Kaska named research award winner

Sophia Kaska, a senior in biochemistry and daughter of Tek and Sarah Kaska, was one of 69 University of Kansas students receiving Undergraduate Research Awards for spring 2009.

The awards support original, independent research by undergraduates enrolled on the Lawrence campus. Kaska’s research is “Testing Potential Therapeutics for Fibrosis via Inhibition of Prolyl-4-hydroxylase.”
Lea involved in health screenings

University of Kansas pharmacy students provided free bone density screening for adults 55 and older on April 2 in Lawrence. The event was first of several planned at the Douglas County Senior Center sponsored by "A Partnership for Senior Health," a collaboration between KU's School of Pharmacy, Douglas County Senior Services and Walgreens. Among the students participating was Josephine M. Lea, a fourth-year pharmacy student and daughter of June Keesling.
Payne named to honor roll

Stephanie Payne, daughter of Donna Payne and Larry Payne, a freshman undecided major and member of the swimming/diving team, has been named to the University of Kansas Athletics Director’s Honor Roll for 2008. Student athletes who achieved a GPA of at least 3.0 are eligible for the honor.
Many will look back at 2008 as a year of challenges for the commercial real estate industry. It also was a year of accomplishments. Downtown welcomed its first grocery store in decades. Olathe impressed the nation by raising the railroad at four crossings, eliminating congestion that had stifled commerce. Lee’s Summit remade its downtown with an eye-catching mix of uses.

The Kansas City Business Journal’s fourth-annual Capstone Awards program honors these and many other real estate developments, large and small, that are making a difference throughout the community.

We asked readers to nominate outstanding real estate development projects and transactions completed in 2008. A panel of judges reviewed everything from visual aesthetics to new technological concepts to the projects’ relevance in the community.

The program’s aim is to look beyond dollar figures and square footage and consider how these projects are changing our community and affecting our lives. Toward that end, we explore the challenges and strategies, and see the care, attention and skill that have gone into creating these impressive projects.

This section recognized more than 120 companies that have had a hand in these projects. We congratulate them and the countless others, including sub-contractors, banks, law firms and consultants, that have shaped some of the area’s most outstanding developments.

Jonna Lorenz

Judges for this year’s event are Neal Angrisano, David Brain, Cydney Gurgens, Brent Miles and Brian Starnes. Angrisano is deputy director of facilities management for Johnston County, president of the American Institute of Architects’ Kansas City chapter and an adjunct professor at the University of Kansas School of Architecture. He previously was a senior associate with Gould Evans Associates.

Brain was a founding shareholder of Entertainment Properties Trust and became its president and CEO in 1999. He previously worked in investment banking and corporate finance for companies including George K. Baum & Co. and KPMG Peat Marwick LLP.

Gurgens is manager and vice president of Wells Fargo Middle Market Real Estate and a past president of Kansas City Commercial Real Estate Women. She has 15 years of experience in commercial real estate lending.

Miles is president of the Wyandotte Economic Development Council. He previously served as director of planning and economic development in Riverside and as a planner in Parkville.

Starnes is president of Blue Springs Economic Development Corp. He previously was director of economic development for the Overland Park Economic Development Council.
Midwest Research Institute expanding to K-State

By MARGARET STAFFORD

Midwest Research Institute plans to open a subsidiary in Kansas to bolster research efforts in such areas as animal health, biosecurity and renewable energy.

The Kansas City-based agency announced recently that its wholly-owned subsidiary, Midwest Research Institute-Kansas, will be housed on the Kansas State University campus in Manhattan.

The announcement comes about three months after Kansas State was chosen as the site for the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility, a federally funded lab that will conduct research on deadly plant and animal diseases.

The institute’s decision to move into Kansas was partly related to the NBADF decision, but it also will strengthen already existing ties between the institute, Kansas State and other Kansas researchers, said Linda Cook, a spokeswoman for the agency.

The institute specializes in applied research and commercialization of the basic research done by many universities, government organizations and businesses, Cook said.

“There are so many synergies between the basic research work done by universities and what MRI provides that it’s just a really good relationship,” Cook said. “They support everything we do.”

The new Kansas subsidiary will open by the end of the month and be housed at the Manhattan/Kansas State Innovation Center. Initially, researchers will travel between Kansas City and Manhattan with permanent staff added in Manhattan as research projects progress, Cook said.

“Establishing a physical presence in Kansas in addition to the Institute’s strong and historic presence in Missouri will enable MRI to significantly strengthen its support of vital scientific research in our bi-state region,” James L. Spigarelli, president and CEO of the institute said in a written statement. “We look forward to many new opportunities ahead.”

Michael Helmsetter, the institute’s executive vice president and director of research operations, was named president of the Kansas subsidiary. He also will become president and CEO of the institute in October, when Spigarelli retires.

One focus of MRI-Kansas will be animal health research, which is expected to boost efforts to attract researchers and related businesses to the Animal Health Corridor. The corridor stretches between Manhattan and Columbia, Mo., and includes more than 120 animal health companies and the University of Kansas and University of Missouri.

The institute and Kansas State also are forming a new collaboration to accelerate research coming out of the NBADF labs, when the facility opens in 2015, as well as Kansas State’s existing Biosecurity Research Institute, MRI said in a news release. MRI also will provide biocontainment management and operations services under an agreement with the Kansas Bioscience Authority.

A third focus of MRI-Kansas will be advanced energy research and commercialization of related technology.

The institute also has labs in Palm Bay, Fla., and Rockville, Md., and has managed the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colo., for the U.S. Department of Energy since 1977.

—AP
Schellus said he vetoed the legislature's request to use federal stimulus money to fund state universities. In his veto message, Schellus said the state Board of Regents should cut $40 million in tuition costs for the 2009-10 school year and write a proposal to help Kansas universities the state will have to settle for. They will have to write it because of expected declines in state revenues.
Bob, Elizabeth Dole to deliver lectures for KU institute

BY ANDY HYLAND
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LAWRENCE — Former U.S. Sens. Bob and Elizabeth Dole are scheduled to deliver the 2009 Dole Lecture sponsored by the Dole Institute of Politics at Kansas University.

Bob Dole has given one of the annual lectures before, but Bill Lacy, director of the Dole Institute, said he has tried to get the two of them to appear at the institute together since Bob Dole’s last speaking engagement there.

“They’re kind of one of the original ‘power couples’” in Washington, Lacy said, pointing out that both have distinguished careers in public service.

The Doles will appear in an interview-style event conducted by Lacy at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, May 3, at the Lied Center. Tickets will be available beginning at 11 a.m. Monday at the Lied Center box office. Student tickets with a valid KUID will be available at the same time at the Student Union Activities box office in addition to the Lied Center.

Tickets are free and limited to four per person. Orders can be taken by phone at the Lied Center box office, with a $5 surcharge per order, by calling (785) 864-2787.

In addition to both serving as U.S. senators — he from Kansas and she from North Carolina — the Doles have a long record of public service. Bob Dole has served as chairman of the Republican National Committee, and was the Republican nominee for vice president in 1976 and president in 1996.

Elizabeth Dole served as secretary of transportation under President Ronald Reagan and secretary of labor under President George H.W. Bush. She has served as the president of the American Red Cross, and ran her own campaign for president in 2000. She was also North Carolina’s first female U.S. senator, in office from 2003 until January of this year.

“Individually, they have extraordinary records of public service, but combined, it’s amazing,” Lacy said.

In his interview with the Doles, Lacy said he hoped to cover how they both got into public service, and why it’s an important calling, in addition to their relationship over the years.

The Dole Lecture is given annually to commemorate the recovery of Bob Dole after he was gravely wounded during a World War II battle. Previous lectures have been given by President Bill Clinton, Sen. Tom Daschle, Gen. Richard Myers, journalist Tom Brokaw and Dole himself.

“Individually, they have extraordinary records of public service, but combined, it’s amazing.”

Bill Lacy
Director, KU Dole Institute of Politics
The Jazz Pioneers, a Leavenworth High School band, performed March 6 at the University of Kansas Jazz Festival. The students were awarded the highest possible rating from the judging panel. This is the second time in three years the group has achieved this rating.

In addition to group honors, one student, Ismael Garcia, earned a special award as outstanding soloist on the drum set.
Twenty students at the University of Kansas have been chosen as orientation assistants for this summer and the upcoming academic year.

One of the students is Garrett Kelly, a senior in theater and film and pre-journalism. Kelly, a graduate of Tonganoxie High School, is the son of Michael E. and Keyta D. Kelly.

Orientation assistants are hired through a process that includes essay writing, group interaction activities, a five-minute speech and final interview. The assistants prepare for orientation sessions by attending three weeks of training that covers KU academic and student services, public speaking, interaction with the public and diversity issues.

New Student Orientation programs, which are tailored to incoming students' fields of study, offer information about KU to first-time freshmen, transfer students and readmitted students.

The programs are designed to help students, parents and guests with their academic, social and personal transitions to KU and to reduce anxieties about attending college.
Study: Billions for businesses in tax changes

LAWRENCE, Kan. (AP) — Three law professors at the University of Kansas have completed a study suggesting that large U.S. corporations won billions of dollars in tax savings by lobbying Congress to change the tax code four years ago.

Stephen Mazza and two associates spent six months analyzing a provision in the American Jobs Creation Act, passed in October 2004, that allowed corporations to bring overseas earnings back to the U.S. at a 5.25 percent tax rate, instead of the usual 35 percent.

They then looked at how much companies like IBM, Pfizer and Eli Lilly and Co. spent to lobby for the change and how much they saved.

Their figures determined that 93 of the country’s biggest firms got $62 billion in tax savings after spending only $283 million for lobbyists. In total, they said almost 500 companies saved close to $100 billion — or an average 22,000 percent return on their lobbying investment.

"Is this how you want policy enacted?" asked Bill Allison of the Sunlight Foundation, which monitors political spending and lobbying. "Whoever has the biggest access to lobbyists and to Washington insiders gets the tax relief?"

Sheila Krumholz of the Center for Responsive Politics, which also watches lobbying, said the big companies could outspend and obscure other viewpoints.

"Is policy being decided on the merits, or is it being unduly influenced by the money spent?" Krumholz said. "And then do the non-moned interests lose a valuable seat at the table?"

Industry officials say they were doing what was right for their employees, customers and taxpayers. "The government is doing something to you or for you every day here in Washington," said Dave Wenhold, president of the American League of Lobbyists, which represents lobbyists themselves. "If you don’t have somebody watching out for your interests, it could prove dangerous to your organization."

Supporters say most lobbying deals with issues that have little financial impact, such as gun control, abortion and education.

Focusing on a single tax break affecting billions of dollars in corporate revenue, like the study does, could overstate what lobbyists do, they say.

Mazza acknowledged that tax lobbying may be quite different from other kinds of lobbying, noting that "the payouts are going to be significantly higher in the tax area."

Others said the tax policy needed to be changed, regardless of whether lobbyists got involved or not. If it hadn’t been changed, the U.S. Treasury would have missed out on billions in revenue as those companies’ overseas profits stayed overseas.

"It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure why businesses have an incentive to look for tax savings," said Pete Sepp of the National Taxpayers Union. "Over $300 billion in profits held overseas were brought back here. ... It sure beats doing a favor for some other country’s economy by letting the money sit abroad."

President Barack Obama has pledged, like presidents before him, to impose tougher regulations on lobbyists trying to influence the executive branch.

But the industry continues to flourish, receiving $3 billion last year — a 14 percent increase from 2007 — to lobby Congress and the federal government, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Lobbyists claim they’re in demand because they get results.

They said the need for professional help is even more profound in taxes matters because the tax code is so complex.

"If anyone’s to blame for this situation, it’s Congress," Sepp said. "If lawmakers would give up their habit of using the tax system as a political weapon and making the whole thing simpler, we wouldn’t even be having this debate."

Allison said it’s not just a question of complicated tax laws, however. It’s that big taxpayers are more likely to get help because they can afford the most powerful lobbyists, he said.

"Any citizen can hire a lobbyist," he said. "But even if we all banded together, we’re not going to get a huge tax break."

Mazza said the study doesn’t suggest that the 2004 tax changes were illegal or wrong, although he did refer to studies indicating the companies receiving the break gave passed along the savings to shareholders instead of hiring more workers.

"The tax break created jobs," he said, "but it created them in the lobbying industry."