic groups.*

The "super subgroup" comprises African-American and Latino students, as well as students on free or reduced price lunch and enrolled in individualized education or English language learner programs.

*The percentage of students eligible for the National School Lunch Program in Columbia Public Schools in 2013 increased by nearly 9 percent in 10 years. From 2004 to 2013, the enrollment percentage for Columbia Public Schools has been about 10 percentage points lower than the state average.*
The percentage of district students on free or reduced price lunch — a measure of poverty — jumped from 40 percent to almost 43 percent in a year, Stiepleman said. He is quoting a higher figure than that used by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (39.6 percent in 2013) because he is including pre-kindergarten students.

The four-year graduation rate for students on free or reduced price lunch was about 75 percent in 2013, compared to the district’s overall graduation rate of about 86 percent, according to the district’s report card on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. Students with limited proficiency in English graduated at a rate of about 29 percent — nearly 40 percent lower than the state average in the same category.

*Fewer than three in 10 students with limited English proficiency graduated from Columbia’s public high schools in 2013. For students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, the rate was more than seven in 10.*

"Achievement is staying flat while rates of poverty move up," Stiepleman said. "We need to review data and choose strategies to measure what is working and what isn’t. The cycle of improvement requires honest and true conversations in our schools and in our community."

Addressing the achievement gap is difficult because an educator has to understand where the students and families are coming from in order to put successful programs in place, said Heather McCullar, the science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM, specialist at Benton Elementary School.

"The district will have to continue to think outside the box and implement programs based on the needs of the students at various schools," McCullar said. "This can happen by focusing on high academic achievement for all students in the district, even if that means varying how this looks in schools based on the needs of the student population."

**Finding solutions**

Asia Plagman, a sophomore at Battle High School, said she was destined statistically to do poorly in school or to drop out because the emotional, academic and financial support at home is unstable.
"Students rise to the expectations you put on them," said Plagman, a member of Battle's Advancement Via Individual Determination system, which provides student with resources and support to get them ready for college.

"There is a big difference in what is expected of me between my honors or (Advanced Placement) classes and my regular ones," she said. "That spurs on inequality because kids in my regular classes never rise to a higher level."

Plagman said that after she graduates, she plans to go to college and study science.

"I have had an awesome group of teachers that pushed me to dream bigger," she said. "The AVID program and the options to take classes are such advantages to growing up in Columbia Public Schools."

While there is no one solution to closing the achievement gap, the AVID program and increasing involvement in AP classes are examples of practices that have made a difference, said Yoakum, who has overseen secondary education for the district since 2012.

"There is an information gap we need to address so that all parents and students know about the advanced classes and options out there," Yoakum said. "We also need to grow our culture to meet the needs of all kids. Many of us have limited experience but serve kids with diverse backgrounds."

Although the district has made genuine, sustainable efforts to make a difference in student achievement, it is discouraging that progress has been hard to see, Philip Peters, an MU law professor, said. Peters is also a project director at Cradle to Career, a coalition of community leaders that partners with the district to improve student success and reduce disparities.

"The district is doing exactly what the books tell to do in focusing on issues like literacy and equal access to advanced classes," Peters said. "But we need to have better outcomes. And government agencies, social nonprofits, parents and teachers all need to join the effort to make a dent in the gap."

Belcher said the state has been negligent in providing financial support to close the gap.
"Two-thirds of the gap is a result of reading loss," Belcher said. "We need more in after-school reading programs and access to early education. We haven't seen an investment at a state level to help us provide those resources yet."

Summer reading loss is a drop in reading ability that occurs over the summer if students don't stay engaged in reading materials appropriate for their grade level.

Liz Peterson, a parent of three whose two older children attend public schools, said she is concerned that classroom overcrowding and the need for higher teachers' salaries are overshadowed by the extreme focus on achievement.

"The impression I've gotten is that all we're thinking about is achievement in the future," said Peterson, a board member of Columbia Parents for Public Schools. "I don't want us to put blinders on everything else."

**Challenge No. 2: Funding education as state contribution declines**

**Stagnant state funding, increasing growth**

The district is growing by about 200 students every year, primarily at the elementary level, said Linda Quinley, chief financial officer for Columbia Public Schools. She will also take on the duties of chief operations officer next year.

*More students are enrolled at Mill Creek, Mary Paxton Keeley, Blue Ridge and Alpha Hart Lewis elementary schools than the schools are designed to hold. Enrollment has not yet surpassed capacity at any of Columbia's public middle and high schools. That means at least one new elementary school is needed every five years, Belcher said.*

As of September 2013, there were 17,905 students enrolled in district schools. That's up from 17,707 in 2012 and 17,256 in 2009.

As the district continues to grow, state funding has flatlined since 2008, Quinley said.

"We haven't been able to add or improve programs because we constantly are pouring our funds into growth," Quinley said. "We have cut all we can, asked the community for all we are comfortable asking for and now it's the state's turn."

It costs $10,000 every year to educate a Columbia Public Schools student, Stiepleman said. The state contributes $3,000, leaving a $7,000 gap filled in by local funding.
"Every time we add a kid, it is taxing on the system," Stiepleman said. "Because funding from the state is short, it is a task for our community. We don’t make this ask lightly and are first looking for internal ways we can reduce."

The piece of the district operating budget funded by state dollars was about 27 percent in 2013, slightly up from about 26 percent in 2012, according to the district report card. In 2009, state funding accounted for about 31 percent of the budget.

Local funding, generated primarily through property taxes, has been increasing since 2011 — up to about 67 percent in 2013.

*In 2013, Columbia Public Schools received about 67 percent of its funding from local revenue sources, a slight increase from about 62 percent in 2004. Since that year, the percentages of revenues from federal and state sources have decreased by about 2 percent and 3 percent, respectively.*

Thanks largely to local funding, the district is not in any fiscal danger, but its biggest issue is how to best prioritize what few additional funds are left over every year, Quinley said.

She said keeping class sizes low and creating new student programs are areas where funding is needed but has been hard to allocate.

"We haven't been able to add or improve where we need to," Quinley said. "We want to maintain our class size while we grow, which will be difficult to do. We know that our students have needs outside of academics and would like to put programs into place. We just can't do it all on our own."

**Remembering the personal touch**
District teachers Amy Schirmer and Dean Klempke said large classroom sizes have made it harder to reach students individually.

"I have 23 students in my second-grade classroom," said Schirmer, who is in her first year teaching at Alpha Hart Elementary School. "We have to provide a lot of academic support, especially in reading, but also have to teach our kids how to behave correctly and adapt to change. That’s hard to do with larger class sizes."
Elementary, middle and high schools had relatively consistent ratios of students per classroom teacher in 2013. The average student-teacher ratio for elementary schools was 19 students per classroom teacher. For middle schools and high schools, the average ratios were 18 and 17.5, respectively, though Douglass and Battle high schools had much lower ratios than Hickman and Rock Bridge.

Schirmer said second-grade has the largest classes at Alpha Hart, at about 23 students, but she said she sees that as a temporary problem.

"I know that our school has grown tremendously in the past few years, which is a common problem for other schools, too," Schirmer said. "We also foresee the class sizes going down due to the new elementary buildings being built."

Klepke, who has spent 14 years in the district, said it is time for a refocus on the personal touch of teaching.

"Over my years, I have noticed how data-driven we have become," said Klepke, a science teacher at Gentry Middle School. "It sometimes feels like we’re digging up more data instead of teaching kids. We need small class sizes and time in teachers’ days for personal connections with parents and kids."

Breonna Brown, the high school sophomore who struggled in school after her mother’s death, said personal relationships with teachers is one of the huge reasons she has thrived at Douglass.

"I’m able to cry on the shoulders of some of the Douglass teachers here," Brown said. "I’m not a math person, but my math teachers sit and talk to me. They help me through issues in my personal life, and counselors help me with my mom and my anxiety."

**Brown is set to graduate — a year ahead of schedule — in May 2015 and plans to attend MU to become a nurse.**

"I really want to give back because people have helped me so much," Brown said. "I have a lot of good memories from CPS. It’s made my childhood awesome. I feel ready for the next step because of the way people have invested in me in personal ways, every day."
During his freshman year at MU, Kenny Cygeirt went on an Alternative Spring Break trip through the university to the Kindred Spirits therapeutic riding ranch in Franklin, Tenn. He was inspired.

When Cygeirt returned to MU, he worked with his then-roommate Hai Kim, who was on the trip, to create an organization that would "bring it home," Cygeirt said.

Together, they co-founded Mizzou Wishmakers on Campus in October 2012. Mizzou Wishmakers on Campus is an organization partnered with the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Missouri as a part of its national Wishmakers on Campus program. The organization sponsors Make-A-Wish children and raises money to help grant their wishes. Cygeirt, now a junior studying international finance, is president of the MU chapter.

The first year was spent building the organization by establishing a structure so more could be done in subsequent years. This year has seen a growing membership and more fundraising and events, said Logan Joehl, a senior in business marketing and director of public relations for the organization.

The group is going through a second, and what is hoped will be a final, restructuring. A board of directors will lead the organization, and a steering committee will coordinate fundraising events. This will help ensure enough to do for all members — now more than 70 students — Cygeirt said. The members of this year's board of directors and steering committee have been chosen.
"Wish children" are selected by the Make-A-Wish Foundation. They must have a life-threatening medical condition and be older than 2 1/2 and younger than 18 years old when they are referred, according to the foundation's qualifications.

Since its founding, the MU program has granted two children’s wishes — first, for then 8-year-old Austin of Columbia’s wish to go to Atlantis Resort. This year, the group helped 17-year-old Chansey of Fairfax meet the Missouri basketball team. Mizzou Wishmakers on Campus is not told the full names of the children for security purposes.

"It’s awesome to see the smiles on the kids’ faces or the pictures from their families," Cygeirt said.

Mizzou Wishmakers on Campus is sponsoring Marshall, a 4-year-old boy from Sikeston. Marshall is battling an atypical teratoid/rhabdoid tumor, a rare type of brain tumor that occurs most often in children younger than 2. His wish is to go to Disney World with his family. The organization’s fundraising efforts this year will go toward granting Marshall's wish.

Many members of Mizzou Wishmakers on Campus have personal connections to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, Cygeirt said. When he was in third grade, a classmate — one of his best friends since kindergarten — was diagnosed with leukemia and granted a wish by the foundation.

Besides granting wishes, Mizzou Wishmakers on Campus is trying to raise awareness of the Make-A-Wish Foundation in Missouri. The campus organization is trying to reach out more to the community for both help and to inform them about the Make-A-Wish Foundation, Cygeirt said.

"I think next year is going to be a big year for targeting the community outside Mizzou," Joehl said.

Mizzou Wishmakers on Campus is looking to establish a "kids for wish kids" program in Columbia elementary schools. Similar to the MU organization, the program would organize events that benefit Make-A-Wish Foundation children. Children would get to help plan and participate in the events.

"It's an awareness program structured into the fun," Cygeirt said.
The MU organization is helping to introduce the Wishmakers on Campus program to other schools in Missouri. St. Louis University, Missouri State University and Northwest Missouri State University are starting their own programs.

"When you provide the children with that joy, that strength, you help give them the will to fight," Cygeirt said.

AS I SEE IT

Cloaked anti-Semitism still lives

April 29
BY JACOB BOGAGE
Special to The Star

Four days after shots rang out at the Jewish Community Center, the impact of the murders hit me again.

I’m a student at the University of Missouri from Washington, D.C. It was quite a transition to come from the hustle-and-bustle of the mid-Atlantic to the Midwest.

A criminology professor asked my lecture hall on April 17 if we’d seen the news about the shooting. A student in front of me whispered to his friend, “If you’re going to shoot up a Jewish center, at least kill Jews.”

It was the latest in a slew of off-the-cuff anti-Semitic remarks I’ve encountered at MU and seen throughout the state of Missouri. It was another shotgun blast through the multiculturalism that the university and our enlightened society strive to achieve.

Later, when my professor spoke of Jews being forced to register by pro-Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine, three students argued, “it wasn’t that bad” and “it’s not like the Holocaust.” Others patently denied the news reports.

Even in Columbia, one of the most progressive environments the Midwest has to offer, anti-Semitism, albeit a cloaked brand, is still alive. Elsewhere it lives in ignorance. It lives in yawns. It lives in misinformation. It lives in deed.
It’s time for that hate to be dragged out from the shadows where it comfortably lives. Jews are members of the Kansas City community. They are members of the Columbia community. They are moms and dads and Little League coaches and Boy Scout troop leaders. They are sons and daughters and grandparents. They are neighbors and friends. Jews want peace and security. They want love and charity. They are patriotic and loyal. They are Americans.

This region responded admirably to console the families of the three victims and restore faith that the Jewish community will have a safe home in the Heartland.

But informal anti-Semitism is still pervasive. It emerges when professors teach lectures they call the “Holocaust Extravaganza” and when sorority girls go to parties at a Jewish fraternity “to end up with a Jewish guy who’s good with money.” It leaks into our society like cracks in the Missouri River’s levees. It has become acceptable.

Meet Dan Clevenger, recently shunned mayor of 2,000-person Marionville, Mo., in southwest Missouri. On April 16, he said he “kind of agreed,” with shooter F. Glenn Miller’s views that Jews harm the economy and dishonestly run the Federal Reserve.

Mr. Clevenger’s views mark an all too common thread in the fabric of Midwestern conversation. Rejecting multiculturalism and tolerance is acceptable to move a discussion along or, in the case of Mr. Clevenger, get through a radio interview.

Such attitudes and indifference foster a culture where the extremist hate held by individuals like Miller can fester and survive. As Americans, it’s our collective duty to eradicate that evil and ensure that our neighbors of any creed, race, ethnicity, religion, and more have a home among us all.

Only then can we truly repair the wound from the shots fired through the peace of Johnson County. Only then can we be the neighbors and friends we aspire to be; the mothers and fathers we were raised to be; the community leaders our nation deserves.

Michael Sam’s boyfriend Vito Cammisano is former Rockhurst swimmer, has KC ties

BY LISA GUTIERREZ
The Kansas City Star

May 12

It was the photo seen ’round the world: Newly drafted Michael Sam sharing a congratulatory smooch with Vito Cammisano. Suddenly, people wanted to know about the boyfriend of the first openly gay NFL player. Turns out he has Kansas City ties.

Like Sam, the 23-year-old attended the University of Missouri, where Cammisano swam competitively from 2009 to 2012. He honed those swim skills in the water at Rockhurst High School, where he swam the 500 freestyle for the school’s championship swim team. He swam the same event, and the 1,650 freestyle, at MU.

A story in MU’s student newspaper reported that Cammisano came out to his Tiger teammates in 2011. His Facebook page says he worked as an assistant in MU’s office of disability services and is currently an intern for Cumulus Broadcasting.

It’s unclear how long he and Sam have been dating, though photos of the two together have appeared on social media the last few months.

The picture of them kissing after the St. Louis Rams drafted Sam near the end of the seventh and final round on Saturday instantly went viral. The photo was taken at the San Diego home of Sam’s agent.

Cammisano’s name may be familiar to Kansas Citians for another reason:

According to Cammisano’s bio on the MU swim team’s website, he is the youngest child of Jerry and Josephine Cammisano. Vito Cammisano’s grandfather was William Cammisano Sr., one of the most feared mobsters in Kansas City history, who died in
1995. The scrap dealer, a four-time felon who had been arrested more than 100 times, was widely known as Willie the Rat.

Read more here: http://www.kansascity.com/2014/05/12/5019527/michael-sams-boyfriend-vito-cammisano.html#storylink=cpy

GENE ROBERTSON: Downtown mess should not be par for the course
Monday, May 12, 2014 | 4:12 p.m. CDT
BY GENE ROBERTSON

Columbia’s downtown development is akin to a golf ball.

If you slice the golf ball in half you will find layers of compressed rubber strings over a core.

The golf ball is a single-purpose object. The Columbia downtown area has many purposes. When all of these purposes are compressed like the rubber in a golf ball, they become inefficient.

The downtown area is expected to house public and private businesses, residents, pedestrian and vehicular traffic, as well as parking. They are needed services and conveniences.

When these activities are too dense they become inaccessible. They are not layers of rubber inside a golf ball.

The downtown core has to contain an adequate infrastructure. The infrastructure must support all of the activities occurring within it, such as water, sewage, varieties of power and other elements.

Overtaxing the infrastructure because of overdevelopment negatively impacts the daily functions in the downtown area. This impact might not only affect the downtown area but other areas of the city as well.
Imagine such emergencies as fire, power outages and natural disasters on the occupants of an overbuilt, dense area without adequate infrastructure or the ability to modify the infrastructure. Vehicular navigation downtown is already a challenge.

Our representatives rarely hold developers accountable for the snake oil they may be selling. Columbia citizens will be the ones who will face cleaning up the mess, which will become the norm.

It is always easier for decision-makers to say "oops" and avoid much-needed questioning that might lead to legitimate permission. Actions and failure to act have consequences. Citizens are always the ones who suffer the consequences.

What are those responsible for the downtown circus thinking?

University students will be greatly affected by this mess. Where is the university in all this?

Let's not be left holding the bag again.

William E. "Gene" Robertson is a Columbia resident and a professor emeritus at MU. He writes occasional columns for the Missourian.