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COLUMBIA DAILY

TRIBUNE

**HUNGER PAINS: COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOL
STUDENTS MAY FEEL PINCH OF RISING FOOD COSTS
DURING LUNCHTIME NEWS, 14A**

Columbia, Missouri

FRIDAY, June 6, 2008

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Nick King photo

Festival royalty

Megan Brush, center, tries on a balloon crown as her cousin Holly Schweikert, 8, left, waits yesterday at Flat Branch Park during the Twilight Festival. The streets of downtown Columbia were full of festival goers, musicians and vendors yesterday evening for the first of this month's weekly festivals, held from 6 to 9 p.m. every Thursday in June and September.

Curators proceed with caution

By ABRAHAM MAHSIE of the Tribune's staff

The University of Missouri curators beefed up security for their Columbia meeting yesterday and today as a result of the recent shooting at a Kirkwood City Council meeting and at university campuses around the country.

"It's a result of the times we're living in," said Jack Watring, security liaison officer for the UM System and chief of the MU Police Department. "Incidents over the last 30 years have increased security on occasion."

Watring cited campus protests over the Vietnam War in the early 1970s and South African apartheid as past causes for concern.

Changes include partitioning off the board and executive staff from the public, rearranging their tables to bring the staff in closer proximity to

Security heightened for board meetings.

each other and stationing an officer nearby. An additional uniformed officer and plainclothes officer also man a single entryway, where photo identification is checked and badges are necessary to enter the meeting area.

Security also is present at after-hours board functions.

Watring and UM System Chief of Staff David Russell said the changes were discussed in closed session at the board's April meeting in

Rolla. Russell said he believed holding the security meeting behind closed doors was the first such occasion in his 18 years at the university, but a necessity. "We wouldn't want to do it on a routine basis," Russell said, adding that sensitive security information might be compromised if publicly disclosed.

In its agenda for the April meeting,

curators cited a provision of the state's Open Meetings and Records Law passed in 2002 that allows public bodies to discuss matters in closed session "in responding to or preventing any critical incident which is or appears to be terrorist in nature and which has the potential to endanger individual or public safety or health."

"It's a shame you have to do it," Curator John Carnahan of Springfield said of the precautions. "We're a little too Midwestern in our approach. We didn't think it could happen to us, then Kirkwood happened."

On Feb. 7, Charles Lee "Cookie" Thornton opened fire during a city council meeting in Kirkwood, killing two police officers, two city council members and the city's public works director and wounding the mayor and a newspaper reporter before

police shot and killed Thornton.

A week later, on Valentine's Day, a gunman burst into a lecture hall at Northern Illinois University, killing five students and wounding 18 others before killing himself. The episode was reminiscent of the massacre almost a year earlier at Virginia Tech University, where a gunman killed 32 people and himself in the worst mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

Regarding additional security to protect students on the four UM System campuses, Watring said security offices have continued efforts to coordinate intercampus communication efforts and improve communication to the president and chancellors.

Watring also said there is discussion about increasing the number of officers on campuses and providing proper security for off-campus university housing.

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Inside

UM president wins extension of his contract.

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'Forgotten day' still fresh for some

By T.J. GREANEY of the Tribune's staff

Ralph Conte, 91, of Columbia says today is a "forgotten day."

In his younger years, there were parades and moments of silence, but today, nothing much at all. The World War II veteran planned to spend today, the anniversary of D-Day, visiting with his wife, Norma, in a nursing home and eating a quiet dinner at home.

"Very few people even recognize that it's D-Day anymore," he said.

Part of it is age. Conte said as many as 1,000 of his fellow WWII veterans die every day across the nation. An annual reunion of his 416th Bombardment Group drew eight men last year, and only six are expected to attend this year, which will be the group's last reunion.

But for Conte, the memories are still fresh.

On June 6, 1944, 850,000 Allied troops crossed the English Channel and invaded Normandy in an effort to liberate Europe from Nazi control. Thousands of young Americans never returned and are buried in cemeteries in northern France.

"We couldn't believe what we were looking

at," said Conte, who watched the invasion from the air. "It was absolutely awesome to see so many thousands and thousands. They seemed like ants all over the place going into the beachhead."

Conte, then 25, was a bombardier navigator posted at an airbase about 30 miles north-east of London. The date and location of the D-Day invasion — short for "deployment day" — were closely guarded secrets, but airmen at Conte's base became suspicious when crews began painting the wings and fuselages of all aircraft at the base with alternating black and white stripes several days before. They'd later find out that anything without this insignia would be shot out of the air.

At 2 a.m. June, all lead pilots and bombardier navigators were roused from their sleep and taken to a briefing room. Conte said that as they entered the room, commanding officers locked all the doors behind them and pulled down all the shades.

The pilots and navigators were told, "Today is the day." Glider aircraft were already dropping heavy equipment behind enemy lines, and an amphibious landing was

headed to the beachhead at Normandy.

"Everyone howled, 'Normandy?'" said Conte. "We always thought the invasion was going to be at Pas-de-Calais, which is only 22 miles away, but Normandy was 100 miles away from the English coast."

Conte's 416th Bomb Group was charged with destroying a key crossroads at Argentan, behind enemy lines. Cloud cover delayed takeoff until 1 p.m., and after that the formation could fly only at an altitude of about 2,000 feet, about 10,000 feet lower than usual.

Conte said the last planes in his 56-plane formation were "practically scraping the ground," and all were in danger of being hit not only by flak from anti-aircraft guns but also by small-arms fire from the ground.

The sight from above, he said, was more than he could put into words. "All we could see were thousands of boats from horizon to horizon. Anything that could float was on the channel at that particular time," he said. "It was a massive thing."

The 56 planes weaved through the air in evasive action when they spotted the flash of anti-aircraft fire on the ground. "You'd go left 9 degrees and then back right. But you have to realize 56 planes making a turn isn't like



Photo courtesy of Ralph Conte

Ralph Conte, third from left, goes over a flight plan with his fellow crew members a few weeks after participating in the Normandy invasion on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

going around a corner," he said.

One of the planes was blown out of the sky, killing the three inside. But the rest of the formation made it to the target and destroyed the crossroads, preventing German reinforcements from making it to the battle. In 2001, Conte memorialized the achievement in a book, "Attack Bombers, We Need You!"

Today there are few D-Day veterans left, and none of those contacted knew of any commemorations. One of them, George Park-

er, 85, of Columbia, said he just feels thankful to have been part of the historic day. He piloted a B-26 Marauder dropping bombs on German gun positions on the Normandy cliffs early that morning.

"No matter what your rank was, if you were in certain places at certain times in history, you can always remember that," he said. "I guess it's the fickle finger of fate."

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with a storm

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