

# THE UNIVERSITY DAILY KANSAN



## Don't forget to say 'please'

Remembering manners will always benefit students in the long run. **CAMPUS** |

## Hawks struggle vs. Trojans

Kansas wins despite shaky pitching and missed opportunities. **BASEBALL** | **1B**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31, 2010

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### WEATHER HUNTING

# Chasing the perfect storm

Photo courtesy of Scott Blair/www.targetarea.net

A strong tornado kicks up debris near Big Springs, Neb. on June 10, 2004. Scott Blair, a meteorologist for the Topeka National Weather Service who captured this photo, has chased more than 350 storms in more than 20 states.

## Storm chasers brave the danger of severe weather for the thrill

BY NANCY WOLENS  
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The sky darkens. Fifty-mile-an-hour winds whip debris across the open field. Blinding rainfall slams the windshield. Erratic zaps of lightning infuse the air. Scott

Blair's heart races. But he's advancing toward the storm, not running away from it.

Blair, a meteorologist for the Topeka National Weather Service, is a weather-hunting fanatic. During the past 14 years he has driven more than 200,000 miles, chasing 350 storms in more than 20 states. He has seen 150 tornadoes.

For him, chasing is a hobby. He captures the alluring landscapes of storms with his camera — and gets an adrenaline fix.

Habitual storm chasers such as

Blair and University students preparing to go into meteorology, look forward to the spring and summer months so they can monitor storms. What is routinely seen in movies and on television isn't always an accurate depiction of real-life chasers; it's their tactical preparation, sound execution and captivation with these mysterious storms that set them apart.

"When storms aren't doing damage there's really a certain beauty to them," Blair said. "There's something magical about severe weather

and it's neat to see something that some people may never see in their lifetime."

As a meteorologist, Blair has the knowledge to track severe weather without putting himself in danger. His knowledge is what separates him from amateur chasers.

David Mechem, assistant professor in the atmospheric science program, said chasing without proper training and knowledge was incredibly dangerous.

"There are a lot of people out there who go out and do it just

as a thrill-seeking adventure," said Mechem, who chased about a dozen storms as an undergraduate at the University of Oklahoma. "You don't have to have a degree in meteorology necessarily, but you definitely need to understand something about storm structure."

Mechem said it helped if chasers had a proficiency in forecasting so they could know what conditions were favorable for the kind of climates they were in.

Blair said that the peak storm season in Kansas was from April

through June, but that severe storms could occur as early as mid-March. The Southern plains have an earlier period from March through May, and the Northern plains have a strong season from June through August.

"Those are the times where the environmental conditions provide the greatest frequency of severe weather," Blair said. "That is when chasers really start coming out, in April, May and June."

SEE **STORM** ON PAGE 3A

To view an interactive graphic about storms, visit [kansan.com/news](http://kansan.com/news)

### ART

# Answers about art only a dial away

BY ALISON CUMBOW  
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"Why don't the musicians notice the murder taking place?"

This question is placed on a label by Thomas Hart Benton's painting "The Ballad of the Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley" in the Spencer Museum of Art.

To hear the answer to that question, and 13 more in the gallery, museum visitors can use their cell phones to call (785) 338-9467.

In August, the museum started a program called "An Ear for Art" with grant money from the Shumaker Foundation. The program is a free cell phone tour through the museum, the only one of its kind in Kansas. In two weeks the museum will use additional grant money to launch an expanded cell phone tour that will include 14 outdoor sculptures throughout campus. The tour will include the Jayhawk in front of Strong Hall and the Moses sculpture in front of Smith Hall.

SEE **ART** ON PAGE 3A

### TOP 3 MOST POPULAR QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED FROM THE CELL PHONE GUIDE TOUR:

1.) Petah Coyne, "Untitled"  
Were the candles on the sculpture ever lit?

2.) Thomas Hart Benton, "The Ballad of the Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley"  
Why don't the musicians notice the murder taking place?

3.) Luis Jiménez, "Howl"  
Is the animal hurt?

To hear the answers to the questions above, please call (785) 338-9467

To see the works of art above, please visit [www.kansan.com](http://www.kansan.com) or [www.spencerart.ku.edu/ear4art](http://www.spencerart.ku.edu/ear4art)



Mia Iverson/KANSAN

Placards such as this one, indicate the art work is part of the "An Ear for Art" audio tour series, which allows observers to tune into more info via their cellphones. The placards are located in the 20th Century exhibit and the main level of the Spence Museum of Art. More placards will be added to outdoor art work.

### ENVIRONMENT



Tanner Grubbs/KANSAN

Karin Scott, left, a senior from Dallas, Renee Boyd, center, a senior from Wichita, and Lydia Gibson, a senior from Prairie Village, sort through campus trash to see how much of the "waste" could actually have been recycled.

# Students dig deeper into campus recycling

BY BRENNALONG  
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As he walks by a newspaper recycling bin, Nick Benson reaches in and grabs a pesky, misplaced soda can. He knows that if he doesn't do it now, he might be pulling it out of the bin and tossing

it with the rest of the aluminum and plastic when he goes to work at KU Recycling.

All recyclables must be sorted by hand at the Environmental Stewardship building, 1851 Westbrooke St., and it can be hard

SEE **RECYCLE** ON PAGE 3A

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## Grad students compete for top prizes at Union

Research and Graduate Studies holds competition. **RESEARCH** | **6A**

### weather



TODAY  
**79** 58  
Partly cloudy

THURSDAY  
**79** 58  
Partly cloudy

FRIDAY  
**68** 50  
Isolated T-storms

—weather.com



STORM (CONTINUED FROM 1A)

THE CHASE

In their storm-chasing quests, chasers hope to find storms that produce violently rotating columns of air called tornadoes. Chasers prepare in different ways.

As a meteorologist, Blair has tools available to him that others do not, such as weather balloons, satellite radio and radar. That equipment gives him extra time to interpret the type of severe storm that might be developing. He can then get on the road days before the storm is expected to occur.

On the other hand, chasers such as Scott Durham, a senior from Kansas City, Mo. and an atmospheric science major, use resources offered on the Internet to determine the exact location and size of the storms they chase.

"Before I head out, I'll go online

to weather.gov because I find it to be most reliable," Durham said. "I'll find out what the weather is like and look at the satellite to see if there's any other systems coming in that the radar isn't showing."

Durham also uses a severe weather index called CAPE, convective available potential energy, which detects values in thunderstorm environments. Durham said if the value was really high then he could generally expect a severe weather outbreak, which usually leads to tornadoes. Storms are classified by how strong the winds are or by how heavy the rainfall, snow or lightning is; tornadoes and hurricanes have their own set of categories.

Durham has gone out storm chasing six times. He witnessed his first tornado — the paramount

objective for most amateur chasers and atmospheric science majors — May 4, 2003, outside the Kansas City, Mo. area.

Durham said he spent most of his time storm spotting rather than storm chasing. As a Johnson County storm spotter, he stays in a stationary location while monitoring the severe weather in designated areas.

While out storm chasing, Blair said, they pinpoint an area where they expect the storm to occur.

"At that time what we're looking for is environmental data," Blair said. "Surface observations, temperature, wind speed, dew point and relative humidity, which tells you so much on where to go from a surface perspective."

Because storms are unpredictable, Blair said it was not uncommon to

have 1,000-mile chase days. One day you might be in the Nebraska sand hills and the next you might be in the Oklahoma panhandle, he said.

"If you do everything else right, all the luck still has to fall into place," Blair said. "The storm is still going to do what it wants to do."

**SAFETY**

Mechem said that he and his classmates as undergraduates at the University of Oklahoma were conservative storm chasers and that they tried to avoid putting themselves in danger. If a storm develops into a tornado, a storm chaser generally wants to be on the south or southeast side of it.

"I tended to stay near the car," Mechem said. "Largely because sometimes the back side, or the

safer side of storms can get hail and you want to be able to take cover."

He said the two biggest hazards while storm chasing were driving on the roads and lightning.

"Lightning tends to be unpredictable so you want to be able to have some kind of shelter," Mechem said. "It can be really close and really frequent in these types of storms and it's a big danger."

Durham said, depending on where he was in relation to the storm, he also generally stayed in the car. If there is lightning and thunder then there is a chance of getting struck. Remaining inside the vehicle and not touching the frame, will keep passengers safe if the vehicle gets struck, he said.

Blair said education was the No. 1 way to be a safe and successful storm chaser. He said it was not

dangerous as long as chasers had the skill sets to go along with it.

"It can put you in the right place where you would have a better success rate to see storms," he said.

GET INVOLVED

For those interested in storm chasing, Blair recommends attending a weather service spotter training session. The Topeka National Weather Service has a calendar online with upcoming sessions.

There are also ways to build basic skills from home through online modules and weather observations, he said. For more information and photos visit Blair's website at [www.targetarea.net](http://www.targetarea.net).

— Edited by Kirsten Hudson

RECYCLE (CONTINUED FROM 1A)

work.

"Bottles and cans are the ones right now that are the back-burners," Benson, a sophomore from Orlando, Fla., said. "Paper is the easiest one to do because of the conveyer."

Benson picks up recycling from around campus and takes it back to sort. But Benson's job is just one of the many ways students are taking a closer look at recycling on campus.

The items Benson and others have separated and bailed for the last 10 weeks were counted for the national RecycleMania competition. The competition ends March 27, and the official rankings of the participating schools will come out April 16. The University is currently seventh out of nine Big 12 schools, collecting 241,807 pounds of recycling.

The University's rankings may look low, but Benson said other universities have more established programs and larger facilities. Plus, the University might waste less in the first place.

"If a school has lower numbers, that doesn't mean it isn't recycling," Benson said. "The students and faculty might be more aware of reducing and reusing, but it's hard

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  - Heavy Weight Paper
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- Newsprint
  - Cardboard or Chipboard

GETTING IT IN THE RIGHT BIN

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to measure that."

A group of five seniors in the environmental studies capstone course investigated that issue last weekend. In a campus waste audit, Kathryn Boyd, from Wichita; Lydia Gibson, from Prairie Village; Lauren Keith, from Wichita; Ryan Rastok, from Lawrence; and Karin Scott, from Dallas, dug into 88 pounds of trash from the Spencer Museum of Art and Strong Hall to see what could have been recycled.

"It was a different way to look at recycling," Gibson said. "We don't really know the types and amounts of recyclables escaping."

The students found that nearly three-fourths of the material could

have been recycled or composted.

One item filled up more of the seven trash bags than Gibson expected: disposable coffee cups. Coffee cups comprised 15 percent of the trash from the art museum.

"Encouraging people to use reusable coffee cups would help cut that volume in half," Gibson said.

By the end of the sorting, the group had 16 to 18 large tubs sorted into 17 different categories. Gibson said the goal was for audits such as this to happen every year so progress could be tracked.

To raise awareness, the group is planning a similar event on April 22 with Wescoe Hall's waste, which will be piled outside the building.

"It's going to be a big event," Gibson said.

Another event in April gives students and faculty the chance to see recycling first-hand. Environs, a student environmental group, will hold a tour of the Environmental Stewardship building April 10 from 1 to 2 p.m. Celeste Hoins, Environmental Stewardship Program manager, said that having knowledge about the recycling program on campus could help everyone participate.

— Edited by Katie Blankenau

ART (CONTINUED FROM 1A)

Liz Kowalchuk, associate dean of the school of the arts, recorded her voice for the line providing answers to the questions and more information. Kristina Walker, director of education at the museum, said the indoor tour had had 751 callers since it began in August.

"We tend to get more callers on the weekend," she said. "That really kind of parallels our attendance."

The top three pieces of art that have received the most calls so far are a big, wired sculpture that is covered with wax, by Petah Coyne, called "Untitled;" a painting by Thomas Hart Benton called "The Ballad of the Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley;" and a sculpture by Luis Jiménez, called "Howl."

Walker said the program received great feedback from

viewers through surveys.

"People have said it's a great way to learn about art, and that it is new and different," she said.

Bill Woodard, director of communications at the museum, said he thought the outdoor tour would be really cool.

"I think it's just one more way of making the collection accessible to all of our constituents," he said. "In the case of KU students, everybody's got a cell phone, and it's a pretty easy way to dive a little deeper into a piece of art that intrigues you."

All of the questions and answers are available online at <http://www.spencerart.ku.edu/ear4art>.

— Edited by Megan Heacock

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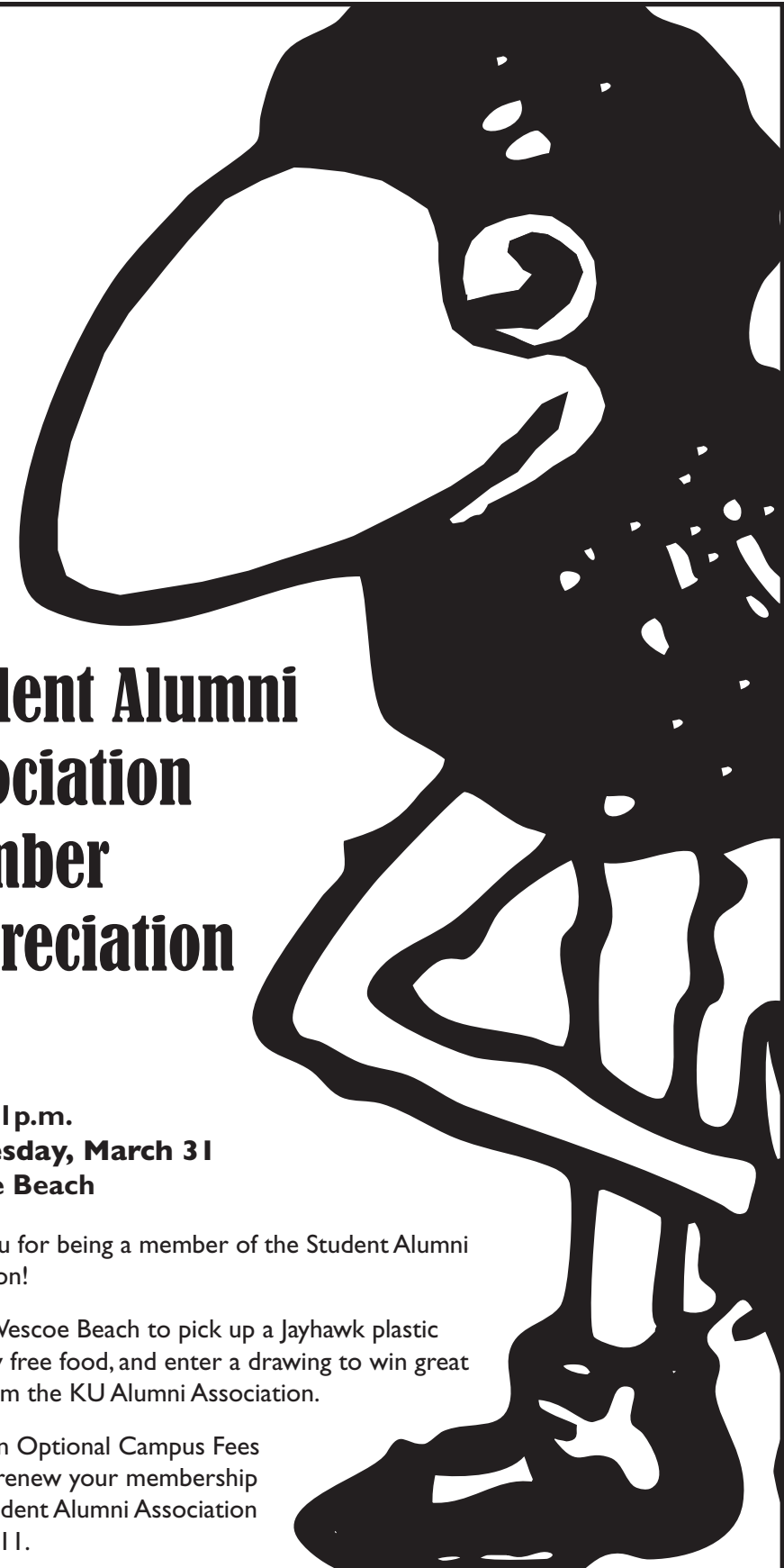
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## Student Alumni Association Member Appreciation Day

11 a.m.-1 p.m.  
Wednesday, March 31  
Wescoe Beach

Thank you for being a member of the Student Alumni Association!

Stop by Wescoe Beach to pick up a Jayhawk plastic cup, enjoy free food, and enter a drawing to win great prizes from the KU Alumni Association.

Sign up on Optional Campus Fees today to renew your membership in the Student Alumni Association for 2010-11.



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The University of Kansas  
[www.kualumni.org/saa](http://www.kualumni.org/saa)