

Changes to sunken pit face problems

BY ANNA SELLE
Staff Reporter

For nearly 20 years, a hollowed space has been a landmark of the Truman State campus, intriguing students about its origins — the small courtyard commonly referred to as the library pit.

Richard Coughlin, Dean of Libraries and Museums at Truman, said people are curious about the space because it sometimes is open and other times roped off.

The pit has been roped off because of poor drainage at the bottom and because too many people being active in it would ruin the grass, Coughlin said.

He said the pit was created during the library's 1993 renovation project when a building adjacent to the library was torn down, leaving an empty space that could have been filled in or left to be used in some way.

Originally, the space was meant to provide light to the basement of the library and act as a space where deliveries could be made through an elevator shaft that runs through the clock tower, Coughlin said. He said the delivery system soon proved

unnecessary and the elevator was unreliable, so the space remained vacant and unused.

Though the library courtyard has been closed to the public for several years, Coughlin said, there are certain exceptions made for the University and other organizations for use of the space, including art displays, low involvement theater projects and group pictures that don't threaten to damage the natural environment of the space. However, Coughlin said he is optimistic about finding a way to open the space to the public during the future.

"We have, over the years, talked to [staff at the] Physical Plant about doing something with the drainage or turning it into a garden with paths and benches in it, which would allow for a passive use of the space," Coughlin said. "Maybe it's time to take another look at that."

Janet Romine, Head of Public Services at Pickler Memorial Library, said she agrees finding a way to better use the space would be beneficial.

"It would be great if there could be a reflective space with some groundskeeping down there," Romine said. "I would definitely be in favor of Physical Plant exploring that

option and doing something a little more with the space than keeping it chained off."

Although the idea of creating a garden or reflective space open to the public would be more favorable than keeping the library pit off-limits to the student population, issues could arise from converting the space, Karl Schneider, Physical Plant director, said.

"A garden, of course, requires more maintenance than grass," Schneider said. "You have to be able to get what's needed for planting down there, and then you have to go down there and maintain it. At a bare minimum, that would be weeding and watering, and if there are any shrubs down there we'd have to do trimming."

Schneider said there are other ways the space could be used by the University and campus organizations, including small receptions, ceremonies and performances. However, Schneider said there is a more realistic option than a traditional garden, but it might still pose significant drawbacks.

"A zen garden, which is rocks and gravel basically, but with larger rocks and boulders, would



The "library pit" is on the south side of Pickler Memorial Library. The space has been considered for different uses, but problems have prevented construction of anything so far.

be another option," Schneider said. "But you would need someone who knows what they're doing. You'd probably have to pay a contractor to build it. It wouldn't

have any plants, really, so it would require zero maintenance ... but again, if it's open at all hours, you might see vandalism. That's why I'm skeptical."



with
University
President
Troy Paino



Reported by Anna Grace

Index: What changes should students be excited about this year when they return from summer vacation?

Troy Paino: Well, from just a physical standpoint, there's been a lot of construction going on. Some of it is very obvious and ongoing. They will see the work on Franklin Street and that will continue to be done — turning that into a boulevard. It will be attractive as well as safe.

All the roads around are getting worked on this week, but that will be an improvement and I appreciate the city investing resources to improve the roads around and through campus.

I think some of the other major physical projects include improvements to Kirk Memorial, a landmark on campus.

We're making good progress on Centennial Hall. The new part, where the students will be living on the south half, along with the dining hall and all of the common areas, will be new and improved for the students living there, so that's exciting. Another interesting thing we're doing is putting solar panels on about a half-

dozen buildings to help conserve energy. The football stadium has new bleachers — they'll be much more comfortable for seating. Our athletic facilities have been improved significantly. From an academic standpoint, we will be putting a more intentional focus on things we're already doing. We hope to increase the profile around what we do with civic learning — having our students engaged in the community, and also demonstrating that we are preparing future citizens and leaders.

The other thing I hope we will be able to do is make applied learning experiences — internships, significant mentored student research projects, study abroad, service learning — a requirement of all students before graduation. These are the sorts of applied learning experiences where students get out in the world in some way and actually apply the skills they have developed while a student here into some real problem or in a real setting. Research shows that the best "entree" for students to get jobs is to have those kinds of experiences. We value those experiences here and we offer and encourage them. I think it's time now that we tell every student who comes to Truman that you are going to have at

least one, hopefully more than one, but you're going to have at least one before you graduate.

Index: What are you looking forward to this academic year?

Paino: Well, I always look forward to just the students getting back on campus because the energy returns to Kirksville when students start arriving back, and I always get a little adrenaline rush when that happens. I'm looking forward to that, it's the thing I enjoy the most about my job — interacting with the students, getting to know the students, seeing them living around my house and being about the place. It's exciting for me because it reminds me of what we do and why we do it.

For this particular year, I'm excited about the new athletic conference we're in — this is our inaugural year in the Great Lakes Valley Conference (GLVC). I'm really excited about that, and I think that being in this conference will be good for Truman and our student athletes. I'm excited for the schools we're going to be associated with in the GLVC because they have a strong emphasis on academics — you see that in the high graduation rates of the student athletes in all the schools we will be competing with.

Index: What advice would you give new students getting acclimated to Truman?

Paino: Get out of your room and get involved. We have well over 200 student organizations. In addition to majors and residence halls, there are also all of these student organizations that are around a variety of interests. So there's no excuse not to find something that interests you. The more students get involved, the more they are going to thrive both in and outside the classroom. They're going to make friends. They are going to feel like

part of the community. I know students come here and especially in those first weeks are a little homesick and have a lot of self-doubt. But we've all gone through it, and it is a difficult transition, but the sooner you get out, and you step outside of yourself and take some risks and get involved and get to know people, the quicker you're going to feel at home here and start enjoying your experience.

Index: What do you think is something Truman students have, opportunity-wise, that other students don't?

Paino: Here, because we put such a value on the residential experience and because of our location in a small town, is a real tight-knit community. It's a place where, as I oftentimes like to say, students run the place in many respects. I don't think you see that at a lot of other places — where students really become leaders in a significant way. I always love coming on the campus in the evening because it is always teeming with activity.

I think some of it is the nature of the students we recruit here. They want to come to a place where they can be active and involved and we offer and value those activities here. Here, as a public institution, there is a lot of diversity, and think that diversity is our strength.

Index: My final question isn't very serious, but I was curious. Do your kids ever call you T-Pain?

Paino: Well, I can assure you both my daughters have the "T-Pain is My Homeboy" t-shirts. I don't think they call me T-Pain, but they do know I am referred to as that and I think they get a kick out of it.

For the complete interview with President Paino, visit tmn.truman.edu/theindex.



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