



RANDY WALTERS SHOWS how to turn the giant orange boiler on in the basement of Decatur Community High School. Sheila Jansonius, (below) counselor at Oberlin Elementary School, works in her office which used to be a closet on the second floor. — Herald staff photos by Kimberly Brandt

School wants changes

Tiny offices were closets at grade school

By KIMBERLY BRANDT
At Oberlin Elementary School, the speech room, the conference room and the counselor's office are as tiny as closets, mostly because that's what they were when the school was built. The building has become crowded as new, specialized programs have grown, many of them required by state and federal law, says Principal Duane Dorshorst.

Mr. Dorshorst said that the brick building, constructed in 1926, is structurally sound and has held up well over the years. Many in the area can remember when they attended school there and the building is full of history.

The location makes it easy for kids who live in town to walk, with few having to cross the highways.

The library is large and has good space for the kids, he said, but it also takes up three classrooms. In the halls, they have tried to use old trophy cases and took out the old lockers so that kids' work can be shown off.

They have made room for new programs in spaces that may not be the best, he said. For example, the resource room, where kids who have special challenges go to learn, is next to the band room.

With changes in law, they have had to use closets and other small spaces to help accommodate what is required.

On a tour last month, he told reporters that there were about nine kids in the resource room at times, all trying to learn. They have to deal with each other's voices, plus the sound of kids playing Christmas carols on recorders next door.

Mr. Dorshorst said you have to imagine what it sounds like when the fifth and sixth grade band is playing. He said that they need more than one room for (Please see **GRADE** on Page 12)



High School has worn down over the years

By KIMBERLY BRANDT
Just like a house, over the years Decatur Community High School has seen wear and tear, Principal Gordon Matson says. Today, there's no reason to replace the building, but there are a lot of things that need to be updated. "This is a great building," he said. "The value is really something. The engineers said it would cost over \$14 million to replace. It is one of the better buildings in western Kansas."

Mr. Matson said that the building works for what the school needs, has a lot of history and overall is in good condition. The thing is that over the years since it was built in 1939, the school has seen more use. Today, it hosts area sports and musical events, and has seen thousands of students come in and out of its doors. "Oberlin has always taken

care of everything well," said Mr. Matson.

He said that it is time to take care of the district's school buildings so they can last into the new century.

At the high school, the Oberlin School Board plans to use its capital outlay budget to take care of the things that need to be fixed over the next few years. A proposed bond issue would only cover heating, ventilating and air conditioning and some electrical work at the high school.

Mr. Matson said that one of the areas that needs work is in the auditorium. In the past, he said, the stage was extended, but the lights were not moved out. He said that they actually would like a new programmable theatrical lighting system because as it is now, if (Please see **SCHOOL** on Page 12)

Heating bills triple; officials say increases haven't ended yet

By KIMBERLY BRANDT
Officials said that heating bills would be high this winter, but when customers received their Midwest Energy Inc. bills last month some were shocked to see that the price had tripled.

People here saw bills that were normally \$43 go to \$132 in a month and officials say that they may not be done seeing the increase. Bob Helm, manager of corporate communications at Midwest said that if the country gets another cold spell the bills may go up again.

Prices on gas bills are going up for three reasons. The first is that natural gas is an unregulated commodity and its price has been on the rise since early summer, the second is that the decline in the production and third is that although the supply has dropped the demand hasn't.

"A lot of the analysts now are looking at the price of the natural gas commodity going down by summer," said Mr. Helm. "Although they don't see the \$2 prices that we have seen in the past, that is part of what got us into this prob-

Tips may help users cut gas bills here

Cold weather is here and the furnaces are kicking on to heat houses as the bills get higher, but there are ways to maybe lower what a user pays.

Bob Helm, manager of corporate communications at Midwest Energy

Inc., said that even though the country is in the cold season there are still tips that may help conserve heat and help the furnace work a little less.

The first thing that can be done is to have the heating system tuned up. (Please see **BILLS** on Page 12)

lem." He is referring to the gas prices in 1999 which were in some places as low as 98 cents at the pump.

Although there are rigs out looking for natural gas now, by the time it gets into circulation it won't change the winter prices, but may lower the bills for the summer.

At Midwest, which is the carrier that

people here use, they are trying to work with the people to help them be able to pay the high bills. Mr. Helm said that one type of help the company is providing is budget billing. Basically it is an average, he said. The company looks at the history of the user's bill and then is able to take an average and spread it over 12 months.

(Please see **GAS** on Page 12)

Winter sport turnout low but kids are still dedicated

By KIMBERLY BRANDT
There may not be as many seniors playing winter sports at Decatur Community High School, school officials say, but the younger kids are learning and trying hard.

Athletic Director Randy Olson said that you can read the lack of seniors any way that you want to, but that numbers are down a little. One reason may be that there are only 32 seniors this year where as last year there were 45. There are also 44 juniors, 51 sophomores and 50 freshmen.

Mr. Olson said another thing that happens is that as freshmen, many students participate in several activities and as they get older, they find out what really interests them and spend more

time with that, whether it be sports, drama or another activity.

Last year, the wrestling team had 22 and this year they are up two at 24. Boys basketball had 22 last year and they are down two at 20. The biggest drop has been seen with girls basketball, which had 17 last year and is now at 12 players. Mr. Olson said the team graduated five girls last year. Three girls who played the sport last year as juniors chose not to play this year.

A young team isn't necessarily bad, he said. It may mean more challenges but it may also mean that there is more to come in the future.

"We have a real good nucleus of junior and sophomore girls who are talented," said Mr. Olson. "There is a good

group of freshman girls who are athletic and talented."

All of the winter sports teams have their share of younger students this season, Mr. Olson said. The wrestling team has 10 freshmen, nine sophomores, three juniors and three seniors.

Coach Joe Dreher said that it is a challenge with so many young kids, but they are hard workers. Part of the challenge for them is that they won't always be wrestling others their age, he said. A freshman may wind up wrestling a kid who has been in the sport for four years.

The season also started a little different because of the age group. The team took the first few weeks to work on (Please see **SPORTS** on Page 12)



THE JACKSON FIVE, Jeremy, Rene, Kara, Korin and the New Year's baby, Kyle, were winners of the First Baby Contest, sponsored by area businesses. Kyle was born at Decatur County Hospital on Jan. 3 and the family welcomed their first boy home on Friday. — Herald staff photo by Kimberly Brandt

New Year's baby boy born here wins food, gifts and certificates

Decatur County's New Year's baby was born last Wednesday at 2:42 p.m. at the hospital in Oberlin.

Kyle James Jackson was born to Rene and Jeremy Jackson, of Oberlin, as the first baby born at Decatur County Hospital in 2001. Mrs. Jackson said that her son wasn't named for anyone although Mr. Jackson's father's name is James.

On Friday Mrs. Jackson and her 7 pound, 11.2 ounce son were able to go home.

Kyle is the Jackson's third child.

They also have two girls, Kara, 4 and Korin, 2. Mrs. Jackson said that at first Kara was upset because she wanted another little sister, but then changed her mind and was excited that she had a little brother. The little girl looks out for her baby brother even at her young age and eagerly asks if she can hold him.

Mrs. Jackson said that they didn't know that they were going to have a boy. They had decided they wanted to be surprised, although with two girls she said they were hoping for a little

boy. "But as long as the baby was healthy," she said, "we didn't care."

With 10 fingers and what Kara said are very little toes, he is healthy and loved already.

With the first baby of the new year the family will receive gifts from local businesses. Mrs. Jackson said that they didn't know about the gifts when she first went into the hospital to be induced before Christmas. The inducing didn't work and the hospital staff mentioned (Please see **BABY** on Page 12)

* School is starting to show its age after 60 years

(Continued from Page 1)
one of the panels that controls the stage lights goes out, it takes at least six months to get parts to repair it.
"This is a beautiful auditorium," said Mr. Matson. "We should keep it functional."
Another major need is the locker rooms, which the principal said have seen a lot of use over the years because of the events that have been held at the school and then kids using them each day for sports and gym classes. During a tour he gave reporters, he showed them the boys locker room downstairs, which is used for track, football and wrestling.
Mr. Matson said that the room needs new

lockers and lights. The metal lockers and doors in the room are chipped and although they continue to repaint them, he said things wear out. He said that the plumbing fixtures need to be redone and he would like to take out the column showers and install wall units.
"It has been cared for," he said, "but just like a house, things wear out and need to be redone."
Mr. Matson said that the locker rooms downstairs and next to the gyms are the worst because they are used more often.
On the junior high side of the building, the locker rooms look similar. The lockers are rusted, it is dark and the room needs work. Bath-

room facilities need to be replaced because they no longer work or are slow.
Another area that needs work is the windows. There are some all around the building that have started to rot, Mr. Matson said. On the front of the building, there is a group of windows which have been boarded up on the inside because there is no insulation there. Mr. Matson said that these need to be replaced with new ones and they may help keep the rooms cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter.
In the wrestling room, he said, the wall to the west needs work. There's no insulation in that wall, he said, and there are several areas where the panel has cracked and it has been caulked.

Mr. Matson said that he thinks they lose a lot of heat because of that wall.
One of the biggest problems, though, and one that the bond issue would solve, is the electrical system. He said that the system is maxed out. The original electrical boxes are still in use, tucked away in the basement with the two large boilers.
"If the bond issue doesn't pass," he said, "we will just make things work."
But, he said, the old heating system is getting harder to keep going. They have been repairing the water return lines weekly and the boilers have to be re-tubed, along with other maintenance. The old heating system keeps many areas of

the school very hot, while the room next door may be cool, he said.
Mr. Matson said that with the changes in technology, he would like to keep the school up to date. Although there is a computer in each room, they aren't able to access the Internet from each room and he would like to see that happen.
In order of importance, though, the most important thing is the wiring.
"Wiring from the 1930s does not work on a building in 2000," he said.
Next he said is the heating system, third the outside south wall and east panels.
"Basically, we need some good general upkeep on a darn good building," said Mr. Matson.

* Grade school officials want to bring kids upstairs for class

(Continued from Page 1)
these kids so that they can learn in a quieter area. In the fourth sketch by the architects for renovations at the school, he said, there would be three or four separate rooms for the class.
Across the hall from the band room, on the school's main floor, is vocal music.
Mr. Dorshorst said that the space works well for what they offer and in the plan, the band room would move to the second floor above it so that they can try to keep the sound of music in one area.
Around the corner is another problem area, he said, the speech room, which is a former closet.
"It isn't an ideal condition for kids trying to improve speech," he said.
In the building plan, the speech room would be moved close to the resource room, in a quieter area, he said. Then

the wall between the vocal room and the old speech room will be knocked out to make the vocal room larger.
Upstairs, the computer lab is functional, he said, but when an entire class gets in there, teachers can't work their way through the kids to help them.
"There isn't any excess room," he said.
Down the hall is a conference room for the staff. The room has a table that seats six and is no bigger than a closet, because it used to be one. This is the only space they have if they need to hold a staffing, he said. Off the room, there is a door to the psychologist's office, which Mr. Dorshorst said is right next to the gym and the noise travels into the office.
Across from the conference closet is the only boys' restroom upstairs for the fourth, fifth and sixth graders. The girls from those classes have to go down-

stairs, he said.
A major goal is to get the kids in first and second grade on the ground floor, which is required today for fire safety. In an emergency, little kids might not be able to make it down a flight of stairs safely.
With the renovations, they would put in an elevator. The school has a chair lift for a wheelchair, which they have been using for the last three years, but the Americans with Disabilities Act says they need to have an elevator for handicapped access.
Although Mr. Dorshorst said that it was important to fix all of these items, the most important thing is the electrical system.
He said that the system is poor enough that when they plugged in an electric heater the other day, it blew a circuit and shut off power in some classrooms.

* Sports teams may be young but they are hard workers

(Continued from Page 1)
technique, which although the older wrestlers might have known, the younger ones didn't.
Mr. Dreher said that they have never had a great number of juniors and seniors out for the sport. The ones that he does have are working on helping those younger than them.
Girls basketball has six freshmen, two sophomores, four juniors and no seniors. Coach Paul Nepodal agreed that because the team is younger, they spend more time working on fundamentals and understanding the system.
He said that he had to get the younger girls used to high school athletics. Although many played in junior high, he said, varsity athletics are more competitive.
"They realize that they need the freshmen to come along to make the team successful," he said.
The girls have a few main goals for the season, he said. They would like to finish in the top three in the league, host the first sub-state game, which depends on their seating in the tournament (decided by won-loss record) and also to improve as the season continues.
Coach Nepodal said he hopes to keep the six freshmen he has now for the next three years. They are a tight-knit group, he said, and come from a strong class.
The boys basketball team doesn't have as young of a team as the other

winter sports. It has six freshmen, four sophomores, seven juniors and three seniors.
"These kids are working hard," said coach Dick Ahlberg. "They are competitive, young talented kids."
The players have to be competitive, he said, because they are in a tough league.
"They are challenged to rise to the level of competition," he said.
There may not be a single answer to why the turnout for juniors and seniors in winter sports is low this year, Mr. Olson said. It may be because at that age they become more active in other things or it may be something else.
He said the high school coaches are

trying to retain some of the older kids. Mr. Olson said that they have projects in the works and some that they have implemented to keep those older players involved. Included in these are the Letterman's Club, recognition for players and a weight club which many younger students have become active.
Mr. Olson said that coaches try to stay positive and provide encouragement at the school and in sports to support the kids. He said that he didn't really have an answer to why there were fewer seniors out this year.
"There are two sides to every coin," said Mr. Olson. "It bodes well to have experience, but also to have younger kids, too."

Oberlin Jaycees to host third annual basketball shoot for cash

The Oberlin Jaycees will sponsor their third annual free throw contest Friday, Jan. 19 during the boys semifinal basketball game at the Oberlin Invitational.
Tickets will be sold that day starting at 5 p.m. with 1 ticket being \$1 or 6 tickets for \$5. During the game a ticket will be drawn from those sold and at half time the ticket holder will attempt four shots.
For each shot they will have 40 sec-

onds and if they don't make the first shot they can't advance. The person needs to first make a lay-up and if they can do that then they will have the chance to make a free throw, then a three point shot and finally a half court shot.
For each of the four shots they have the possibility to win \$25, meaning if they make all four shots they will win \$100.
The event is open to all ages.

* Gas decrease has caused bills to rise

(Continued from Page 1)
"This way they won't have to come up with \$200 to \$300 a month," said Mr. Helm. "Instead they will pay the same each time."
In Oberlin, he said, it works a little different because people don't receive their electricity from Midwest. Basically, users here receive service from Midwest for December through March and then in the summer they pay a minimal bill for the water heater, pilot light and if they have a gas range. They then pay the city for the electrical air conditioning. For Midwest users the more expensive months would then level out so that in December and June they would pay the same amount to Midwest, instead of having a few high months and then summer months when the bill can be under \$20.
Mr. Helm said that they haven't really heard complaints because users have read about the increases before they were here. Recently the company sent out fliers in their bills to explain why the increase was there and how people could get budget billing. In one flier it told users that "a typical residential customer may experience bill increases of 50 to 80 percent or more per month. If we experience a colder than normal winter, the bills could be significantly higher."

in the mailings that users could see an estimated change in winter natural gas heating bills of 120 percent more than last year.
Mr. Helm said that in December with colder weather and the first big jumps in bills seen they had 881 accounts sign up for budget billing.
"We know that

people are on fixed incomes," he said. "We want to make it affordable so that they can get through the winter."
Mr. Helm said that for people who are interested in signing up for budget billing, they need to contact their local Midwest provider.
"We will make arrangements so that everyone will stay warm in the winter time."
He said that they don't want people to have to sacrifice other things for example buying groceries to pay their gas bills.
"It is really easy to budget with," said Mr. Helm, "that is why it is called the budget plan."

* Bills can be lowered with extra work

(Continued from Page 1)
Newer systems operate best, he said, but they also come with a price. Older systems still can do the job but like anything they need to be tuned up and kept in shape. One way to keep the system working well is to replace the air filter.
Another way to lower the bill is to keep the thermostat at the lowest setting possible where people are still comfortable in the house, but that it isn't hot or running all the time. Mr. Helm said that it is important to not keep it too cold, but that users can find a setting that is right for them and that may be lower

than what they have it at now. He said then to leave it at that, although some people turn their heat down at night which he said is fine. He doesn't suggest turning it off, mainly because he said he would be worried that the pipes would freeze.
Mr. Helm's last tip is something that he said a lot of people don't think of and is very economical. This is to put an insulation blanket around the water heater, which will keep it heated longer so the water won't have to cycle through as much and will save the system some work.



ERIC SCOTT AND JOE STANLEY look through some of the food collected in the food drive at Stanley Hardware. On Thursday, kids from Teens for Christ pushed the collected items to the Decatur County Food Bank, located at the United Church of Oberlin. — Herald staff photo by Pat Cozad

Food bank receives delivery from hardware store food drive

The Decatur County Food Bank became richer by 1,832 items Thursday night after kids from Teens for Christ and Stanley Hardware employees delivered the food from their second annual drive.
The goal set for the food drive was 2,001 items by 2001, but they fell short by 169 items. Owner of Stanley Hardware, Joe Stanley said that although

they did fall short dollar wise they collected more than last year.
During last year's drive they collected 2,200 items earlier than the deadline, with most of it being nonperishable food.
Although this year they collected many canned and boxed food, he said that they also received a lot of personal health items like toothbrushes, laundry

detergent, soap and baby diapers. These types of items are often more expensive than food.
Last week the items were boxed up and put in shopping carts from Raye's Grocery and pushed to the food bank at United Church.
For those who are still interested in giving items, the food bank always accepts donations.

Council unsure about what type of bonds to get for water work

The Oberlin City Council met with a man from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Thursday night about their application for money to work on the city water.
The city is applying for a \$1,047,800 in bond money for the project. In order for the process to continue there are numerous forms that needed to be signed and filled out including a letter of intent, obligation form, operating budget and others. All of them are required by the federal government.
Bill Moore, rural development specialist with the agency brought the information in including a letter that explained what would happen now. Mayor Charles Frickey had a question on it about the kind of bond. The letter said it would be a general obligation bond, which is typically paid off with property taxes, although they don't have to be, while the council thought that it would be a revenue bond, which would be paid off with revenue from the water system. Mr. Moore said that he

needed to know what type of bond the council wants before they continue work.
City Attorney Steve Hirsch said that he would call the bond council and see if this type of bond will work for them. After that he will get together with City Administrator Gary Shike and they will call Mr. Moore. Mr. Hirsch said that his suggestion is to go with the general obligation bond because it typically earns a little better interest rate than a revenue bond.
The council also discussed that the city crew needs to be more task oriented with the usage of the new bucket truck. Councilman Stan McEvoy said that he asked that it be put on the agenda because he doesn't want extra wear and tear to be put on the new vehicle. The suggestion was to use a different truck to do the everyday jobs and then if they need the bucket truck that they can go back and get it. City Foreman Dan Castle said that it is hard to say what is an emergency because each time they are called out it is an emergency to someone, but that they will start to try to use another truck for some of the jobs.

were within the budget for the last year except for contractual which they were around \$750 over. He had excess in the other areas of the budget.
• Designated The Bank and Gold Bank as their depository banks for the next year.
• Agreed to the general accepted accounting principles resolution which basically exempts them from adhering to the generally accepted accounting principles, meaning that they don't have to keep two books, they only need one.
• Appointed Janice Shobe to the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp.
• Appointed Stan McEvoy, Connie Grafel, Judy Cochran and Carol Barrett to the Convention and Visitors Bureau.
• Heard that people have been asking for some type of sign outside The Gateway to announce what event is there. Councilman Marvin Matchett said that although they have gotten bids on a sign, they have come in large sums and that maybe they need to do something in the meantime.
• Heard from Mr. Castle who said that the Christmas decorations received some wind damage this season and need to be repaired before they are hung again. He also said that there are several places that need street repairs to take out the bumps.

* Baby wins many prizes

(Continued from Page 1)
to her about the New Year's baby promotion. When she went in after the new year to be induced again she said that she didn't really think about it and was a little surprised when she was told.
The 2001 baby and his family will receive a gift certificate from The Dresser, Gold Bank, Ward Drug Store, Addleman Drug Store, Stanley Hardware, Mary Kay Cosmetics and Ben Franklin Store.
At Ray Jewelry, the LandMark Inn, Fredrickson Insurance Agency and Gold Banc Insurance Agency a special gift waits.
The family will also receive a quart of Capture carpet cleaner from Jay's Floor Covering, a pizza for two from Pazzo Hut, a case of baby food from Raye's Grocery, \$10 of gasoline from Oberlin Sinclair and two Sunday buffets from Janey's Frontier Restaurant.

In other business, council members:
• Heard from Chief Police Wade Lockhart who said that for the year they have had a total of 821 calls for a variety of reasons. He said that they also



The Stamps

- PRE-INKED (NO STAMP PAD NEEDED)
- CLEANER, EASIER TO USE
- 50,000 IMPRESSIONS BEFORE RE-INKING
- DOZENS OF MODELS

You Can't Wait to Get Your Hands On.

THE OBERLIN HERALD
170 S. Penn • Oberlin, Kan. 67756 • 785-475-2206