

KANSAS CITY AND THE AREA

# B METROPOLITAN

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**COMMENTARY**

**STEVE PENN**

### Work is fun even after 48 years

I've been at The Kansas City Star almost 21 years. But I've got a new way to reach up to one employee of the city of Kansas City.

She's Mary Ellen Lilla. And like her, I'll be here for a long time.

Today, I mark Lilla's 48th year as a city employee. She's done just about everything for almost five decades. She'll arrive at work around 6 a.m.

Meetings will start her into the night. By the weekend, she'll log 60 hours plus.

That's just the way Lilla lives.

Lilla organizes the park department's special events. She's both having fun and not about to give that up.

"This work is fun," she says. "You work, you work. I feel like I'm goofing off when I work just 48 hours."

Only one other city worker—a seemingly publicity shy public works employee—has worked for the city longer.

Years ago, when city employees made their 40th anniversary, they had to retire. Period. Today you can work forever.

Lilla may do just that.

The fact that she's been given each hour Lilla graduated from St. Teresa's Academy in 1941 and from the UMKC. Teresa's College in 1953 with a degree in education.

During her summer breaks from college, she worked part time at a recreation leader at downtown swimming pools. After graduation, she was offered a job in her position with the recreation division.

In college, Lilla preferred the production side of theater. Those kids for pulling off events come come in handy.

"This is what I was trained for," Lilla said. "I've got full credit."

Today Lilla teaches Tim Watson golf clinic, a VIP reception in Lower Park and plenty more.

"There are interesting jobs," Lilla said. "There's always something going on. I help people I get paid to play."

One unforgettable experience: Procuring the entertainment for Expo 1993 in Berlin, Spain, one of Kansas City's finest cities. Lilla spent several months there, competing globally. "That was a fun thing," Lilla said. "It's one of the highlights of having worked so hard for nothing."

There have been challenges, too. Lilla keeps up with technology. At first, she resisted computers and, but eventually she found they made her job easier.

"There are times you feel like a dinosaur," Lilla said.

Lilla showed her calendar for May had about every day was marked in pink and yellow, notation that reminded her of even in various stages of planning.

This week Lilla explained the parks board on the re-evaluation of the Henry Memorial around Memorial Day next year.

The three-day celebration will include a symphony performance, speeches, the unveiling of new light show and many other activities.

And guess who has the responsibility of bringing it all together? Lilla. In fact, she plans to be the president of the United States.

Embarrassed on her blouse one day recently were the phrases: "Show down. Enjoy the night. Relax for a while." She doesn't mean it.

"That's not me," Lilla said. "I'm still involved in some interesting things. I can't imagine being on the outside."

Lilla is proud that you enjoy your job enough, you can do it for a long time.

Most people around her age are busy planning their retirement activities. Not Lilla. She's busy planning the city's 48th birthday.

To reach Steve Penn, call (816) 234-4477 or send an e-mail to [spenn@kcstar.com](mailto:spenn@kcstar.com).

**Review Saturday in FYI**

From Thursday night: **Accorda String Quartet** at Congregation Beth Torah.

**Mike Hendricks**  
Judging a cute-baby contest is a dubious honor. Commentary, B-2

**Council likes KCI floor art**  
New motifs uses terrazzo with inlaid brass, multicolored patterns

By MIKE RICE  
The Kansas City Star

The new artwork proposed for floors at Kansas City International Airport got a positive review from the City Council on Thursday.

The four terrazzo flooring with inlaid brass and multicolored patterns — and an arrow — will be one of the most prominent features of the \$183.4 million renovation of the KCI terminals.

"These floors will be the crown jewel of the terminal renovation," said Commissioner Teresa Loefer. "No airport in the country has anything like this, but we want it."

"No airport in the country has anything like this, but we want it," Loefer said. "This is a different from the renovation she had in earlier proposed by New York based architect Kravis Horn and Andrew Gambel."

That design involved more than 25,000 arrows that pointed in different directions and were intended to depict wind currents and migration patterns.

Loefer and other council members contended that the arrows might confuse travelers in the event of an evacuation or fire.

So the artists agreed to do a different design.

The council saw two panels of the new design, which features brass and inlaid brass, depicting various animal patterns. One panel had a lion.

See KCI, B-2

**Precious Doe still a mystery**

DNA results show she is not missing girl, KC police say

By CHRISTY VESTER  
The Kansas City Star

Kansas City police received DNA results Thursday that showed Precious Doe was a missing girl from Tacoma, Wash.

Precious Doe's name figured in more than 20 tips that stemmed from a newspaper on "Missing Doe Wanted" earlier this month. She was reported missing from a block of East 46th Street in 1999 and would now be 4, about the same age as Precious Doe.

But blood taken from Precious Doe's relatives did not match the DNA from Precious Doe, police said.

Thursday, homicide detectives continued to track down lead tracks, including a tip that a vacant house on East 46th Street might be connected to Precious Doe's kidnapping. Neighbors told police a family secured the house abruptly about the time Precious Doe, police said.

See GIBL, B-2

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**Faith in his friends**

While he waited for a friend below to re-position his ladder, Ricardo Lopez held tight to a third-floor window ledge. When he was safely situated again, his girlfriend, Maria Perez, gave him a kiss. Lopez was helping Thursday with window repairs on an apartment building at 105-111 Chestnut Blvd. in Kansas City.

Photos by KEITH STETSON  
The Kansas City Star

**National spelling bee a tough test of ability**

By TOM ROBERTSON  
and DENISE BRADLEY  
The Kansas City Star

This was the day a national spelling champion would be crowned, so the word gladiators stepped under the stage lights, knowing that judges would challenge them from the unaided depths of their dictionaries.

But how deep stemmed Leo's Summit sixth grader Justin Shilbark.

He did quickly, missing on his first word Tuesday. So did 57 other contestants of the 97 who had reached the last day of the Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee in Washington.

"I didn't expect so many kids could spell so many words I never heard of," he said.

Not that Justin and his family weren't proud of his effort. By the time his run ended on "Gloria," a five-letter word, he had spelled about 100 words in two hours.

Justin had gone further than most of the 148 original contestants.

"It was really fun," he said. "It was a challenge. But I know I wouldn't make the top 10."

See BEB, B-2

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**Tiny Missouri town yields big-money ticket in Powerball drawing**

By DENISE BRADLEY  
The Kansas City Star

It's paid to claim the second cash prize for a Missouri in Powerball's one-year history.

Already, the rabid crowd has come calling on the customer at the Pittsville PX gas station, hoping that lightning will strike twice. "We've had a lot of men on tickets in here," said customer Chris Stinson. "Everybody's excited, everybody's asking a lot of questions."

The winner's name is expected to be announced today, pending verification of the ticket by Missouri Lottery officials in Jefferson City, Mo., the power ball.

Stinson said he was a woman — gets the biggest would make a \$6.4-billion woman with \$65 million in 1995. All in picking a string of numbers: 11, 28, 36 and 41, with 9 as the power ball.

Stinson learned early in his shift about the stroke of luck. But he wasn't taken aback too much. If a winning ticket was going to be sold in Holden, he said, he was certain it would be sold at the Pittsville PX.

"This is about the only place you can buy them here," he said. "It's hardly even a secret."

To reach John Shultz, call (816) 234-4477 or send an e-mail to [jshultz@kcstar.com](mailto:jshultz@kcstar.com).

**Up in smoke**

Did you remember Thursday night to light up? It was World No Tobacco Day and the message was "Secondhand smoke kills."

The World Health Organization announced the international effort to educate the public about the dangers of second-hand smoke, which is blamed for about 3,000 lung cancer deaths in the United States each year.

For more information on smoking cessation programs, call (816) 943-5242.

—Barbara Samuels/The Star

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**Angel's remains return home**

Family members and friends of a murdered 5-year-old girl cradled a box Thursday that held her remains.

Eight years ago, Angel Hart was killed in Kansas City, ensnared in concrete and dumped in a California desert.

She was finally home for burial.

In February a woman found her bones in California. DNA tests established they were those of Angel. Assistant Jackson County Prosecutor Ken Mahoney, who prosecuted Angel's killer, flew to California on Wednesday to prepare the girl's remains.

"Turner Jackson of Independence, Angel's cousin, thanked Mahoney and others at a news conference.

"We can put her to rest," she said, "just her with the other angels where she belongs."

Angel's funeral is scheduled for 1 p.m. Wednesday at Mount Washington Cemetery in Independence.

—Joe Lambert/The Star

**Families escape burning building**

A dozen families were evacuated from a Kansas City apartment building early Thursday when a fire broke out in a fourth-floor residence.

Thirty fire residents, including 18 children, escaped injury in the 2:30 a.m. fire at the Wilshire apartment, 2101 and 2103 Lincoln Blvd.

A passer-by saw the fire and called 911 from a cell phone. The families were getting help from the American Red Cross and staying at a hotel. Fire and utility officials were working to return some of the families to their homes by the weekend.

Officials said the fire mostly was limited to one apartment, but other parts of the four-story building were damaged by water and smoke. Officials said the fire was intentionally set. Damage was estimated at \$6,000.

—Kevin Hoffmann/The Star

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**P.S.**

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