New TB research group that includes KU looks for root causes

BY MARGARET STAFFORD
Associated Press Writer

LAWRENCE (AP) — Experts in diverse fields such as genetics, anthropology and epidemiology have formed a consortium dedicated to bringing new strategies to the fight against tuberculosis.

It’s a grand goal, and the effort is in its early stages, but members of the group say its approach is different enough from typical medical research that it could someday provide customized treatments for TB sufferers.

They say that’s necessary to treat a complex bacterial disease that kills about 2 million people a year and has nine or 10 different strains, some of which are causing worldwide alarm because they are resistant to currently available antibiotics.

“We are clearly in a very crucial stage of tuberculosis control,” said Phil Griffin, director of tuberculosis control for the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. “With the emergence of new strains, our tools for fighting it are getting very old.”

The consortium involves about 30 researchers from the University of Kansas; the Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research; the University of Arizona; the University of Texas El Paso; the Texas Department of State Health Services; the state of Kansas, and Chihuahua University Medical School and Public Health Service in Mexico.

The International Consortium for the Study of Tuberculosis will focus on the DNA of populations with high rates of the disease, the genetics of the various strains of tuberculosis and environmental factors affecting high-risk populations.

While the disease has been largely eradicated in the U.S., the recent case of An-
TB Research

continued from page 3

percent of those who are infected with TB get the disease.

“The central question is ‘Why?’” Crawford said. “Why do some people handle the disease and some die from it very, very quickly?”

The group’s pilot project will focus on TB patterns among the Tarahumara, a native Indian tribe in northern Mexico with high rates of the disease. Members from the U.S. and Mexico have met to discuss the project and plan another meeting in August.

Results from that study may help Texas and Arizona officials battle high rates of TB in Mexico, which has been a concern for years along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Luis Escobedo, an epidemiologist in El Paso and director of the health services region of the Texas health department, said Texas needs new tools to help people with TB.

“If we continue to just work with what we know, we may not be able to keep up with all the things happening with TB,” Escobedo said.

Immunologists, geneticists, epidemiologists, anthropologists and public health officials may find new strategies because they bring expertise different from most physicians, Crawford said.

“Physicians want to treat the symptoms,” he said. “We’re more interested in understanding how the system works. Then as we understand how the system works, we can more intelligently apply methods of treatment, diagnosis, etc.”

For now, the consortium is trying to attract more funding and to bring representatives from places such as Russia, India and Africa on board. The group has initial funding of about $16,000 from the University of Kansas and some funding from the Texas health department.

Crawford said group members will work on the Mexico project and training workshops while trying to develop the credentials and research to attract more funding. It hopes to receive funding from such groups as the National Institutes of Health or the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations, which has donated millions to TB research.

The Speaker case shows how susceptible everyone is to the disease, consortium members say. Some U.S. cases are misdiagnosed as pneumonia.

“The (Speaker) case was a good example of how, in today’s world, where travel is so much easier, people can bring it in and out of the country very easily,” Griffin said. “It’s not something to run around and be panicked about, but we should all keep in our heads that it has not gone away.”
Tuition too high

Tuition is going up again this term at the six state universities in Kansas. That is hardly a surprise. Over the last two decades, the Kansas Legislature has cut back on state support. That forces the schools to hit students and their families with tuition increases year after year to maintain a quality education for our young people.

The University of Kansas is taking an unusual step to ease the problem. Under a plan approved by the Kansas Board of Regents, this year's freshmen will pay a fixed amount for their first four years of education. Officials note that this is not a discount, but if tuition continues to escalate, students could save money. It will also encourage students to complete their undergraduate work in four years.

The Legislature, while increasing the amount of higher education funding over the years, has steadily reduced its share of the funding pie. In 1985, the state financed 49 percent of the operating budgets and tuition accounted for 15 percent. Twenty years later state support was 29 percent and tuition was 23 percent. If the trend continues, in a few years students and their families will be paying more tuition than the state appropriates for operating costs.

This is an injustice to students, especially the ones from lower-income families. While there are scholarships available, not all students can or do take advantage of them.

The Board of Regents will ask the 2008 Legislature for additional money, but even if the full amount were appropriated, it would not come close to restoring the traditional level of state support. The regents recommended an increase of 8.7 percent, or $71.9 million for the next fiscal year.

Note to Legislature: More is needed.
KU’s theater department offers production at Edwards Campus

KATRINA SEGERS
STAFF WRITER

The University of Kansas’ Department of Theatre and Film brings a romantic musical revue to the KU Edwards Campus, 12000 Quivira Road, Overland Park, this month.

John Staninunas, associate professor and chair of theater and film, said audience members can expect outstanding singing from the cast of three and a sense of happiness and hope from the performance of “Starting Here, Starting Now.”

“You get to meet and follow three performers through a performance. You really get to know what they are like as performers, you really get to experience their true emotions,” Staninunas said. “That’s what makes it so special at being at Regnier Hall on the Edwards Campus. It’s an intimate setting.”

Bondank, 22, Overland Park, said the cast has been rehearsing for a while.

“This show has been one of the most low stress shows I’ve ever been in,” she said. “Things just seem to be falling into place.”

Staninunas, who serves as director, choreographer and costume designer, said he picked the show hoping the audience would find it entertaining.

“It’s not a lot of dialogue,” he said. “It’s just one song after another.”

Bondank, whose other productions include “Guys and Dolls,” “Sweeney Todd” and performances at the Lyric Opera, said she looks forward to the chance to play to a different audience.

Staninunas said he hoped more university theater productions could play at the Edwards Campus.
KU announces spring 2007 honor roll

The students, from KU's Lawrence campus and the schools of allied health and nursing at the medical center, represent 99 Kansas counties, 44 other states and the District of Columbia and 37 other countries. (Parent names and high school information are given if available and provided by students. Included on the spring honor roll from this area are:

Alyssa Anne Neumann, daughter of John and Patti Neumann, Isabel, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Senior
Derek Michael Setter, son of Christopher Setter, Cunningham, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Sophomore
Ian R Bowen, son of Allyson and Jaylene Bowen, Kingman, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Senior
Ashley Clark, daughter of Max Clark, Kingman, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Junior
Nathan Richard Clark, son of Calvin Clark, Kingman, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Senior
Mark Allen Heatherman, son of Harry and Loretta Heatherman, Kingman, Education Undergraduate, Senior
Megan Elizabeth Swingle, daughter of Chauncey and Junell Swingle, Zenda, Pharmacy Professional Prof 1
T'Lane Balue Briggeman, daughter of Stuart and Teri Briggeman, Pratt, Business Undergraduate, Senior
Christopher James Dino, son of Andrea Fea, Pratt, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Senior
Tyson Ray Eisenhauer, son of Rob and Cindy Eisenhauer, Pratt, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Senior
Katie Dawn Fisher, daughter of Vickie Fisher, Pratt, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Senior
Jessie Trece Garrett, daughter of Michael and Kimberly Garrett, Pratt, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Junior
Jamie Lynn Hearn, daughter of Richard and Janell Hearn, Education Undergraduate, Senior
Kelli Lynn Martin, daughter of Denise and Kris Dover, Pratt, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Senior
Megan Elizabeth McCusker, daughter of Barbara Cudney, Pratt, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Senior
Megan Diane Jarmer Olson, daughter of Frank and Trish Jarmer, Pratt, Pharmacy Professional Prof 1
Katie Lynn Pinkall, daughter of Bruce and Rita Pinkall, Pratt, Pharmacy Professional Prof 1
Kaci L Austin, daughter of Kyle and Cindy Austin, Preston, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Sophomore
Amber Dawn Bortz, daughter of Berry and Carla Bortz, Preston, Liberal Arts Undergraduate, Junior
State researchers dig for answers on area playas

By STEPHANIE FARLEY
sfarley@cteleg.com

LANE COUNTY — It’s not really known how playas — or closed basins where water collects during precipitation — form, but state researchers are hoping to find their answer from the playas of western Kansas, including two in Lane County.

Mark Bowen, in the geography department, and Erin De Lee, in environmental studies, both at the University of Kansas, stood Wednesday on ground owned by Vance and Louise Ehmke near Healy. The two were collecting soil from different areas of the Ehmke playa to return to Lawrence with and study, hoping to eventually find whether a link exists between climate change and how playas form.

If a link is determined, they’ll have a better idea of how the natural land/water formations are created and grow, Bowen said.

The Ehmke family has been on the property since 1896 — Vance Ehmke is the fourth generation to have lived on the land. The Ehmke property contains one of the playas located in the county.

See Land, Page A5

Land: State researchers dig for answers on playas

Continued from Page A1

with the naturally-formed land feature historically serving as a gathering place, an “oasis,” to get water after it collected in the basin.

The Ehmke playa currently has water in its basin, marking the fourth time Vance Ehmke has seen it fill. Ehmke said he remembered seeing the playa fill for the first time in fall 1963 — he was a freshman in high school and it “rained and rained” at a football game between Dighton and Ransom, and the playa was filling the next day. Since then, the playa has filled in 1986, ’96 and after snow and ice thawed this spring.

James Aber, professor in earth science at Emporia State University, studies playas and is interested in wetlands.

“It’s a wetland that comes and goes,” Aber said of playas, adding that they’re dry most of the time but occasionally hold water and are common on the High Plains in Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas.

Aber uses kites and other devices to take aerial photos of playas and closed basins. Aber said he was interested in the region of closed basins, between Garden City and Scott City and how they formed.

When filled after a rain or other precipitation, playas look like “wet spots” in a field and often go unnoticed by the general public, Johnson said, but they serve as “really important” land features for wildlife and play a role in groundwater recharge of the High Plains/Ogallala Aquifer.

“We want to just try to learn more about them,” Johnson said, adding that they’re studying them because there hasn’t been a lot of research done on playas and very little is known about their origins.

The three-year project Bowen and De Lee are working on through funding by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is one of several aspects being studied about playas. Johnson said they also were working on photographing and mapping playas in western Kansas; assessing the playas as wetlands and identifying the quality and how to measure and monitor that quality of playas; studying their history; and looking at the geologic origin of playas by using deep drilling and seismic measurements.

Johnson said the Ehmke playa had been chosen for the study because it hasn’t been disturbed or plowed like some.

Bowen said that while dating of playas isn’t definite, it’s believed the smaller playas date back about 8,000 years, while larger playas date between 10,000 and 12,000 years — near the end of the last Ice Age. Playas range from less than an acre in size to more than several hundred acres.

Bowen plans to collect 25 cores from the Ehmke playa, hoping to get core segments from the basin once it dries.

Finney, Gray, Scott and Lane counties contain the greatest density of playas on the High Plains, Bowen said.
Repair projects await approval

By CHRIS GREEN
cgreen@daynews.net

TOPEKA (HNS) — Millions of dollars in building repairs at state universities could be just one step away from proceeding.

The state Board of Regents signed off on a plan last week that would spend $134.4 million over five years on deferred maintenance projects at the state’s six four-year institutions and University of Kansas Medical Center.

Before work can begin, however, an interim legislative committee must review and approve the projects later this month, Board of Regents spokesman Kip Peterson said.

Lawmakers approved a funding plan earlier this year that provides $90 million in new state general funds to help ease a $600 million backlog at state universities. Universities will also keep an additional $44.4 million from interest on tuition dollars to pay for repairs.

However, before the money can be spent, lawmakers require that the Joint Committee on State Building Construction give a green light to the upgrades.

That panel’s chairman, Rep. Joe Humerickhouse, R-Osage City, said he hoped lawmakers could complete their review when the 10-member committee meets July 18-19.

“My goal is to try and have those proposals taken care of during those meetings,” Humerickhouse said.

In addition to providing the $90 million for state universities, lawmakers also gave community and technical colleges, as well as Washburn University, access to $100 million in state-issued loans. However, only university projects are subject to review by the joint building committee.

Humerickhouse said his panel only would be reviewing projects being funded in fiscal year 2006, which began July 1. However, it will also study and make a recommendation on how the Legislature should exercise future oversight of deferred maintenance spending.

“I do see the committee’s role as scrutinizing these projects, but most of the members of the committee are very aware of most of them,” Humerickhouse said.

Last week, the Board of Regents gave the go-ahead for $38.3 million of repair projects set to begin in 2006, as part of the overall $134.4 million plan.

Officials allocated the money to the universities on the basis of the amount of building space at each institution, taking into account the ages and types of buildings being repaired.

The 2008 projects include the first year of funding for a $14.4 million upgrade of power conduits at Kansas State University, including the “Frankenstein Room.” That campus power plant is where workers must take unusual precautions, such as using a wooden pole to move electrical switches, to protect themselves from electrocution.

Fort Hays State plans to use its $2 million of its $2.8 million allotment to begin a nearly $4 million renovation of Picken Hall, one of the campus’ signature buildings.

However, the repair plans don’t take into account $82.5 million in tax credits designed to lure in $120 million private donations. Universities become eligible for those tax credits next year.

After the passage of this year’s repair plan, some lawmakers said they considered the package a down payment on deferred maintenance and called for additional funding in future years.

With that in mind, the Board of Regents also announced last week that it plans to seek $56.39 million more for repair projects when the Legislature convenes next year. That amount comes on top of a request by officials to increase higher education by 8.7 percent or $71.9 million next year.

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Repair plans

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Source: Kansas Board of Regents
Rossville student earns KU art history award

The Kress Foundation Department of Art History at the University of Kansas recently gave awards to 59 students for excellence during the 2006-07 academic year.

Raechell Smith, director of the H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute, was guest speaker at the recognition event in May at the Spencer Museum of Art. KU Endowment administers funds for the awards, which were presented by art history faculty members to their outstanding students.

Forty-six students received books on subjects in which they excelled. Caitlin Marie Alvarez, daughter of Anna Alvarez of Rossville, received a freshman Amsden Award.

The Amsden Book Awards were established in 1976 by the late Floyd and Barbara Amsden of Wichita.
KU announces spring honor roll

More than 4,690 undergraduate students at the University of Kansas earned honor roll distinction for the spring semester.

The honor roll comprises undergraduates who met requirements in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and in the schools of allied health, architecture and urban planning, business, education, engineering, fine arts, journalism, nursing and social welfare.

Honor roll criteria vary among the university’s academic units. Some schools honor the top 10 percent of students enrolled, some establish a minimum grade-point average and others raise the minimum GPA for each year students are in school.

Local students on the honor roll are:
From Delia, Emily Claire Seifert, daughter of Leon and Connie Seifert, a senior in fine arts;
From Rossville, Caitlin Marie Alvarez, daughter of Anna Alvarez, a sophomore in liberal arts; Danielle Marie Froelich, daughter of Barbara Froelich, a pharmacy student; Derek David Ronnebaum, son of David and Beth Ronnebaum, a senior in education;
From Silver Lake, Lindsay Brooke Abbott, daughter of Scott and Patty Abbott, a senior in liberal arts; Erin Rae Wiley, daughter of Jack and Linda Wiley, a senior in journalism; Michael Matthew Grimmett, son of Bob and Susan Grimmett, a liberal arts senior; Jenna Lee Hewitt, daughter of Mark and Lori Hewitt, a senior in education.
Supreme Court Chief Justice To Visit Kansas University

LAWRENCE (AP) - Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts plans to spend two days at the University of Kansas in 2008, meeting with law and business students and delivering a speech, the university announced Friday.

Roberts is scheduled to give the Vickers Memorial Lecture on April 30 at the Lied Center.

The university's business and law schools are working together to develop a schedule for his visit.
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The university said law professor Steven McAllister was pivotal in bringing Roberts to the university, using his experience as a clerk for Supreme Court justices Byron White and Clarence Thomas to communicate with Roberts’ office.

Tickets to the lecture are free but won’t be available until next year.

The Vickers lecture is named after J.A. Vickers, an alumnus and founder of Vickers Petroleum, and his son, Robert. Speakers have included George H.W. Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Kenneth Starr and [Supreme Court Justice].