

COMMENTARY



BARBARA SHELLY

Politics in some pear trees

A moment of silence please, for the ornamental pear trees, finally removed from their state of deprivation and removal.

For 17 years they have struggled to grow in 164 planters along Southwest Trafficway. The folly of the horticultural experiment has been well-documented. The poor trees were choked at the roots, assaulted daily by noxious fumes, pummeled with salt and sand in the winter, and baked in the summer.

They never thrived, yet the city persevered. A tree would die and then be replaced by another. Until now.

"Finally, finally, finally, after years of trying to grow trees where trees aren't supposed to grow, they came to the realization that we'd be better off with some decorative pavement," said Bob Lewellen, a member of the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners.

The trees are gone now, leaving only a brick strip to divide the northbound and southbound lanes of the busy trafficway.

I found one person who missed them.

"It looks kind of naked. Like when you don't wear earrings," said Mickey Simmons, a waitress at Nichols Lunch, which faces the trafficway at 39th Street. She's been serving coffee and platters long enough to see the trees planted, replaced and finally removed.

Her customers seemed more in tune with Lewellen.

"Trees just won't grow there," says Jim May, a regular.

No, they won't. Experts here and elsewhere had anticipated that, back in the 1980s, they predicted ruin for trees stuck in a median less than 6 feet wide.

But neighborhood and political leaders wanted something to distinguish the trafficway, the major north-south thoroughfare on the west side of midtown. The city has never been good at saying "no" to such demands.

"I think some people really took an interest in wanting it to be done. They wanted it so badly they kept trying different things," said Mark Govea, citywide services manager for the Parks and Recreation Department.

The department experimented with different species of pear trees. In recent years it had also tried daylilies and grasses. The bills sat on a shelf. Preparing the wells and planting the original trees, in 1986, cost \$415 a tree. Counting labor, it cost about \$200 to replace a tree, Govea said.

Budget realities finally forced the decision.

"We're cutting people. We're cutting services, I said, 'Let's cut our losses,'" Govea said.

Of all the people who drive the trafficway, the number who have formally protested the deforestation can be counted on one hand. One man wrote a 16-page letter expressing his concern. A woman suggested replacing the pear trees with redbuds. She further recommended getting Anheuser-Busch to sponsor the planting, and using the slogan, "This Bud's for You."

But there won't be buds for anyone along the trafficway anymore. The tree wells have been paved over. The city is through trying to grow vegetation between flowing traffic, although it would consider banners if someone wanted to pay for them, Govea said.

As a regular driver of Southwest Trafficway, I prefer the new, minimalist look. The trees were always painful to behold. May they rest in peace.

And sometime down another road, may common sense prevail over politics a little sooner.

To leave a comment for Barbara Shelly, call (816) 234-4800 and enter 4384, or send e-mail to shelly@kcstar.com.

More spending

Kansas City's school superintendent proposes restoring some budget cuts. B-3

Prostitution sting labeled a success

By CHRISTINE VENDEL and GLENN E. RICE
The Kansas City Star

Police said Wednesday that last week's prostitution sting netted several prominent people among the 100 arrested, and has reduced the number of Internet ads for escort services.

Among those arrested were a priest from St. Joseph, a Clay County sheriff's deputy, the head track coach at Shawnee Mission South High School and an executive vice president of a Baptist college in Iowa.

The sting focused on escort services and involved 20 law enforcement

agencies in Kansas and Missouri. It was the largest local sting of its kind, according to Sgt. Brad Dumit of Kansas City's vice unit.

"Everyone worked very well together," Dumit said. "We were very successful."

Dumit said he was planning similar stings in the future.

The sting began with police placing four ads in a weekly newspaper and on the Internet. Police said men who answered the ads and agreed to exchange something of value for sex acts were arrested. Police said women who agreed to provide sex acts in exchange for

See STING, B-2



Yael T. Abouhalkah

Corporate upheaval has cost Kansas City two prominent civic leaders. Opinion, B-7

Teenager sentenced in death of classmate

Boy gets two life terms for rape, murder

By SHASHANK BENGALI
The Kansas City Star

Zachariah Tripp was sentenced Wednesday to two life terms in prison plus 15 years for the kidnapping, rape and murder of Buchanan County teenager Sarah McCoy.

Tripp, a 17-year-old from Gower, will not be eligible for parole on the

life sentence attached to the murder conviction. Judge Randall Jackson ordered that the sentences be served consecutively.

Jurors had recommended the sentences after convicting Tripp last month to conclude one of the longest criminal prosecutions in Buchanan County history. Tripp's first trial had ended in October in a mistrial after jurors deadlocked.

A jury from Boone County was brought in for the retrial and sequestered.

McCoy, a 15-year-old from near-Easton, disappeared from her home on Dec. 3, 2001. Her body was found in a creek bed two days later.

Tripp and McCoy had known each other as students at East Buchanan High School. Prosecutors called Tripp "a stone-cold

See TRIPP, B-2

Community tribute



DEBORAH JOHNSON/The Kansas City Star

Members of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority honored Lucile Bluford on Wednesday at a community tribute and memorial service. The

journalist and crusader died last week at the age of 91. Bluford edited *The Call*, a weekly newspaper, for more than 40 years.

Lucile Bluford recalled with tears, laughter

By BRIAN BURNES
The Kansas City Star

Mourners filled Watkins Brothers Memorial Chapel on Wednesday night to remember Kansas City journalist Lucile H. Bluford, who died last week at age 91.

But as they mourned, they also laughed.

Some speakers described Bluford's powers of persuasion. Baseball legend Buck O'Neil said he first met Bluford 65 years ago in a

Kansas City nightclub. Bluford persuaded him to meet her the following morning in a Kansas City church.

"We are so honored that we had you not only as a journalist but as a friend," O'Neil added. "Love you, Lucile."

Several speakers, recalling Bluford's resolve in the face of injustice, remembered her impatience for anyone who called upon her on Thursdays — deadline day for *The Call*, the weekly African-American newspaper for which Bluford began writing in 1932.



Bluford

Others detailed her insights into the city's political life.

Jackson County Executive Kathryn Shields recalled that many Kansas City Democrats were unconvicted in the early 1980s that Alan Wheat, an African-American

state representative, could win election to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Bluford was, and she published an analysis that convinced many "When Miss Bluford wrote it, people listened and believed," Shields said.

What won election to the House in 1982.

Some spoke of the journalist's softer side. Arthur A. Benson II, a

See BLUFORD, B-4

Sidewalk cafes to get KC Council vote today

By LYNN HORSLEY
The Kansas City Star

Cafes on public sidewalks are not allowed in Kansas City, but a City Council vote today could bring eats to the streets — and alcohol.

The council's Planning, Zoning and Economic Development Committee endorsed a sidewalk cafe measure Wednesday to promote a more dynamic street life downtown and in other commercial districts.

The measure now goes to the full council.

"This is a small step in providing a more vibrant downtown and a more vibrant Kansas City," City Manager Wayne Cauthe told the committee. "It's something that as a city we need to do."

Supporters want to move quickly to take advantage of the summer restaurant season.

Mayor Kay Barnes, downtown boosters, and restaurant and bar owners urged passage of the measure, which would require establishments to pay a \$50 application fee and a \$250 annual permit fee, and carry \$2 million in liability insurance.

The fees would allow the city to hire additional enforcement staff to guard against violations.

Tables and chairs would be allowed only in commercial areas, would not be allowed to block pedestrian or wheelchair access to the sidewalks, and would not be allowed to endanger the public or cause a nuisance.

The permit requirements would apply to cafe owners whether they are selling doughnuts and coffee,

See CAFES, B-2

P.S.

In search of a name

A 17-year-old Merriam tradition is about to quit using its name — cold turkey.

Parks and Recreation Director Susan Hayden said she had been hearing from residents who did not know that the city sponsors the annual Turkey Creek Festival.

"We think it's important that the city of Merriam be recognized in the title," Hayden said.

Suggested names must include Merriam in the title and an explanation of why the name is appropriate. Mail suggestions to Director of Parks and Recreation, 5701 Merriam Drive, Merriam, KS 66203; or e-mail to susan@merriam.org.

The festival is held the third Saturday in May in Antioch Park. Activities include a parade, a 5K run, an arts and crafts show and concerts.

— Peter Boylan/The Star



Leaping tall buildings...

Wednesday's high of 88 probably inspired many residents to take refuge somewhere nice and cool.

Ryan Funk, 8, of Kansas City, Kan., chose to cool down with a flying leap off Roeland Park Aquatic Center's high diving board.

Kansas City's skyline served as a backdrop for Ryan's plunge.

Today's weather is forecast to be a little cooler, with a high of 80.

CHRIS OCHSNER
The Kansas City Star

Funds and fur

The Wayside Waifs animal shelter in Kansas City raised enough at its Fur Ball fund-raiser to pay off its \$300,000 building mortgage.

Officials said they expect the seventh annual event will bring in between \$450,000 and \$475,000 after costs. Saturday's "Tails of the High Seas" event at the Muehlebach Tower of the Kansas City Marriott Downtown included a dinner and auction.

"We were a little worried we wouldn't have the number of folks

we had anticipated, but it ended up being the largest fund-raiser in our history," said Courtney Dunn, spokeswoman.

Last year, the Fur Ball brought in a little more than \$200,000, she said.

Wayside Waifs opened its new facility in 1996. The 32,000-square-foot building cost about \$4 million. The shelter operates on an annual budget of about \$1.9 million.

— Summer Harlow/The Star

Easy does it, leadfoots

Drag racers, beware.

Beginning Friday night, the Overland Park Police Department will step up enforcement near 135th Street and Quivira Road.

Officers will use low-profile vehicles and other measures to go after drag racers, speeders and others violating traffic laws.

The department has noticed an

increase in drag racing in the area from 119th to 143rd streets between Nieman and Pflumm roads since school let out for the summer.

More officers will be patrolling that area on Friday and Saturday nights.

— Brin Fitzgerald/The Star

Game dispute flared into murder, victim's family says

By GLENN E. RICE and JOHN SHULTZ

Dustin L. Thomas died over a basketball game. That, said Rob and Michael Thomas, was the genesis of a Northland feud that boiled over Monday and ended with the slaying of their 18-year-old brother.

"He had just started his life." An 18-year-old classmate of Dustin Thomas remained in custody Wednesday, accused of first-degree murder. Her bond was set at \$2 million.



Thomas Roberts

Michael Thomas. "He was the one kid you wouldn't expect to get a phone call over like this." The Thomases, standing at the crest of Kansas City's Water Works Park, fought back tears as they cradled their brother's plastic-bound blue senior book.

They Tuesday, they found Thomas sprawled on a grassy area across the street from his home, bleeding from a wound in his throat. Thomas died at the scene, Snapp said.

Robert then drove away. Officers arrived and found Thomas lying on the pavement. Homicide detectives observed Billy clubs, sticks, a crowbar and a pair of tree trimmers in the street in the area.

TRIPP: Teenager sentenced to life

A 20-year-old Kansas City man was arrested Wednesday morning for allegedly sending sexually explicit messages over the Internet to a 13-year-old Idaho girl.

Sex-abuse charges. A 20-year-old Kansas City man was arrested Wednesday morning for allegedly sending sexually explicit messages over the Internet to a 13-year-old Idaho girl.

Teen fatally shot. A teenager was shot to death Wednesday evening in the 4100 block of Troost Avenue, police said.



Tripp



McCoy



One, two, three...heave!

As downtown Kansas City's skyline seemed to beckon behind them, ground crew members for the Goodyear blimp Stars and Stripes launched the airship on a flight Wednesday.

Leavenworth. Police said eight shots were fired into the house, probably from a 9mm weapon, about 12:45 a.m.

Fort Leavenworth. Chance of command. Fort Leavenworth commander Lt. Gen. James C. Riley will officially relinquish his command by 10 a.m. June 26.

Police promotions. Eight police officers were promoted this week. A ceremony was held Tuesday night to honor the officers.

Fugitive arrest. A Minnesota man wanted in connection with the murder of his girlfriend's husband was arrested in Kansas City late Tuesday.

Electrical fire. A fire early Wednesday heavily damaged one Kansas City house and caused minor damage to one next door.

Reward raised. The reward offered for information leading to an arrest in the December slaying of a Kansas City couple at their home was increased this week to \$10,000.

CAFES: Kansas City Council votes today

Several members of the Liquor Ordinance Review Committee urged city officials to proceed slowly in adopting the ordinance to guard against the proliferation of too many liquor establishments, especially near residential neighborhoods.

Robbery arrests. Police arrested two men Wednesday afternoon after a robbery at a fast-food restaurant.

STING: Police top success after 100 arrests in prostitution raid. Something of value also were arrested. On Wednesday, Dumit said he checked some Internet sites and saw that many ads for escort services had been pulled.

JACKSON COUNTY. Family sought. The medical examiner's office is seeking relatives of Kenneth G. Rogers' attorney, John P. O'Connor, declined to comment until prosecutors are finished reviewing the case.

GRANDVIEW. Children's advocate. Joan Parrott, vice president of the Children's Defense Fund, will speak on children's issues at 6 p.m. Saturday.

LOTTERIES. Wednesday's winning lottery numbers. Missouri Pick 3: 3-0-3. Straight-play winners won \$598; box-play winners won \$200.

CAFES: Kansas City Council votes today. Several members of the Liquor Ordinance Review Committee urged city officials to proceed slowly in adopting the ordinance to guard against the proliferation of too many liquor establishments, especially near residential neighborhoods.