Morel Boosters
Mushroom hunters find the tasty fungi at a biological reserve

By Jan Biles • Photographs by Mike Burley • The Capital-Journal

LAWRENCE — Sherry Kay hiked through the brush and grasses at Breidenthal Biological Reserve in search of her obsession: mushrooms.

It was a warm April afternoon; the floor of the woods was still damp from a recent rain. And the fungi were hiding from its hunter.

“It’s just like fishing, you never know,” Kay said.

Kay and four members of the Kaw Valley Mycological Society — Bob Bruce, Stan Schneck, Ron Meyers, Cindy Trask, all of Lawrence — walked through the 90-acre forest, scanning the ground for white or brown caps and stems. They knew mushrooms were likely to grow near oak and hickory trees and river banks.

They climbed up and down the banks of a creek on the western edge of the reserve and searched underneath fallen, rotting logs and tree limbs. As they continued their hunt, Kay talked about her obsession.

“Mushrooms are essential because they help rot wood in the forest,” she said.

She points to mycelium, a white fibrous substance, on a rotting tree trunk lying on the ground.

“It looks like white paint, but that was a mushroom,” she said. “That is the organism that later produces mushrooms.”

Suddenly, Bruce shouts that he’s found morels along the creek bed. Steps quicken toward his voice, and the hunters surround their prey. They pluck the spongy morels, which have pitted, yellowish-brown caps and stems. They knew mushrooms were likely to grow near oak and hickory trees and river banks.

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Suddenly, Bruce shouts that he’s found morels along the creek bed. Steps quicken toward his voice, and the hunters surround their prey. They pluck the spongy morels, which have pitted, yellowish-brown heads, and place them in their baskets. The mushrooms most likely will end up on their dinner tables, after being sauteed in butter or baked and stuffed with meats or vegetables.

“I just can’t resist them,” Kay said as she picked another one.

Kay, a retired psychologist, has been hunting and identifying mushrooms at Breidenthal for several years. Her husband, Richard “Skip” Kay, a retired University of Kansas history professor, authored “A Guide to Kansas Mushrooms,” and together they have developed a checklist of mushrooms found in state.

“There are about 3,000 types of mushrooms in Kansas and we’ve identified about 1,000,” she said.

As she hiked through Breidenthal, Kay pointed out different types of mushrooms:

- **Polyporus alveolaris.** Its small, orange cap appears on fallen hardwood branches during the spring and may persist through summer, according to “A Guide to Kansas Mushrooms.” The underside of the cap shows large hexagonal pores, and it has a stubby, nearly lateral stalk.

- **Stereum.** It appears as a parchment-like, shell-like cap on fallen hardwood branches during the spring and may persist through summer, according to “A Guide to Kansas Mushrooms.” The underside of the cap shows large hexagonal pores, and it has a stubby, nearly lateral stalk.

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Fungi: Specimens donated

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Richard Kay shows off a piece of Tremella Mesenterica, known as “witch’s butter.”

shaped crust on decaying tree limbs or logs. It is too leathery to eat.

- Tremella mesenterica, or witch’s butter. A yellow-orange jelly that has the consistency of half-melted butter and appears on dead deciduous trees. The guide states the jelly dries into hard, shriveled masses that are easily revived with moisture.

The Kaw Valley Mycological Society, founded in 1986, hosts monthly mushroom hunting forays spring through fall, which allows Kay and other members to search for new types of fungi. Occasionally, friends will give Kay mushrooms they’ve found in Kansas.

On this day, she had an oyster mushroom in her freezer that someone had dropped off a day or two earlier.

“I’m not a real big eater of mushrooms, because I’ve had them on my table rotting from identifying them,” she said.

Caleb Morse, collection manager at R.L. McGregor Herbarium on KU’s West Campus, said Kay and other Kaw Valley Mycological Society members have donated hundreds of mushroom specimens to the collection.

“They had no place to deposit the specimens so we serve as the depository,” Morse said.

The herbarium has about 370,000 specimens, including plants, fungi, lichens and mosses, he said. About two-thirds are from the Great Plains.

The collection includes about 6,000 fungi specimens.

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MUSHROOM FACTS

- Mushrooms are neither animal, vegetable or mineral. They are fungi.
- Mushrooms don’t have chlorophyll, which most plants use to convert carbon dioxide and water into carbohydrates. They don’t require light to grow.
- Mushrooms are considered to be saprophytes because they get their nutrition from nonliving organic matter, such as dead plants.
- Mushrooms are produced commercially in nearly every state. Pennsylvania accounts for 40 percent of the total U.S. production.

Sources: The Mushroom Council; “A Guide to Kansas Mushrooms,” by Richard Kay
About 350 high school seniors from throughout Kansas are expected for the 65th annual American Legion Auxiliary Kansas Sunflower Girls State from Sunday through Friday at The University of Kansas. The opening assembly will be at 7:10 p.m. Sunday at the Lied Center.

Delegates, sponsored by their local American Legion Auxiliary units, will focus on a weeklong study of government at all levels and on national patriotic traditions. Most sessions will be at the Lied Center and the Dole Institute of Politics at KU.

Mary Christine Banwart, KU assistant professor of communication studies, will speak on “Women as Political Leaders” at 7 p.m. Monday at the Lied Center. Ron Thornburgh, Kansas secretary of state, will address the group and guests at inaugural ceremonies at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Lied Center.

They will meet with state officials during a visit Friday to the state Capitol in Topeka.
Report of gunman jars KU

Authorities conclude story was unfounded

By Tim Hrenchir
The Capital-Journal

LAWRENCE — "There's a madman on campus and he has rifles."

Kathryn Lewis said that is what a custodian told her and her fellow employees Friday morning at The University of Kansas Bookstore's shipping and receiving office in the basement of McCollum Hall.

Lewis was among scores of people on campus who got the news by word of mouth as authorities checked on a maintenance employee's unconfirmed report that he had seen a man carrying a long gun and walking on campus.

Lynn Bretz, KU's director of university communications, said authorities concluded the report was unfounded after they searched and found nothing.

But Bretz acknowledged Friday's scare illustrated to KU officials they need to do a better job of quickly and accurately informing students and faculty and staff members in times when their lives may be in danger. She said KU will conduct a detailed analysis of Friday's response.

The scare came less than seven weeks after a student shot and killed 32 others before committing suicide April 16 at Virginia Tech University. KU officials announced soon after the massacre they would implement a new text messaging alert system designed to quickly inform students of crisis situations. Bretz said 5,000 to 6,000 students have signed up for the service, which hasn't been put in place as KU continues to collect phone numbers.

KU student Danielle Rittenhouse said Friday's threat came at a time when the atmosphere at KU is generally casual and relaxed. Bretz said the number of people on campus was minimal — spring classes have ended and summer courses begin next week.

However, a KU Web site indicated a football camp for children in fourth- through sixth-grades and a KU camp for competitive swimmers ages 9 through 18 were in progress Friday. About 80 children attended the football camp, where organizers during the scare directed them to workout in the KU indoor facility while a coach watched the door.

Bretz said a KU maintenance employee called Lawrence police at about 9:15 a.m. to report he had looked out a window of a facilities maintenance building located southeast of Wescoe Hall and seen a man who appeared to be carrying a long rifle. The worker was the only one to report the sighting.

KU police, Lawrence police and Douglas County sheriff's deputies set up a perimeter and searched several KU buildings in the area, Bretz said. She said they didn't evacuate any buildings, telling occupants they could leave if they wanted.

Officials in some buildings ordered occupants to stay put until the all-clear was given at 10:55 a.m.

Rittenhouse, a member of this summer's advertising staff of the Please see KU, Page 8A
KU: E-mail filters hinder delivery time

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University Daily Kansan student newspaper said she was among 13 students attending an advertising staff meeting in Stauffer-Flint Hall when their adviser told them of the threat. Stauffer-Flint Hall is just north of where the gunman was reported seen.

Rittenhouse said her adviser told students the building doors were being locked and they weren’t supposed to leave. She and fellow staff members checked Web sites and their e-mails to try to learn more about what was happening.

Soon after learning of the threat, KU senior vice provost Kathleen McCluskey-Fawcett and other university officials prepared an e-mail to send to the university community, Bretz said. The e-mail was turned over to KU’s information technology department to be sent out at 10:10 a.m.

Because that department happened to be performing system maintenance on its computer network, the e-mail wasn’t sent to some recipients until as much as 40 minutes later, Bretz said.

The message stated: “KU public safety has received an unconfirmed report of a man carrying a rifle near Wescoe Hall. KU and Lawrence police have responded to the area and are conducting a perimeter search. Repeat — this is an unconfirmed report. The campus is not in lockdown, but if you see any suspicious behavior on campus, call 911 immediately. If you are in the central campus area, please remain indoors until further notice.”

Rittenhouse’s computer indicated KU sent the message to her at 10:42 a.m. and she got it at 11:17 a.m.

That was well after KU sent out a second message at 10:55 a.m. saying the search had been completed, there was no evidence of a threat and all on campus were advised to return to normal operations.

Bretz said one reason for the late arrival of some of Friday’s emergency messages is because e-mails KU sends sometimes are directed to e-mail addresses that aren’t on the KU system and held up by spam-filtering mechanisms of servers for those addresses.

“E-mail systems have filters and ‘rules’ governing which e-mail messages are accepted into an in-box,” Bretz wrote in an e-mail. “They are set up to block ‘spam,’ and e-mails sent to a large number of people may be interpreted as spam. The two emergency e-mails we sent today went to 37,000 addresses each time. We can guarantee delivery to all KU e-mail addresses; we can’t control whether other e-mail systems will filter out messages.”

Bretz said KU will seek to address e-mail challenges it faces while continuing to work to put a text messaging system in place.

She noted that KU also sent automated voice mail notifications of Friday’s crisis situation at 10:27 a.m. to all land-line telephones on campus, then sent the all-clear message to those lines at 10:55 a.m.

“You can’t rely on any one communications tool,” Bretz said. “You have to have a layered system.”

Capital-Journal staff writer Kevin Haskin contributed to this report.

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WU considers new emergency systems

By Adrielle Harvey
THE CAPITAL-JOURNAL

Washburn University officials are considering new ways to communicate with students in emergency situations due to such recent events as the Virginia Tech University shooting.

Dean Forster, chief of the WU Police Department, said officials were considering installing LED announcement boards across campus, as well as implementing a cell phone calling system.

A cell phone system using the text message function was adopted recently by The University of Kansas, but it hasn’t been implemented and wasn’t available Friday when a maintenance employee reported seeing a man carrying a long gun and walking around campus.

KU authorities later said the report was unfounded.

Forster said Tuesday that Washburn University officials always update their policies.

“We have a good system,” he said. “We’re going to have a better system constantly.”

“Washburn has a lot of things in the works,” Forster said. “We take the security on this campus very seriously.”

At the same time, he wants a place where students can have fun without being afraid.

“This is a learning environment,” he said. “You don’t want to make it like a jail.”

Forster said WU currently uses a calling tree to make faculty/staff aware of emergencies. It starts by one person initiating a phone call to several other people, then those people call people and so forth.

WU also uses targeted announcements via the Internet and e-mail to alert students of such events.

“This is a good system, but there’s no way to reach everybody,” Forster said.

He said WU also was getting more security cameras that would allow about 44 different locations on campus to be monitored.

WU student Brian Forester thinks the university police department does a “pretty good job” at keeping the campus safe.

“I’ve always felt safe here on campus,” Forester said. “I can’t think of any reason why I wouldn’t.”

Forster said he thinks there is “less opportunity for mass violence” on a smaller campus, but that it often starts with the students.

“Students can help out a lot,” he said. “If you see something, report it. They (police) rely on the citizens to protect the campus.”

Forster said the WU Police Department has 21 officers who are on duty at various times.

He said all campus parking lots were marked with signs, so students there could report their exact location in the event of trouble. Twelve help phones, at which students can push a button to bring campus police to a specific location, are placed across campus, Forster said.

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Right direction

Road improvements are boon to region, and funding by user fees makes them even better

Even though it will soon cost more to drive on the Kansas Turnpike, we’re revved up about the recently completed expansion of the road.

The widening of the highway from four to six lanes between Topeka and Lawrence is a boon to the area, not only for the thousands of commuters who travel the toll road every day but for the economic development potential of the capital city.

After all, good roads are among the community assets that companies seek when looking for areas in which to expand or relocate. So are top-notch educational institutions.

The new stretch of turnpike helps Topeka stand out in both those respects. Topeka has always been able to tout the gem of a higher educational institution in its own backyard, Washburn University, but now the city can highlight its proximity to The University of Kansas — less than a 30-minute drive on a silky smooth, six-lane road.

So even those who won’t drive the road on a daily basis — or at all — will benefit in some way.

For those who rely on the turnpike to travel between Topeka and Lawrence, the expansion should bring less congestion and shorter commutes.

The payoff should be worth the 3½ years of construction on the $65 million project.

Starting July 1, though, comes the part we’re less excited about: higher tolls.

The Kansas Turnpike Authority will bump the charges by 5 percent to fund replacement of the bridges over the Kansas River in Lawrence. That $140 million project includes replacing the east- and westbound bridges over the river, the viaducts that carry traffic on two city streets over the turnpike, improvements to toll plazas and an additional lane in each direction between the East Lawrence and West Lawrence interchanges.

The increased tolls obviously aren’t cause for celebration, especially when coupled with high gasoline prices, but the good news is that the higher rates will allow the KTA to fund the project without turning to state taxpayers.

That model — upgrading and maintaining the turnpike with user fees as opposed to tax revenue — has been the KTA’s way of doing business throughout its history.

We’re happy to see the turnpike continue to operate in that mode, even if it means extra costs to regular travelers on the toll road. Let’s not forget, after all, that it’s not just Kansans who use the turnpike.

Thankfully, too, the increases aren’t coming on top of any other recent price hikes.

That might have been the case had lawmakers embraced Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius’ suggestion this year to fund deferred maintenance projects at state colleges by boosting turnpike tolls and taking the proceeds for state use.

Sebelius’ idea was innovative, and there were several things to like about it:

■ It would have generated a great deal of revenue quickly.
■ It would have allowed the state to fix the buildings without raising taxes.
■ Even with Sebelius’ proposed rate increase, the state’s tolls would still have been under the national average.

The Legislature steered away from the governor’s proposal, choosing
instead to turn to a mix of funding sources — both tax money and private donations — to pay the bill for the universities’ deferred maintenance.

In the end, it was good for the state to keep its hands off the turnpike. Doing so protected motorists from facing a substantial rate hike while allowing the KTA to fund its next round of improvements with an increase that is fairly easy to digest.

As proved by the expansion project, the folks who manage the turnpike do a pretty good job of improving and maintaining the road using motorists’ dimes and quarters.

Here’s hoping the next upgrade turns out as well as the last.