

Year 2000

Threats, fires all in a year

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

The year 2000 was in the news long before the big ball in New York dropped, with rumors of "Y2K" computer problems.

Although some predicted that computers across the world would be shut down because of the double zeros, life continued. In Decatur County, it was a year packed with new businesses, crops maturing early, the city searching for water (or at least a way to clean up what it has), the county working on a strategic plan and the schools hoping to renew their buildings.

Each January, *The Oberlin Herald* looks at the year to see what have been the top news stories. Whether that is a "Top 10" list or through separate stories, it is a challenge to determine what to include.

Here is a review of "Y2K" from the pages of *The Herald*:

• **In January**, the building which used to house Raye's Grocery at 304 W. Commercial was being remodeled for a Dollar General Store.

Wind gusts of 50 miles per hour helped fuel a fire which burned hundreds of acres of grass, wheat stubble, hay bales, a barn and an old school in southwestern Decatur County. The fire brought farmers together to help battle the blaze and put the county on the front page of *The Salina Journal*.

• **In February**, Decatur Community High School received a bomb threat letter and the students were evacuated and taken to The Gateway. This came after threats had been found in Colby, Norton and Phillipsburg within days of each other. Later a student who was then 16, was arrested for allegedly planting the letter.

Sheriff officers found more than one portable meth lab in the home of Robert Petersen while they were looking for him for allegedly kidnapping, abusing and sexually assaulting a woman at gunpoint. They called in the Kansas Bureau of Investigation.

The Oberlin City Council started to look for a quick fix to the city's water problem by blending clean water with contaminated water from one of its wells.

• **In March**, county commissioners



LAST MAY, THE BOHEMIAN HALL rolled down U.S. 83 to its new home in Oberlin. People waited all day for the hall to arrive, knowing that the museum had bought it for \$1.

— Herald file photo

made cloud seeding illegal here after it is banned in Rawlins and Cheyenne counties.

The city council decided to wait on the water plan until they could determine a way to pay for it. Later they decided to blend the water at a cost of \$387,000.

Former City Administrator Victoria Gordon was accused of misusing public money, providing false information and making false claims while head of the Coffey County Housing Authority in Burlington, Kan.

• **In April**, commissioners made it a rule that county workers can't use their job vehicles for anything other than work after they heard complaints

that county vehicles were being used to move things, including furniture.

The Last Indian Raid Museum reached an agreement to receive the Bohemian Hall from the ZCJB Lodge of the Western Fraternal Life Association.

The Dollar General Store welcomed its first customers.

The Gateway came alive with music with a nationally known country band. The Wilkinson's drew over 1,000 for their performance.

• **In May**, a 32-foot-wide, 88-foot-long, 25-foot-tall landmark rolled down U.S. 83 into Oberlin. The Bohemian Hall was met with people who had waited all day long for it to arrive.

In Norcat, a park was named after a state Hall of Fame baseball player, Elden Aufer, who was from there. He recalled striking out Babe Ruth in one of his first big-league games, only to face Ty Cobb next.

• **In June**, dry weather forced farmers to harvest their wheat early, and they finished harvest before it normally starts. Most elevators weren't full this year, since the wheat was hurt by the weather. Officials said that the area could see wheat that would weigh as much as 15 pounds or more less per bushel.

The corn, which had been in the ground for a month, was starting to be (Please see YEAR on Page 12)

People get a say in plan

The Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp. will hold its first public meeting to obtain information for a countywide strategic plan at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 11.

The meeting is required by the Kansas Department of Commerce and Housing as part of the plan for counties seeking Community Development Block Grants, but officials say that the plan needs input from people here. Connie Grafel, marketing director for the corporation, said that they want a lot of ideas on what people see as strengths and weaknesses here, what they want here for the future and other community issues.

In the past, when the county has been working on a plan, they have held similar meetings. Ms. Grafel said that last time they looked at health care. She said

that this time, she thinks they might talk about the city's water supply and possibly the bond issue that the Oberlin School Board is considering. She said they would be looking at both to see how they relate to economy.

She said that she thought another major concern would be jobs, with an emphasis on those that pay more than minimum wage, and how to bring people into the area.

Representatives from Tekquity Ventures, a Colorado firm which has been doing a feasibility study here, will be the host for the meeting.

"They will be able to get a feel from the public to see if a business of theirs would be supported here," said Ms. Grafel.

The meeting will hopefully generate (Please see GROUP on Page 12)

City, school seats open in spring

By noon on Tuesday, Jan. 23, anyone who wants one of the school board or city council jobs in Decatur County needs to file for office with the county clerk.

So far, Clerk Marilyn Horn, who is the county's election officer, said that she hasn't had anyone come in and say that they would like to run in the April 3 election.

If there turns out to be more than one person seeking a job, she said, they will have to hold a primary on Feb. 27.

The Oberlin City Council will have three positions open, which are now filled by Leslie Bartels, Stan McEvoy and Gary Walter. Candidates will serve a four-year term.

In Dresden, the council has five positions that will be on the ballot, including the seats held by Mayor Russell Rhodes, who took over after the former mayor resigned, and the position vacated by Mr. Rhodes and taken over by Ron Jacobs.

If these men want to continue in the positions for the remaining three years of the terms, they will have to be elected. The three other seats which are up for election are held by Don Sulzman, Don Ritter and Clifford Mowry, which are all two-year seats.

The Jennings City Council has three spaces that will be open, which are now occupied by Mayor Richard Rowlinson, Louise Cressler and Bob Jones. All are

Registration is open now for election

Voter registration is open for those who have yet to register in Decatur County.

For the upcoming school board and city council elections, if there is a primary on Feb. 27, registration will close on Feb. 12. If there is no primary election, voters can register until March 19.

County Clerk Marilyn Horn, who is the county's election officer, said that the clerk's office will remain open on those final registration days to accommodate the voters.

She said that people will be able to do advance ballots and she will announce when they can pick them up when it gets closer to election time.

four year positions.

Norcat has four positions t up for election including one which is empty now and others held by Mayor Doug Dempewolf, Linda Hunt and Colleen (Please see OFFICES on Page 12)

Bond issue in 1965 was last renovation

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

In 1965 voters in Decatur County approved a \$1.087 million bond issue for additions at Decatur Community High School and the Oberlin City School, which later became Oberlin Elementary School.

That's the last time the district has invested in major additions to its buildings. Those bonds were paid off 15 years ago.

Stuart Euhus, who has lived in the county all his life, said that what he remembers is that the school board members were out campaigning for the bond issue. At the time, Mr. Euhus said that they had four kids ranging in age from 4 to 9 years old. He said that some of them were already in grade school, while others went to school after the additions were built.

"They would talk about it wherever anyone would listen," he said of the board members. "They would talk in church basements and in line at the grocery store."

At that time, he said, he lived next door to board member Don Jorn. He said he doesn't remember how the taxes changed after the voters passed the bond issue, but he does know that the board provided examples of the changes and drawings to the voters.

"Every question that we asked was answered," said Mr. Euhus.

The questions covered everything from what was proposed, why they needed the additions and how they were supposed to pay for it, he said.

Although there are several people in

the county who would have paid for the first bond issue and will pay for the one proposed this year, there aren't any board members alive who helped plan the last bond issue in 1965. At the time *The Oberlin Herald* covered the issue before and after the election.

According to school records, on Feb. 18 the school board had passed a resolution to allow for the bond issue. The total issue was for \$1.087 million, which with inflation it would be an almost \$6 million today.

At the elementary school, they asked for \$335,000 for the remodeling. The money built eight more classrooms, where the second graders learn now, and the ones downstairs outside the gym to the west side of the building. The money from the bond issue also helped expand the library and the lunchroom.

At one time, the lunchroom was actually in the basement of the building. In the 1930s, they started to serve lunch to the kids, so after that they needed to build the one upstairs which is able to accommodate more kids and staff. The work added 16,000 square feet to the building.

This is the only addition that has been made to the building, which was constructed in 1926.

At the high school in 1965, the board asked for double what they did at the grade school. The resolution asked for \$752,000 to build onto the school, which was originally built in 1939. The money was used to add 60,000 square (Please see BOND on Page 12)

A bit of Jack Frost



GRASS, TREES AND EVERYTHING that was standing still were covered in frost Sunday morning. In Jennings, this grass had a white glisten from the cold and the small amount of moisture the area received overnight.

— Herald staff photo by Jeanette Krizek

Four people want vacated county seat

Four people so far have given notice that they would like to be appointed to the county commission seat vacated by the death of Bob Glenn, including two Oberlin City Council members, a retired businessman and Mr. Glenn's widow.

The four are Patricia Glenn, Councilmen Jerry Fidele and Stan McEvoy, and Doyle Fredrickson, a retired car salesman.

County Clerk Marilyn Horn, who has been collecting the letters, said that she has heard of one other person so far who may be interested although they haven't made a decision.

The person to take the 3rd District

commission seat will be chosen by Republican County Committee members Todd Tompkins, Dolores Koerperich and Ken Morgan.

Under state law, the party's county chairman has to hold a convention within 21 days after being notified of the vacancy. That meeting has been set for 7 p.m. Tuesday, said Chairman Jack Metcalf. At that time, precinct committee members from the commission district will vote on a new commissioner. The meeting does not have to be open to anyone but committee members.

The decision will be reported to the county clerk, who sends the name to (Please see THIRD on Page 12)

Radio stations sold; format won't change

Oberlin radio station KFNF and the rest of the Goodstar group have been sold to an Omaha firm, with the company assuming control Monday.

The Oberlin station, which broadcasts at 101.1 FM, is one of 14 stations included in the agreement. Waitt Radio Inc., primarily owned by Norman Waitt Jr., a co-founder of Gateway Computers, says it operates 56 radio stations in Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, Minnesota and Florida.

Marvin Matchett, general manager at the station here, said that they have known that it was for sale for awhile. They found out last week and as of

Monday have been under the control of Waitt.

He said that employees are all excited about the change. He said he thought it would benefit everyone. Under new ownership, he added, the employees will have a great benefit package.

"I think that the employees will do well with the change," said Mr. Matchett.

He said that Waitt Radio is committed to its communities. He said that they are in tune with what people want and support local sports programs.

The company acquired stations in (Please see RADIO on Page 12)

* Bond issue passed with flying colors 35 years ago

(Continued from Page 1)
feet to the building. The addition included 11 classrooms in the south addition, math rooms, science rooms and some of the social studies rooms, a three-room science area, library, cafeteria, double gym, shop and an area for the band, the room to the east of the auditorium. There was some space that was re-done in the older portion of the building.

On March 16 of that year, the bond issue was approved by the voters. For the high school they voted 1,076 in favor and 557 against and for the elementary school 1,013 in favor and 289

against it. With the bond issue passing, the work started.

Bonds were sold at different rates, according to the bond book in the Decatur County Courthouse. The rates ranged from 3 to 3.25 percent. There were 152 bonds sold for the high school and 67 for the grade school.

In 1968, the buildings were completed and an open house was held so that visitors could see the changes in their schools. Throughout the remodeling, students went to classes.

In the end, the district spent \$804,380 at the high school and \$293,304 at the grade school.

In 1968, which was the first year that Principal Gordon Matson taught at the school, the building was completed and everyone was able to use the new areas. He said that the additions were looked at with pride.

The school started to take on more activities, he said, and with two gyms, they were able to sponsor more events.

"The planning was really well done, because we have six dressing rooms next to the gyms, two gyms and a common area to host events," he said.

The additions, Mr. Matson said, gave them a

lot of advantages. As soon as they were recognized by other schools and the state activities association, the school was asked to host even more events, he said.

The school also started to hold their own invitational tournaments, bringing other schools here for events.

He said that all of the events they hold at the high school help bring business into town. Without the bond issue and the remodeling 35 years ago, they wouldn't be able to host those. Now, Mr. Matson said, it is the district's responsibility to keep the building up to date.

Similar to the bond issue that the district is looking at today, the one in the 1960s was paid off in 20 years, with the last payment being made on Oct. 1, 1985.

Mr. Euhus said that he has yet to hear a whole lot about the bond issue this year, but thinks they are going to have to answer the same questions that the board did 35 years ago.

"What are we getting, how do we pay, why do we need it, how much will it cost and what will it do to our taxes?" are only some of the questions Mr. Euhus said the school board may need to answer.

* Year comes to an end

(Continued from Page 1)
hurt by the dryness, yet no rains came. In Herndon, the Ox Roast swelled the town's population to almost 4,000 people for the day.

In July, the area received a small rain which helped the corn crop, but the experts said that the yield would be down, especially since the year before there were some who had crops which were 150 bushels an acre.

The drought forced stockmen to take calves and some cows to the sale barn earlier than normal. Cows are normally sold in early October, but business has been on the increase recently.

The city council continued to look for a remedy to the water problem and considered spending as much as \$5 million to do improvements.

The school board agreed to spend \$20,000 to have a consulting firm study its buildings and come up with plans for improvements.

In August, the City Council decided to blend the water from two wells, re-drill well No. 7 and build a well house. This may increase the average water bill by \$5.75 a month from \$12 to about \$17.75 to pay for the work.

The hot and dry weather had burned up the corn and prompted farmers to cut some of it for silage for the cattle.

The city power plant generated twice as much power as it normally does in July and August, with the peak demand for power higher than it had been in the last 20 years.

In September, the corn harvest

started more than a month early because the crop has matured quicker than normal in the drought.

In October, the Oberlin-Decatur County Area Economic Development Corp. met with Tekquity Ventures, a Colorado company, to get the ball rolling on a feasibility plan so that they can use the information for a county strategic plan.

The Bohemian Hall was open for its first dance after it had been moved.

On Halloween, three tornadoes were spotted here, but only minor damage was reported.

In November, pheasant season started even though numbers here were down because of the dry weather.

The economic development corporation agreed to pay \$25,000 to Tekquity for surveys which can be used for the county strategic plan.

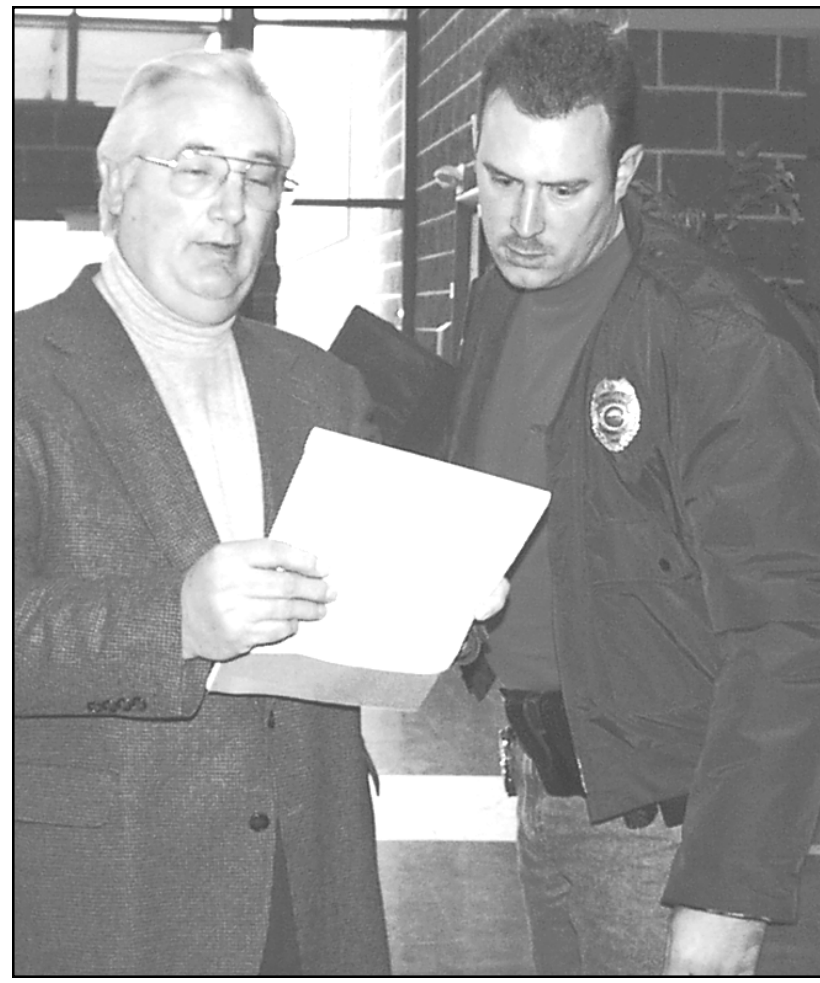
The school board signed a contract with a bond agent for school renovation.

In December, Tekquity started to collect information for a feasibility plan to see if one of its businesses might work here and strategic plan.

The school board agreed on the fourth sketch for building improvements at the grade school and a \$7.38 million bond issue. Both the grade and high schools would get new heating, air conditioning, ventilation and electrical

Preliminary census numbers showed that the county's population had shrunk by 76 from 1998 to 1999.

Of course, this doesn't include the



HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL GORDON MATSON filled Oberlin Police Officer Troy Haas in after the school received a bomb threat last February. Students were evacuated to The Gateway after the letter was found. — Herald file photo

wrecks, minor crimes, the events at both of the schools, and a host of other events that made up the year.

Many of the big stories will carry the county into the new year and possibly into 2002.

* 'Tourism social' planned for end of month

The Oberlin Convention and Visitors Bureau board decided to hold a tourism social at the end of January.

The social will be held at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 30, featuring Marci Penner of Denver, founder of the Kansas Sampler Festival. She will emphasize how to get people here excited about tourism and how to get tourists passing through to stop and visit.

The evening will cost \$2 a person with appetizers served. Board members decided during a meeting on Wednesday, Dec. 13, at the LandMark Inn to offer a drawing for \$50 for businesses at the event, but the only ones eligible are businesses that have sent two or more people to represent them.

There will also be door prizes for participants.

Bureau members will send out letters at the beginning of the new year inviting people to attend.

The group also talked about the

Sappa Celebration Expo, which will be held here this summer instead of the Tri-State Fest-of-All. Judy Cochran had served for the last year as a representative from the group for the summer event, but will no longer be able to.

At a recent Sappa Celebration meeting, there were members elected to serve on the board, so it will be organized a little differently than the Fest-of-All group, said Mrs. Cochran.

Although the Tri-State-Initiative hasn't decided on whether it will continue their support of the Fest-of-All, Connie Grafel, who attends those meetings, said that the new president didn't support the summer event last year and she doesn't see her changing her mind.

Gary Anderson, who owns the LandMark Inn, said that at the Sappa Celebration meetings they have talked about lowering the price of entry and localizing the event more. It will be open to all people and different types

of booths. Mr. Anderson said that in January, they will run an ad in every paper within a 50-mile radius asking for vendors.

In other business, members:

- Talked about the billboard they have been saving money to put up on the east side of U.S. 83 between Hall and Commercial. They decided that they needed to check to see if the bid they received is still good. Mr. Anderson asked where they are on the brochures, saying that if they can put reprinting them off for a year, they may have the money to do the sign. Ms. Grafel said she thought she had 200 left, but was going to check, as were other members.

- Fonda Farr, curator of the Last Indian Raid Museum, said that she hears good feedback from people who see the museum signs and then come into town.
- Talked about putting a travel center at the old police station on the south-

east corner of U.S. 83 and U.S. 36. The group will take a proposal to the Oberlin City Council in January, because the city owns that building. Ms. Grafel said they need to think about a desk and chair there, a sign outside, a phone and a brochure rack.

In the beginning they could possibly match funds with the Oberlin-Decatur County Chamber to help start the center, and then if crafts are sold in the second room, maybe it could support itself. They discussed asking the city to pay the utilities and have it rent free.

Mr. Anderson suggested that they check with Norton and see how their center, in a park near the highway, works.

- Heard that terms of Mrs. Farr, Mrs. Cochran and Stan McEvoy are up in January.
- Heard that the chamber web site has only been up for two days and has had 49 hits.

Castle has icicles bigger than a man's leg

By **KIMBERLY BRANDT**

There are icicles on Gaylen and Roni Spresser's ice sculpture, formed over a pile of metal and wood, that are bigger than a person's leg.

The design has slowly crept toward the street, causing a solid sheet over an inch thick to take over the driveway. Lights under the sculpture glow during the evening, showing the shapes that the water has made.

The ice castle, in the driveway in front of the Spresser home at 101 S. East Ave., has been there for the last few weeks.

Mr. Spresser said that as a child growing up in Jennings, he saw something similar. The creator made a pile of box springs and tumbleweeds and when it got cold enough, he would spray it with water and it would leave different types of ice formations dangling from what was underneath.

About four or five years ago, the Spressers were living in Dresden. Since they had a good size yard, he said, he thought it was time to try his own ice structure.

"I went out back behind the house and gathered up as much junk as I could

find," said Mr. Spresser. "It didn't resemble anything; it just stood above the ground. Then I strung lights on them and they were enclosed in the ice."

He said that it took a couple of nights of spraying it to really get it going, but once it starts, the ice gets thick quick.

The family has never done the ice formation in Oberlin before. He said that they tried last year, but that it never got cold enough for anything to happen.

"It would freeze," he said, "but then it would thaw out the next day. It was just too warm last year."

This year, he got out the tire rack, wire, bed frame, ladder and various pipes and bars and assembled the lot in the driveway. Next, he started to string lights from it until he had a couple hundred lights wrapped around and dangling from the sculpture.

It didn't get cold right away, so he had to wait and the structure sat at the top of the driveway until that first time he was able to spray it.

The recent cold, day and night, has worked its winter magic. Mr. Spresser said that the first day went the best. He started spraying it down on a Sunday afternoon and sprayed it all night. By

morning, it was as big as it is now, he said.

Mr. Spresser said that he has sprayed the castle a couple more times, but doesn't know if it helped the formation or if it only made it melt a little.

As it is now, the ice is seven feet tall and about three to four feet wide, he said.

It has stayed for a long time, but to make sure that it is here through the holidays, he will work on it again.

Each year he does the ice formation and each time he sprays it, he said, he learns something new about it. He said that he has learned what the perfect temperature is for it and how different nozzles will either melt the ice or help it freeze. He said that he has also learned to not use anything dark under the ice because the dark items attract the sunlight.

Mr. Spresser said that each day the ice disappears a little, but that even when it gets in the 50s and 60s for a

week, there will still be chunks that stay around for a while longer.

The family has noticed an endless stream of cars that stop so that people can take a look at the ice. Mr. Spresser said that it has been fun to watch the people, some who even get out to take pictures of it.

Although they welcome people to come out to look at the ice and lights, he added, "We have the sidewalk and driveway roped off because of the ice."

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* Radio manager says change is good

(Continued from Page 1)
Oberlin, Colby, Dodge City, Garden City, Liberal, Great Bend, Hutchinson, Pratt, Salina and Larned from Goodstar, which purchased them in March 1997.

Mr. Matchett said that these stations were sold to Goodstar as a package too, although that doesn't mean that they will always be sold that way.

"Geographically, this group of stations fits very well with our existing roster of radio properties in the Mid-

west," said Mr. Waitt.

Although the company took over the daily operation of the stations on the first day of this year, they have to wait for approval from the Federal Communications Commission before the sale can become final.

He said that there weren't any immediate programming or personnel changes at the stations. Mr. Matchett also said that he hasn't heard of any changes planned for the station or the programs that it offers.

* Group asks public to attend meeting

(Continued from Page 1)
some volunteers who will work on an outline of priorities in the county, she said.

The priorities will be taken from issues that people talk about at the meeting.

For those who are interested in serving on a committee, Ms. Grafel said that they should attend this first meeting so they have a real sense of what the public would like to see happen.

Then they will probably meet four times after that to work on an outline and then there will be another public meeting.

Those who are interested in the committees are not the only ones who are welcome at the meeting.

Ms. Grafel said that everyone is welcome, no matter what their age. She said they are looking for some younger people to be there so that they can see what they would like to see in the

county in the future.

"If you aren't there to give your opinion on what the community needs to do to survive over the next five to 10 years," she said, "then you don't have the right to complain about things that don't happen."

The written plan needs to look at a variety of things, she said, including community boundaries, needs and opportunities assessment, a mission statement, community collaboration, how they initiated the project, "stakeholder" involvement, consistency with other plans, goals, objectives and strategies, priorities for action, an action plan and an evaluation/monitoring program for the process. These are required by the Department of Commerce and Housing.

Ms. Grafel said that those who can't make the meeting can mail their ideas and areas of interest for the county to her at 1 Morgan Drive.

* Offices will be filled by spring in city and school elections

(Continued from Page 1)
Ramsey.

There are also several seats open on the county's two school boards.

The Oberlin School Board will have three seats which are now occupied by Chris Bailey, Dewayne Jackson and Delayne May. They are all four-year terms, and members represent a district. You must live in the district to run for a seat.

In Jennings, there are three positions

which are occupied by Vickie Bailey, Rhonda Wildeman and Jeff Wahlmeier for four-year terms.

There is also one two-year term which is now held by Sarah Coiner. Seats in the Jennings district are elected at large.

Anyone who wants to run for office needs to go to the county clerk's office. Mrs. Horn said that they have to pay \$5 or have a certain number of names on a petition to file.

* Third commissioner will be appointed by precinct people

(Continued from Page 1)
Topeka. The governor has to make the formal appointment, but he is bound by the party's choice, the Republicans in this case since Mr. Glenn was elected as a Republican.

Two of those interested in the county post currently sit on the Oberlin City Council, but state law says that a person cannot hold both jobs. Mr. McEvoy's seat will be up for election in April, however.

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