

Editorials

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StarTribune

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A glimpse of academic 'free agency' at U

- Allegations of double-dipping reveal competition for professors.

Recruiting isn't just restricted to University of Minnesota athletic teams. While coaches woo talented athletes, the academic side is essentially doing the same, hoping to lure the best and the brightest new professors.

It didn't garner headlines until now, but last fall the university's Academic Health Center had an especially successful recruiting class. In search of marquee faculty for its new bioinformatics programs, officials landed a husband-wife pair of superstars from Georgia Tech. Julie Jacko and Francois Sainfort settled into their Minneapolis offices just after the new year. With them came instant credibility and expertise in an area that university officials say is critical as the school seeks to become a biosciences magnet.

But the couple now find themselves in a dispute with Georgia Tech. The Atlanta school contends that the two never really left and are "double-dipping" by drawing salaries and expense reimbursements from two institutions at the same time. The couple, through their attorney, have said they are eager for the Georgia attorney general's review. General Counsel Mark Rotenberg said the U is looking into the situation.

While it's too soon to draw conclusions about the allegations, the case offers an intriguing glimpse of a rapidly changing academia — one increasingly modeled after professional sports free agency.

In their world, Jacko and Sainfort are top athletes. Their expertise in a critical, if little understood, field can pull in research dollars, create spin-off companies and lure new ones here. Healthcare informatics, at its simplest, utilizes computing power to com-

pile and use health data. It's helped make possible everything from study of the human genome to electronic medical recordkeeping, and plays a key role in identifying hospitals and procedures that achieve the best outcomes most cost-efficiently.

Jacko has written more than 120 research publications and received the highest award given to young scientists and engineers by the U.S. government. Sainfort's areas of expertise include health outcomes modeling and management and medical decisionmaking. His work helps administrators weigh whether to buy new medical technology and is used by policymakers to decide how best to invest tax dollars to prevent disease.

The U rightly recognized the couple's potential. Jacko and Sainfort, though, came at a price. Together, their salaries top \$500,000. Are they worth it? Only time will tell.

As universities increasingly rely on research funding, other schools are taking the same competitive approach. Once, administrators nurtured new programs into existence. Now, a rapid return on investment is expected. That requires big-name talent at the get-go. That should generate debate on campuses everywhere. While a few professors earn big salaries in a star-based system, many don't. Nationally, 68 percent of those teaching in college classrooms are not tenure-track professors, compared with 43 percent in 1975.

What's the impact in the classroom and the overall quality of education? How much will universities have to shell out to keep their stars? Like the Jacko-Sainfort case, only time will tell.

Employers, workers can be financially fit

- Itasca Project aims to boost retirement savings, banking.

Some of Minnesota's most influential companies are leading an important campaign to shore up the personal finances of the state's workforce.

The Itasca Project's new Financially Fit Minnesota program is designed to increase retirement savings and encourage the use of direct deposit instead of paychecks. Despite dire warnings of a looming retirement crisis, fewer than half of Minnesota workers currently participate in employer-sponsored retirement savings plans. In addition, more than 500,000 full-time workers in the Twin Cities don't use basic banking services such as direct deposit, and a growing number are using costly money exchanges and payday lenders.

With that troubling backdrop, the Itasca Project today will call on employers throughout the state to join the effort to close the gaps in savings and encourage the use of direct deposit. Itasca is an alliance of more than 40 Minnesota chief executives and elected leaders formed to address regional issues that affect economic competitiveness and quality of life.

Financially Fit Minnesota can have an important and measurable impact on the state. Already companies such as Best Buy, Allina Hospitals & Clinics and Target have made specific commitments. For example, Best Buy will automatically enroll all new and current Minnesota employees in its 401(k) plan. Allina intends to maintain a 90 percent or higher participation rate and boost savings rates. And Target will emphasize the benefits of direct de-

MONEY MATTERS

"These simple, practical steps have a significant potential to positively affect the financial futures of thousands of Minnesotans."

Best Buy CEO Brad Anderson

ON THE WEB

www.FinanciallyFitMN.org

posit, which helps workers avoid check-cashing fees while establishing a relationship with a traditional bank.

Best Buy's move toward automatic enrollment in its 401(k) plan sets a great example for other Minnesota companies, regardless of size or industry group. Many employers now rely on workers to opt in to retirement plans, but it makes sense that participation would increase if employees were automatically enrolled and had to take steps to opt out.

One of the keys to increased participation is employee education, and many companies with higher rates of 401(k) enrollment provide seminars and other employee services aimed at making the plans easier to understand and use with confidence. For smaller, resource-stretched companies, the Financially Fit Minnesota website provides an excellent toolkit.

Our workforce is aging, and study after study shows that too few workers are saving enough for retirement and too many are using costly alternatives for basic banking. Itasca's help will make it easier for Minnesota companies and their employees

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Readers Write

SOREL TO HEAD MNDOT He has a giant task

Tom Sorel says he wants to rebuild public trust and confidence in Minnesota Department of Transportation. For the governor to hire someone who is currently managing an office of 22 people to now manage an organization with 4,400 employees seems like a rather large leap of faith.

Either Gov. Tim Pawlenty has an extraordinary amount of confidence in Sorel or he is just hoping for something better than Molnau.

I want to trust MnDOT, too. And competence would go a long way toward rebuilding my trust.

AARON BLECHERT, Minneapolis

Five years too late

It is an ironic measure of the poor leadership of Gov. Pawlenty that he appoints a civil engineer to head MnDOT after the Interstate 35W bridge fell down.

Why did he originally appoint a political hack to manage an extremely complicated infrastructure?

JOANNE MUNSON, Minneapolis

CENTRAL CORRIDOR The obvious solution

The University of Minnesota is now asserting that a northern route for the new Central Corridor light-rail line through campus is more cost-efficient than a tunnel underneath or a realignment of traffic away from Washington Avenue.

Is this a surprise to anyone? The northern route would use an existing rail bridge and existing depression through Dinkytown before swinging over to align with University Avenue and the sports facilities. It requires no new bridges, no new tunnels, no disruption of traffic on Washington Avenue and still reaches very important parts of campus.

The fact that so much time and money was wasted by the U in pursuing the most expensive option does not seem very Minnesotan.

JEFF KOCUR, Richfield

PHYSICAL UNFITNESS It sees no gender

The Tucker Center study reported on in the Tuesday Star Tribune bemoaned the lack of exercise and sports involvement among girls. However, this isn't just a girl problem. The majority of girls and boys are leaving organized sports early.

This isn't a gender issue, it is a child welfare issue.

DR. PAUL BEARMON, Edina

MEDICAL MARIJUANA Arguments for

In an April 21 letter, Dakota County Attorney James Backstrom reiterates the misleading commentary about the medical marijuana bill that he has repeatedly presented in testimony before the Legislature.

Backstrom's claim that the American Medical Association has "rejected" medical marijuana dismisses the substantial medical support for these compassionate laws and is false: The AMA neither supports nor opposes medical marijuana, but it does oppose penalties for doctors who recommend it to patients.

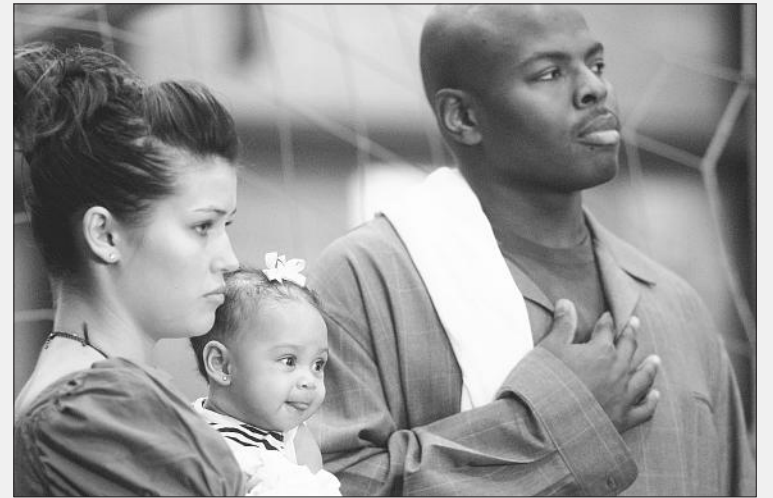
For a county attorney, Backstrom sure sounds as though he has a medical background. He does not. But four doctors and 10 nurses testified in favor of the medical marijuana

LETTER OF THE DAY

Vikings need more players like Udeze

It was great news to hear that Minnesota Vikings defensive end Kenechi Udeze's leukemia is in remission. It was also refreshing to hear a Minnesota Vikings player — obviously a well-educated gentleman — speak so eloquently. Pro football — and especially the Vikings — could use more quality players like Udeze to be role models for our kids.

DAVE RAND, Minneapolis



ALI HAUPT • ahaupt@startribune.com

Vikings defensive end Kenechi Udeze, pictured here with his wife, Terrica, and daughter, Bailey, announced that his leukemia is in remission.

bill; nearly 3,000 Minnesotan medical professionals have signed a statement of support in favor of its passage, and it has the backing of the Minnesota Nurses Association, the Minnesota Public Health Association and the Minnesota AIDS Project.

The two largest papers in the state have endorsed the legislation, and highly esteemed national groups like the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and the American College of Physicians — the country's second-largest physicians group — have urged compassion for seriously ill patients.

Medical marijuana should be a matter of health care and not ideology. We hope both the house and Gov. Pawlenty will heed the experts' voices and pass this bill into law.

NEAL LEVINE, Minneapolis;
state campaigns director,
Marijuana Policy Project

Misinformation

In his April 19 commentary, Nicholas V. O'Hara, an inspector in the Ramsey County Sheriff's office, made three claims about the use of medical marijuana that are baseless.

- That marijuana is a gateway drug. There is sound evidence that marijuana is only a gateway drug because it is purchased from the same people who sell harder drugs. But that would not be the case with the distribution of medical marijuana.

- That marijuana may cause cancer. This may be true when smoked, but medical professionals suggest that marijuana be vaporized for safer inhalation.

- That marijuana use rose among teens in seven of the 12 states where medical marijuana is legal. Yet O'Hara doesn't provide any information that demonstrates a correlation.

MICHAEL D. MOLZAHN, Woodbury

HENNEPIN LIBRARIES Are they paperless?

While the Hennepin County library system may be winning the DVD battle, it is losing the book war.

It is removing books from the system to free up shelf space. Apparently the goal is a paperless library where everything is done on a computer.

As someone who enjoys the utility and feel of a real book in a quiet space, I prefer the Dakota County libraries. I was in one recently, and it was like Hennepin County's used to be — the shelves were completely full of rows and rows of real books.

MICHAEL JOHNSON, Brooklyn Center

WRIGHT COUNTY Living the good life

New ghost towns? Sure there are problem properties in Wright County, but fortunately most properties are just fine. The sky is not falling, and the quality of life in our small towns is fantastic.

I'm tired of reading about how bad it is in Wright County. Just looking out my window, I can tell you what's good about it: the beautiful Crow River with eagles circling overhead, a little boy on the banks fishing and enjoying the sunshine. I'm going for a bike ride in Rebecca Park tonight where I will see foxes running, ducks swimming, deer leaping and frogs croaking.

The world is OK — especially in Wright County!

JON STEINMETZ, Delano

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS?

We welcome your participation, whether in letters or articles for the opinion pages.

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