New sirens tested in Boone Co., Columbia during state tornado drill


COLUMBIA, Mo. - Boone County's new outdoor warning sirens were tested as part of a statewide tornado drill Tuesday afternoon.

The sirens went off across Mid-Missouri at 1:30 p.m.

Boone County was recently divided into northern, central, and southern zone where sirens were individually tested.

The University of Missouri also tested its mass alert and warning system at 1:30.

ABC 17 News checked in with officials there who said this was the first time they tested the system when all classes were in session, and they said the test went smoothly.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

ECHO project strives to bring autism care to rural Missourians

Tuesday, March 3, 2015 | 8:40 p.m. CST; updated 6:29 a.m. CST, Wednesday, March 4, 2015

BY JILL DEUTSCH

COLUMBIA — What stands between a worried parent and the relief that comes with having answers about a child can seem as simple as a full tank of gas, a day off work and
an appointment.

But those things can become insurmountable obstacles for people living in rural areas.

**A new joint effort of MU’s Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders and Missouri Telehealth Network aims to make the inconvenience of distance irrelevant. The ECHO Autism project will provide health care providers in rural areas with the training they need to screen and recognize autism in places as far-flung as Poplar Bluff.**

Kristin Sohl, the Thompson Center's medical director, calls the process "moving knowledge instead of people" by utilizing Skype technology to connect specialists in Columbia with primary care physicians in other areas of Missouri. Those participating just need Internet connection and a forward-facing camera.

ECHO projects are part of a growing health care trend called telehealth. It uses video conference technology to provide care to patients where they live. Providers in more than 40 specialties and subspecialties serve 72 Missouri counties from 220 telehealth sites, according to Mirna Becevic, the associate director of the Missouri Telehealth Network. These specialists provide one-on-one specialized care to patients.

ECHO projects use similar videoconferencing technology, but with specialists providing instruction to other health care providers instead of providing care directly. Sohl said this allows specialists to increase autism knowledge exponentially rather than treat one patient at a time, bringing best practices in autism care to primary care.

**A national trend**

The concept originated with a liver specialist, Sanjeev Arora, in Albuquerque, N.M., according to the University of New Mexico. In 2003, thousands of New Mexicans seeking treatment for hepatitis C overwhelmed the small number of specialists who could treat them in rural New Mexico. Arora was working at one of the only two clinics that treated hepatitis C in the state.

Arora sought to fix that with the first Project ECHO, or Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes. The idea was to use video chat software like Google Hangouts to
create an online network of health care providers. Doctors in rural New Mexico could join a Skype call with Arora, and he could teach them about hepatitis C and how to treat it. This allowed patients to receive treatment locally, avoiding long drives and waitlists. Today, there are 39 variations of the first Project ECHO, operating in 22 states and five countries, according to the University of New Mexico. A national ECHO project treats chronic pain, another focuses on rheumatology and several others treat hepatitis C.

Missouri's ECHO Autism launches Wednesday, with pediatricians and primary care physicians from around the state joining a group of Columbia-based specialists: autism and developmental pediatric specialist; child and adolescent psychiatrist; clinical child psychologist; clinical dietician; resource coordinator and parent educator. The doctors joining the group's conference calls will hear about specialized techniques for treating autism and be able to ask questions about specific patients.

**Demand, obstacles for autism care**
Sohl began the project knowing there is a high demand for specialized autism care in Missouri. The waiting list for treatment at the Thompson Center is nine to 10 months. Sohl estimated that there are between 10 and 15 developmental pediatricians, child and adolescent psychiatrists and clinical child psychologists who have autism experience in Missouri.

Part of the problem arises from a lack of emphasis on autism education in medical schools. Pediatricians spend a month of their three-year residency learning about developmental disorders such as autism, and family practitioners spend less, Sohl said. Alicia Curran, the parent educator for the project, encountered this when she lived in Rolla, Missouri, in 2003. Her son, Sam, was 3 years old and showing early signs of autism: He had not spoken a word, made limited eye contact, did not point at objects, would not regularly respond to his name and did not play with toys appropriately.

Curran knew something wasn't right, but she and her pediatrician knew little about autism. During his time off work, her pediatrician searched for reliable medical articles to provide the answers Curran desperately needed.

Sam Curran was diagnosed with autism at age 3 at a speech clinic in Chicago. When the Thompson Center opened two years later, the Currans made the hour-and-a-half trip to Columbia for treatment. They now live in Columbia.
Hesitation to screen for autism
Autism treatment is complex. It’s common to have a number of diagnoses in addition to autism, including anxiety, ADHD, seizure disorders, intellectual disability, sleep problems and GI problems. Without specialized knowledge, an ear infection can go untreated because the fussiness is attributed to behavioral problems.

Autism’s complexities can make doctors hesitant to recognize and screen for autism, Sohl said.

"Autism is so complex, and primary care physicians don't have all the tools in their toolboxes to say, 'It's autism,'" she said. "So, a lot of them end up saying, 'They'll be fine,' and they're not fine."

Sohl said patients need more evaluation.

Without it, a patient’s diagnosis is delayed. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends screening for autism between 18 and 24 months of age. In reality, it happens much later for many people. Jasmine El Khatib, a pediatrician in both Jefferson City and Fulton says it's common for parents to notice something is wrong with their child early in life. But kids don't come to her office until they are about to enter preschool or kindergarten, between 4 and 5 years old, due to parents' circumstances, such as financial issues and lack of insurance.

"So by the time I see them, we are definitely behind the ball, and they need supportive services and help immediately," El Khatib said.

But "immediately" is often bogged down by other issues. There are the long waiting lists at specialist centers like the Thompson Center. Patients may also lack transportation to the centers or medical insurance to cover the visits.

El Khatib said it can be difficult to know what the scenarios affecting patients are, so her outreach team has to do extra work to ensure patients make their follow-up appointments.

If the ECHO project works, primary care physicians will be able to effectively screen and treat patients in their clinics, and only those needing a specialist will get a referral to the Thompson Center.
"The research on ECHO projects has shown the same or better outcomes in the people treated in their own communities than those who drive out to the 'ivory towers,' the academic centers, to get their treatments," Sohl said.

"I hope to be able to better streamline patients from point A to point B," El Khatib said.

If ECHO Autism works, then point B won't be miles away for Missouri’s rural patients. It'll be in their hometowns.

**the maneater**

New radar increases meteorology, research potential for CAFNR

**A new radar system is currently being built for an MU research team, filling a gap in meteorological radar coverage in Missouri.**

The radar is being funded through a National Science Foundation grant that is aimed at stimulating competitive research. It will be installed at the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources’ South Farm Research Center and is currently slated to be completed during summer 2015.

Dr. Neil Fox, associate professor of atmospheric sciences, is leading the Department of Soil, Environmental and Atmospheric Sciences team that will use the radar. Fox said the radar will be used to study ways plants and crops change with the climate. He said he hopes to take the radar beyond research and implement the technology into his classes and even outside CAFNR.

“It is one project with lots of potential,” Fox said. “I’d like to have students actually using the radar for data and research projects ... Researchers, undergraduate, graduate students, the city of Columbia can all get use from it. It can be used for more than meteorology.”

Graduate student Ryan Difani said he is one of the students expecting to use the radar when it arrives this summer. He said the new radar could increase the amount of meteorological events MU students can cover in the area. More specifically, Difani said he hopes to use the radar for his research.

“My project speaks to flooding and heavy rainfall, specifically,” Difani said.
While the radar will be physically stationed at the South Farm Research Center, students and staff can review the data from the radar from the main campus.

Difani said students using the radar must be 100 kilometers (62.1 miles) within the radar they are getting their information from to ensure sufficient, accurate data. Currently, the two radars closest to MU are in St. Louis and Kansas City.

Difani said the distance between Columbia and the radars can prevent MU students from gathering accurate information from local storms and other meteorological events.

The new radar will also benefit other researchers in other places with radar if an event were to occur midway between two places, Difani said.

“There could be in-between, or overlap, with two radars where we can compare data from our radar with another nearby to enhance data,” he said.

Fox said the new equipment could have benefits for research and students outside MU as well.

“It’s funded by the NSF, so the data must be public. Everyone has access to the data,” he said. “We could collaborate with UMKC, UMSL, SLU and Lincoln.”

Fox said the initial NSF grant will cover the radar’s operation through its first four to five years, after which the university will re-apply for the funding. He said he hopes additional funding will become more likely as the university finds new ways to use the radar and the data collected.

“We hope to demonstrate its value for teaching, researching and benefiting the community,” he said. “We want them (the NSF) to keep it going.”

Unused university land could create more STEM jobs

The 5-year plan would offer tax incentives to companies who used the land.

An attempt to increase Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics jobs could result in more companies moving onto unused university land.
The federal government is attempting to inflate the STEM job market. In 2013, the White House proposed its 5-Year Federal STEM Education Strategic Plan. According to the plan, the federal government will make investments into higher learning in those fields.

In Jefferson City last week, a Missouri House committee heard a series of bills proposing ways to use university land and offering tax incentives for STEM companies and graduates.

The Economic Innovation Investment Act, HB 676, proposes to offer tax incentives for companies that establish themselves on unused, state college-owned land. It also offers tax incentives for the employees of those companies.

In order to qualify for the tax incentives, the institution must meet four criteria: It must further the academic mission of the institution, have a positive community and economic “reasonable performance metrics” to evaluate the business over time. The land must not have been acquired by right of condemnation after the bill’s effective date, proposed as Aug. 28, 2015.

The bill is sponsored by Rep. Caleb Rowden, R-Columbia

“I understand his intent is to increase collaboration between businesses and universities so the university can benefit,” said Steven Devlin, director of MU Extension Business Development Program director. “It is a significant opportunity for growth in this state. From that standpoint, if we can increase the amount of interaction between university and business and industry, I think it’s a good model for us … I don’t think we can survive as an institution without that interaction.”

Relationships between businesses and universities can be hesitant but should be done, Devlin said.

“Are there considerations or concerns when it comes to the relationship between academics and business? Certainly,” he said. “I know a lot of pure academicians are hesitant to get involved with business or industry because they are afraid about their academic freedom, and I think there are valid concerns there. But I don’t think we can survive as an institution without having that interaction. They are a part of our customers, a part of the system that we operate in.”

That interaction can also benefit students in the future, Devlin said.

“We can’t just graduate students and throw them over the wall,” he said. “It doesn’t work that way. We are a part of an interactive system. You have business that provides markets in terms of where our graduates go, they have products that are generating revenue and tax income that helps support the institutions so, to me, it is beneficial to have that interaction.”

Devlin said MU did not have any direct driving force behind this bill’s creation.

This bill does not apply only to MU land, but to all unused land owned by public two-year and four-year higher education institutions. The effects of this bill would span statewide.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Tiger Tot Mommies aims to deliver support to new mothers
Tuesday, March 3, 2015 | 6:25 p.m. CST; updated 6:36 p.m. CST, Tuesday, March 3, 2015
BY TIMOSHANAE WELLMAKER

COLUMBIA — Tiger Tot Mommies, a support group for new mothers through MU Women's and Children's Hospital, will begin a series of monthly meetings this week.

The service offers day and evening sessions to reach as many mothers in need of advice as possible. Planned topics include tips for working moms, making baby food, cloth diapers and parenting secrets.

Daytime discussions will be held from 10 to 11 a.m the third Wednesday of every month at ParentLink, 4800 Santana Circle. These sessions will be open discussions, and siblings are encouraged to attend.

Evening sessions are scheduled for 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. the first Thursday of each month, except for May and June, when it will be held on the first Wednesday. The scheduled dates are March 5, April 2, May 6, June 10, July 2 and Aug. 6.

The evening sessions will be held at MU Women's and Children's Hospital conference center, 404 N. Keene St.

The first meeting, "Babywearing Do's, Don'ts and Benefits," will cover ways to carry babies in a sling or other wearable carrier.

During each meeting, a lactation consultant from the hospital will be available to answer questions about breastfeeding and offer free baby weight-checks.
The service is sponsored by MU Women's and Children's Hospital and the federal Women, Infants and Children program.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

FROM READERS: LGBTQ advocate reflects on growing up in small town

Tuesday, March 3, 2015 | 7:17 p.m. CST; updated 8:20 p.m. CST, Tuesday, March 3, 2015

BY HANNAH FEAGAN/MISSOURIAN READER

Hannah Feagan is a freshman at MU and an LGBTQ advocate.

I've approached writing this article in multiple ways. Each time I sit down and try to type it, something isn't right. I have become increasingly emotionally taxed from trying to keep the reader at an arm's length from my personal experiences.

It's time to just be honest.

A few months ago I told my parents who I was dating, and they high-fived in delight that it wasn't a girl. Over a year ago, in reference to my brother discovering that I was dating a girl at the time, he told me to lose weight so I could date men.

Knowing that these things happened to me, and even understanding that I'm allowed to be upset by them, I still don't like to complain. My family isn't the usual Southwest Missouri demographic of conservative Christians that seem to care more about Friday night football games and Wednesday night youth groups. Not that anything is wrong with that. It just wasn't me. And it was never me.

I was never a very good church-goer, and I don't like watching sports. I've identified as a feminist since about the fifth grade. In high school, I cared more about memorizing world geography and reading the stories of Nelson Mandela's heroism than the school-spirited activities that many of my peers were taking part in. I was always just kind of different, and I wasn't shy about those differences.
For me, I didn't have the "Oh... okay, so this is a thing now" moment that made me realize I'm queer. I just kind of... always knew it was there. I never officially came out to my family, they just eventually picked up on the fact that I wasn't heterosexual and moved on. (It might have something to do with the fact that I expressed no interest in boys, but hey, who knows).

Their micro-aggressions are strong and still upset me, but it's a lot better than having parents that try to pray the gay away. For that, I am thankful, because I know that a lot of people in the queer community have struggled with acceptance from their families in insurmountably greater ways than I have.

As I grew older, however, my stability weakened as the differences between the surrounding community and myself became astoundingly clear. The community made my partner feel unsafe in her identity, and I was therefore asked to keep our relationship a secret. Having my first romantic experience with this female friend, who very few people even knew about, shoved me into a closet for years. It kept true expression of my sexuality on hold until I left for college.

Leaving my hometown has made me realize just how much our environment shapes who we become. Growing up in such a conservative area meant that I had no LGBTQ adults in my waking life to connect with and admire. I had no education on safe sex between same sex couples. There was no representation of the transgender community.

I know people from high school have come out as members of LGBTQ community, but they often only feel comfortable doing so after leaving home. I wish that the fear to exist while simultaneously having to prove our existence was no longer muddled by struggle, but it's something that hurts the lives of queer people every day. We are the experts of our own experiences, and I believe that our society's greatest asset in positively moving forward is listening to these experiences.

If I had to give advice to queer kids growing up in conservative areas, I would tell them to listen to Ellen DeGeneres. Watch Modern Family. Read LGBTQ news every day. Marvel in ads that feature lesbian and gay couples. Get excited for the increasing fame and influence of Laverne Cox and Janet Mock. Surround yourself with the little representation that the queer community has, and let it serve as a reminder that things are getting better.
It's not enough, but sometimes getting angry about not having enough doesn't help. Sometimes you need to get excited that someone asks what your preferred pronouns are because that's not something that society has conformed to doing yet. Sometimes you need to get excited when someone asks about your "partner" because they made a conscious effort not to assume your partner's sex and gender identity.

I let myself get very caught up in activism, angered by the societal constructions that hold people back from expressing their individuality. I often forget to sit back, relax and feel grateful for every step in my journey that has made me as happy as I am today.

So yeah, sometimes the way we're raised sucks. Sometimes you need to express anger at the limits of our society's system. But other times, you just need to stand up and show the world that you deserve happiness, too. Show the world that there is strength in hope. And trust me when I say that you deserve to feel hopeful, and you deserve to be incredibly happy.