

Workshop hopes for minimal cuts

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Missouri sheltered workshops, including Kirksville's Community Opportunities Inc., are awaiting final budget numbers from the capitol for fiscal year 2013.

The Missouri Association of Sheltered Workshop Managers gathered in Jefferson City earlier this week to talk to lawmakers. After two days of lobbying, it looks as though state funding for workshops, which employ disabled adults, will remain flat, as it has the last three years.

"Well, we know where we're at now — everything is on the table," MASWM President Bob Koch said. "We're looking at [a budget of] \$24 million, which is \$3 [million] or \$4 million short of full funding, but that's just the nature of it these days."

Koch said he's optimistic that sheltered workshops will not see big cuts because the MASWM has good relationships with legislators, and Gov. Jay Nixon is sympathetic to funding for disabilities.

Still, he said he knows the situation could change as the state seeks to fill a projected \$500 [million] to \$800 million state budget deficit.

"We're hoping to hold on to that because they're still looking for more cuts," Koch said. "We're working very hard to hold on to what we've got."

The expected 8 percent shortfall in funding for fiscal year 2013 would mean sheltered workshops like Community Opportunities Inc. in Kirksville would have no state funding for the last month of the fiscal year, Koch said.

A month without state funding would not be a new experience for Dennis Drew, the owner of Community Opportunities, the Sheltered Workshop that collects Truman State's paper and cardboard recycling as one of its revenue streams. Last year, the shelter went

about a month without state money, he said.

Community Opportunities, which employs about 70 workers in Kirksville, is paid for jobs like collecting recycling, car detailing and assembling filter masks for the company 3M company, but it's not enough to sustain the workshop without state money, Drew said.

To make up for decreased funding last year, Drew applied for a grant from the Developmental Disabilities Board created by Missouri Senate Bill 40.

He said he's not sure what to expect for the upcoming fiscal year.

State funding for sheltered workshops funnels through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, said Fulvio Franzi, Director of Extended Employment Sheltered Workshops under DESE.

A Missouri statute mandates a level of funding for sheltered workshops, Franzi said, and last year workshops received between 8 and 10 percent less than the full funding stated in the statute.

Franzi said funding in fiscal year 2013 likely will be on par with last year's funding levels.

Even without Missouri's current budget situation, government funding for sheltered workshops is controversial.

The National Disabilities Rights Network, an advocacy group for individuals with disabilities, argues that money put toward sheltered workshops is misspent.

"We clearly think that federal and state dollars should not be used for segregation — segregation in any form is bad," said Cheryl Bates-Harris, NDRN senior disability advocacy specialist.

The government should spend its resources on helping disabled people become fully integrated into communities through departments like Missouri's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, which provides support to help individuals with disabilities have regular jobs, she said.

"We believe everyone is entitled to a



Jackie Kinealy/Index
Donnie Wheeler, Community Opportunities Inc. employee, assembles respiratory masks as part of his job duties at the Sheltered Workshop in Kirksville.

real job with real wages," Bates-Harris said.

The NDRN published a report during January 2011 that calls workshops a place where disabled people are "segregated and exploited," and often paid less

than minimum wage.

The report recommends restricting government funding for employers who segregate employees with disabilities from the general workforce, and ending sub-minimum wage for disabled workers.

West Campus adds two in some suites

Suites in West Campus will house six people a suite next fall

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Suites on the second and third floors of West Campus Suites will house six residents instead of four next semester in an effort to preserve bed spaces while the south half of Centennial Hall will be closed for the 2012-2013 academic year for renovations.

The south half of Centennial will be closed the following year with an expected overall completion during late Summer 2014.

No renovations will need to occur to house an additional resident in each of the two rooms in the suites, John Gardner, director of the Office of Residence Life, said.

Gardner said Residence Life will try to accommodate as many students as possible, but even with the additional space in West Campus, there is potential not every student wishing to do so will be housed in the residence halls.

"We try to make sure we have enough space for our first-years, because they are required to

live on campus," he said. "We are working with the Office of Admission to see how much space we will have for returning students."

Gardner said Residence Life will continue to provide single rooms on campus to select students with disabilities and a few student staff members.

"We have a couple of rooms that we have available that we call emergency rooms for when we have either someone that has something related to a medical situation or a roommate situation," he said.

Like this year, students will not have the option to buy out rooms for single occupancy.

Gardner said of the approximately 2,900 bed spaces available this year, 50 were empty. About 2,800 spaces will be available this fall.

The price for suites on the first and fourth floors will be \$4,285 while the second and third floor "economy suites" will be reduced to \$3,875.50.

Gardner said five suites in West Campus housed six people during the 2010-2011 academic year when the south half of Ryle was closed for renovations.

Sophomore Alex Williams, who lived in one of the suites last year, said his living space was function-

al, but not comfortable.

"I'm relatively easy-going, so I guess for me it was perfectly doable," he said. "The bedrooms themselves were not spacious at all. Even when everyone had everything completely clean, there was no floor space."

A wardrobe and a bed will be added to each room in the suites, while two desks will replace the armchair in the living rooms.

Physical Plant Director Karl Schneider said moving furniture from Centennial to West Campus will take six to eight weeks this summer with the help of contractors and 12 student workers who currently are being interviewed for the jobs.

The furniture primarily will be carried by hand inside the buildings and transported between the buildings by trucks, Schneider said. The beds will need to be disassembled and reassembled to transport.

Schneider said he doesn't expect any issues with utilities such as running out of hot water with 96 more residents in West Campus.

"The building was designed for the number of people that are there now, so we may possibly have some issues, but we're not expecting problems," he said.

Senate proposes fountain contest

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Student Senate's academic affairs committee is trying to start a design contest to paint the bottom of the fountain at The Mall with Senate funding.

"If there are students who have been looking for a big mural or a really big canvas to express their artistic abilities, hopefully we can provide that and the materials," sophomore Aaron Malin, student affair chairman, said.

The fountain was painted annually several times during the early 2000s, but because of improper materials, the paint chipped quickly, Physical Plant Director Karl Schneider said.

He said Physical Plant currently is not pursuing the project, but if Malin researches which materials will work, Physical Plant will approve it.

"We wouldn't want to have anybody paint it unless there was some new product out there we have confidence in that would last," Schneider said.

Malin said he is going to contact the University of Missouri-Columbia for ad-

vice about how the school painted a particular fountain.

He said the project is a short-term solution to make the fountain look nicer until its possible renovation in the future.

"This might be a way to make it look nice in a cheap way in the meantime," he said. "When they redo the entire thing, it's very possible that the entire fountain will be gone and new."

Malin said posters have been made for the contest, and he's hoping to have the project approved next week. Design submissions will be accepted in a variety of formats.

"If they want to digitally draw it or paint it, it really doesn't matter," he said. "The Student Affairs Committee will select a design and will have it approved by Laura Bates from the [Center for Student Involvement], Karl Schneider from the Physical Plant and [University President] Troy Paino."

Malin said the original deadline for design submissions was March 1, but that date might be rescheduled if proper materials for the project are not selected soon.

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