

Be counted on Tuesday

City and school elections. Polls open 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.

THE OBERLIN HERALD

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Farmers line up to sign up for help

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

With the deadline looming to sign up under the new farm bill, the Decatur County office of the U.S. Farm Service Agency has helped around 90 percent of the county's farmers sign up for the new subsidy program.

The program is complicated. It takes a long time to sign up and the farmer has to produce records since 1998 to change their base and yield records.

Diane Barrett, county executive director for the agency, said the final date for base

and yield elections is Tuesday, although farmers and ranchers have until June 1 to sign a contract for the farm program. She said the agency, part of the Department of Agriculture, has helped around 90 percent of the 822 farms in the county update their base and yield elections so far. The base is the base acres of the farm and the yield is what it has produced.

Basically, she said, farmers can update their base for the crops planted to a four-year average between 1998-2001 or keep their previous numbers and add oil seed crops,

which are sunflower and soybeans. Mrs. Barrett said the changes by the farmers are being allowed because of the farm bill was passed by Congress last year.

This farm bill is different than the last one mainly because the program isn't doing direct market loss assistance. It is now being done through a counter cyclical payment which is based on market prices.

Farmers have been planting more acres in the last four years, Mrs. Barrett said, so the amount of the base acres has increased. That is one reason for a farmer to file.

If a farmer chooses to update their base, they get a chance to prove yields for the counter cyclical part of the payments, which are based on market prices. If the markets stay high, said Mrs. Barrett, there is not much chance of a counter cyclical payment, but if prices go down, there could be one.

The other part of the program is a direct payment, which is based on base acres, yield set for the farm and the payment rate. With those payments, it doesn't matter what is planted. All farmers can get a direct payment and it is guaranteed.

Once a producer updates the base and yield election, it will be set until 2007. Mrs. Barrett said this is the first time farmers have been able to update those figures since 1985.

With the signup 90 percent done, she said she has about 9 percent left to do. One percent of the farms have base acres that are too small or the farms are so small the producers don't come in.

When the base and yield are updated, farmers will have to provide production records, said Mrs. Barrett, but that doesn't (See DEADLINE on Page 10A)



JUST BEFORE CLOSING TIME Monday, Rhonda Wildeman took advantage of the advance voting system

instead of waiting until election day Tuesday.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Brandt

Council sets up odd, even system for outdoor water

The Oberlin City Council revised its water conservation plan at a meeting Thursday night, setting new watering days based on even/odd house numbers, and new hours.

The council has been studying the plan at recent meetings, preparing for the summer. There are no water restrictions in effect so far.

The council decided that people who have odd numbers on their house will be allowed to water on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Those with even numbered houses can water on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, between 12:01 and 10 a.m. and 9 p.m. to midnight.

Councilman Ken Shobe said the recent rain is welcome, but it won't make the wells gain the two feet lost in the last year. He suggested the watering every day on odd/even shifts and not watering at all on Monday. He said the break on Monday would give the water tower a chance to catch up.

Mr. Shobe said he would like to

see the hours change from last year, but still didn't want people watering in the afternoons because it is so hot.

Timers can be set to a certain day of the week, said Councilman Ray Ward, and for a certain amount of time, so it would work for certain houses to be watering on certain days of the week.

Mayor Gary Walter said the timing would have to be from midnight to midnight because anything else could be an enforcement problem, not to mention an education problem.

Education is important, said Mayor Walter. Just because a person can water every other day doesn't mean they have to.

The council didn't make any changes to the triggers for the plan to go into effect.

Mayor Walter said if there is a water emergency, the mayor can put the plan into effect.

The council voted unanimously to make the changes.

City, school board seats on ballots

Voters in Decatur County will go to the polls Tuesday to decide races for Oberlin mayor and City Council, two seats on the Oberlin School District, one for the Norcatour City Council and one for the Jennings School Board.

Since the cutoff for filing to get on the ballot, several have decided to run as write-in candidates, causing races for some of the positions.

County Clerk Marilyn Horn, who serves as the county election officer, said as of Thursday morning 45 people had decided to vote in advance either through the mail or by going to the clerk's office.

She said that everyone in the county should vote, because each vote counts and it is important.

In Oberlin, voters will decide

Where to cast your vote

For the election Tuesday, all of the polling places will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Here are the polling locations:

- Allison, Pleasant Valley and Jennings townships and City of Jennings vote at the Jennings Senior Center.
- Altory, Center, Grant, Harlan, Liberty, Logan, Olive, Roosevelt and Sherman townships, at the Oberlin Golden Age Center.
- Bassettville, Beaver, Cook,

Finley, Oberlin, Prairie Dog, Sappa and Summit townships, at the Oberlin American Legion.

- Custer, Lyon and Dresden townships and Dresden City, at the Dresden United Methodist Church.
- Garfield and Lincoln townships and Norcatour City at Norcatour City Hall.
- Oberlin City 1 at the American Legion Hall.
- Oberlin City 2 at the Decatur County Courthouse.

two city races. The first is for mayor. Both Councilman Ken Shobe and Steve Smith filed for the position.

Voters will decide how to fill two seats on the council.

Their choices are Incumbent Ray Ward, Patrick Pomeroy or Royce Leitner, who is a write-in candidate. Although Jerry Fidele, former councilman, filed for the election he has since moved. His name will still appear on the ballot, but if elected he won't be able to serve his term.

If Mr. Shobe is elected mayor, that will leave his seat open on the council, which means someone will have to be appointed to fill the position.

Voters in the Oberlin School District will settle two races. One is between incumbent Jeannie Martin and Dave Stapp for the (See VOTERS on Page 10A)

Herndon, Atwood to vote on combining

Voters in the Herndon and Atwood school districts will go to the polls Tuesday to decide if the two should consolidate for the next school year.

The Herndon and Atwood boards met in December to look at the possibility of consolidating since the enrollment in Herndon was below 100 and expected to drop drastically in the next few years.

The Herndon board met with the Oberlin and Golden Plains school

boards as well, but decided to consolidate with Atwood. The Herndon board swayed back and forth, retracting the motion to consolidate and then deciding to do it.

After the new year, the state Board of Education approved the consolidation and now it is up to the voters to make the final decision.

The question says, "Shall school districts No. 317 and No. 318 form a consolidated unified school district?" There are 272 voters in the Herndon District and 1,571 in the

Atwood District, and the issue needs a majority of all voters to pass.

The votes will be counted together, so if the majority of the voters say yes, the consolidation will pass even if it loses in one district.

By consolidating now, the two districts will freeze their current combined budgets for four years.

That way, if the district loses kids, it will still be able to use this year's count for state money. If the district

grows, the new enrollment figures can be sent to the state and the district will receive more money.

Herndon Superintendent Kim Juenemann said she didn't want to talk about the consolidation until after the election Tuesday.

Atwood Superintendent Lee Tarrant didn't return the call by Monday evening.

The Atwood board signed an agreement to keep the grade school in Herndon open for four (See SCHOOLS on Page 10A)

Norcatour man serving in the Marine Corps

With the United States at war with Iraq, servicemen and women from all over the nation are being deployed or looking at the possibility of fighting, including those from Decatur County.

One is Russell James, son of Larry and Terri James of Norcatour, who have lived in the county for the last 24 years. Russell is a linguist in the Marine Corps.



R. James

Mr. James said his son graduated from Decatur Community High School in 2000 and enlisted in the Marines. He said Russell always wanted to be in the military. He has an uncle and great uncle who are retired Army.

Russell graduated from boot camp nearly three years (See FAMILY on Page 10A)

Special section to honor troops

The Oberlin Herald plans to run a section in honor of the servicemen and women from the area.

Anyone who has a family member who is serving in any branch of the armed forces is asked to call or write the paper with the name of the person serv-

ing and relatives.

The number of the paper is 785-475-2206. The address is 170 S. Penn Ave Oberlin, KS. 67749, or e-mail obherald@nwkansan.com. The paper needs the information by Monday for the section, but will continue to build a list of service people from this area.

City council decides giant billboard must come down

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

The Oberlin City council decided Thursday not to change the city's zoning ordinance to allow a Classic Cable sign on U.S. 36 to stay.

After the vote, the city wrote the company which installed the sign and said the council chose not to accept the planning commission's recommendation that it could stay. The firm has 30 days to appeal to the District Court. After that, if the sign is still up in 30 days, the city will tear it down.

The 24-by-10-foot billboard was put up by Thomas Outdoor Advertising of Manhattan without permission from the city. The zoning ordinance limits off premise signs to 6 by 6 feet.

City Administrator Gary Shike said when he heard the sign was being installed, he went to the site, gave the man the form and explained the procedure. The form was never filled out or returned, although the company did pay the \$100 fee. Mr. Shike wrote the company, telling it to remove the sign.

After an appeal, the city planning and zoning commission recommended changing the ordinance to allow the sign to stay.

County Attorney Steve Hirsch said whenever the zoning ordinance is changed, the process is to submit the issue to the planning and zoning commission, which was done. The council then can adopt the recommendation of the commission, override the recommendation or return the recommendation to the commission with a statement as to if they have or haven't approved it. Then the commission would have to discuss the issue again.

Councilman Stan McEvoy said he felt that the sign company didn't put the sign up in the proper way or go through the procedure. He sug-

gested not changing the ordinance.

Councilman Ray Ward said he agreed that the proper process wasn't followed. He said he didn't think the city was running any businesses off but the city could run people off if ordinances are not enforced.

On the flip side, asked Councilman Ken Shobe, why does the city have a planning and zoning commission if the council isn't going to listen to it?

Did the commission talk about the company not going through the proper channels, asked Mr. McEvoy.

City Administrator Gary Shike said the group did talk about the process. The commission said they didn't want to start a trend where the city had a bunch of signs on the highway all next to each other. The man from the advertising company said he didn't think the billboard would start a trend.

Did the man give a reason why he didn't go through the process? asked Councilman Jay Anderson. He basically said some places don't have sign ordinances, said Mr. Shike.

The city has made allowances from ordinances, said Mayor Walter, but those people went through the process. The ordinance maybe does need to be changed, said Mr. Ward, but the city doesn't need to make allowances just for this sign.

Before the council started talking about the billboard, Steve Smith said he would like to see the ordinance changed to keep the sign. There is a double standard, he said, because the merchants have a bigger sign on U.S. 83. The city's ordinances should facilitate growth, not run businesses off. City Attorney Hirsch said the ordinance doesn't apply to signs that advertise the city. (See SIGN on Page 10A)

* Deadline near for farm bill agreements

(Continued from Page 1A)
 have to be done right away. Mrs. Barrett said everything is computerized and employees helping farmers sign up have taken training classes on the program. Checks are issued from the local office, she said. When a farmer signs up, they can decide if they want to receive half of the payment sometime between now and August and then another check toward the end of the year, or to get one check at the end of the year.

After the base and yield elections are updated, she said, farmers will just have to come in an sign the contract each year until 2007, when the farm program will be up for renewal. Mrs. Barrett said a lot of farmers here waited to sign up because they didn't know if anything would be changed. Signing up has taken some time under the new law, she said, especially since the office is taking acreage reports at the same time. Some farmers seem to be disappointed, she said, because of the amount of money they get, and there has also been a lot of confusion about the program. This has been one of the more complex farm programs ever, she said. Roger May, who farms in Decatur

County, said he signed up for the program the first part of March. It took two afternoons, he said, but part of that was due to acreage reports. He said there are some things that could be done to make it easier for a farmer to sign up. It seems like you need a computer and software just to figure out what the best plan of action is. Then it is a guessing game on what the market is going to do. If the market stays low, he said, then there is one way to go which would be better than any other way for the counter cyclical payments. One thing which might make it easier is to use crop insurance yields instead of having a farmer bring in records since 1998.

Part of the problem, said Mr. May, is that all of the details about the program aren't out yet. At least in March when he signed up, the information for the white wheat incentive weren't out.

The farm bill does put money into conservation, he said, but they have already started taking money out of that to pay for disaster. A positive thing is that some money is going for grants.

The program is complicated, he said, and that leaves a farmer guessing on which way is the best.

* Voters will decide races on Tuesday

(Continued from Page 1A)
 large position. The other is between incumbent Dan Wasson and Monte Moore for the District 2 seat. Incumbents Kurt Vollertsen, District 1, and Barb Olson, District 3, are running unopposed. For the Norcat City Council, there are three seats open, with only one person who filed. Mike Helm will be the only name that appears on the ballot, but there are seven write-in candidates including Tami Cook, Teresa Reves, Jean Pelkey, Jim Plotts, Carolyn Plotts and Rodney Leichter. For the Jennings School Board, four candidates filed. Aden Schillig

filed to fill an unexpired term and will appear on the ballot alone. Sara Carter, Sheila Rhodes and Lawrence Carter filed for four open seats for full four-year terms. Gary Gillum and Lila Jennings are both running as write-in candidates for the board. There are three seats open for Jennings City Council, with Eric Green and Sara Carter running for the posts. There are no known write-in candidates. In Dresden, Russell Rhodes filed for mayor position, but there are two council positions which no one filed for and there are no known write-in candidates.

* Schools may join

(Continued from Page 1A)
 years or as long as it is economically feasible. In a previous meeting, the two boards agreed on an interim board made up of four Atwood and three Herndon representatives. Appointed to this board were Kent

Morgan, Pattie Wolters, Bill Beamgard and Chris Schmidt from Atwood and Andy Green, Tom Kogl and Francis Wahrman from Herndon. If consolidation passes, the interim board will take the reins of the combined district on July 1.

* Schools may join

(Continued from Page 1A)
 when Russell was transferred to Fort Gordon, an Army base. Mrs. James said the forces intermingle a lot and there have been other facilities he has been stationed at that haven't been Marine Corps bases. Mr. James said his son enlisted for eight years, but he thinks he will probably serve 20 so he can retire. He wants to get a master's degree in criminal justice and pursue a career in that field. Russell hasn't been deployed yet,

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* Sign has to come down

(Continued from Page 1A)
 the museum or anything like that. First of all, said Mr. Anderson, the man told the city that it wasn't worth checking to see whether there was an ordinance. Then he said the city wasn't going to get any more signs like this anyway. Then he kind of ignored us, said Mr. Shobe. Then he told us what was wrong with the signs the city already has, said Mr. Shike. The council agreed to override the planning commission's recommendation and not change the ordinance to allow the billboard to stay.

swerved to miss the car. She hit the Civic in the back end. There was very minor damage, said Chief Lockhart. Gary King reported damage to the right step frame and a scratch to the exhaust cover on a 1997 Peterbilt he drives that is owned by Moore and Sons Inc., of Danbury. The semi had been parked in the Sinclair parking lot when Mr. King noticed the damage at 12:30 p.m. Friday. He said the truck had been parked there for a week and he believed it was damaged while parked.



IN PREPARATION FOR WARMER WEATHER and days of mowing, Sexton Nan Stanley demonstrated where flowers shouldn't be at gravestones at the Oberlin Cemetery. Ms. Stanley said the flowers and other items can only be put on the side of the stones, not in front or behind. — Herald staff photo by Kimberly Brandt

Flowers need to be removed

With warm weather and the promise of spring just around the corner, the city is urging people to clean up their flowers and other items at the cemetery. Sexton Nan Stanley said flowers and memorabilia that are placed between or on headstones are OK. Items that are placed in front or back need to be moved so she can mow. There are over 3,000 graves in the cemetery, she said. Some families take care of the graves themselves, and they are allowed to have the items in front or back, but on those maintained by the city, the items need to be moved. Ms. Stanley said she doesn't want to offend any-

one, but she also doesn't want to mow over any flowers or other treasured items this spring and summer. Traditionally, the cemetery has three cleanup days: April 15, June 15 and Sept. 15. Items that aren't in the right spots after the clean up day on April 15 will be removed. Glass vases, which aren't allowed in the cemetery, need to be removed, she said. If the mower hits a glass vase, the glass can hurt someone or damage a stone. Without having to move anything, she said, it already takes two days to mow. No one wants to destroy any of the flowers or any other items, but the cemetery needs to be maintained.

* Family proud of U.S. Marine son

(Continued from Page 1A)
 ago and went on to study foreign language at The Presidio in California, graduating in September 2002. Russell was transferred to Goodfellow Air Force Base in Texas and in November 2002 he was chosen as the outstanding student of the month. Mrs. James said their son never said what he studied while there. He and his wife Christeen have lived in Augusta, Ga., since January,

said Mr. James, but it is a possibility. No dates have been set yet. Mr. James said he is proud of his son and supports the troops 110 percent. Mrs. James agreed that she is really proud of her son.

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Council continues land lease

The Oberlin City council agreed Thursday to continue the lease for the fenced-in land north of the airport entrance on U.S. 36 for another two years.

City Administrator Gary Shike said the city received a letter from Baker-Hughes to see if the lease could be renewed. The oil field service company pays \$960 a year for the lease.

The council approved the renewal.

Mr. Shike said a Gateway sign committee has been formed. Peg Smith, who works at Hirsch and Pratt; Connie Grafel, marketing director for economic development and The Gateway; Kem Bryan, who works part-time at the Oberlin Library and Lohofener Grain; and Karen Larson, who works at Dr. Gary Fredrickson's office, have started to work on getting a sign in front of the civic center.

The group has put together information for a grant which might pay for 40 percent of the equipment for the sign, the administrator said. The four women have received two bids that need to be compared. One is for just under \$38,000 and the other is for \$26,774.

Mr. Shike said he didn't know if the bids were for the same kind of sign.

In other business, the council:
 • Heard that Councilman Jay Anderson, Mr. Shike and Ms. Grafel went to a tourism meeting sponsored by the Kansas League of Municipalities. Mr. Anderson said the meeting was educational.

• Briefly talked about a letter they had each received from Lairy Gold about the dog catcher and stray dogs. Councilman Stan McEvoy asked if the council wanted to re-visit the issue. The council didn't say if they did, but the did learn that citizens can call the dog catcher and have warnings given for stray dogs. Citizens can give information to the dog catcher who can give warnings

• Held a 30-minute closed session for attorney-client privilege. There was no action taken.

• Heard that the lake committee will meet at 7 p.m. Tuesday at The LandMark Inn to talk about walking trails at Sappa Park. Jack Benton said he heard from Congressman Jerry Moran's office that the city will get a matching grant for \$8,000. He said the committee can go back a year and include all the work and materials from the last year to match the \$8,000.

• Approved Kelly Glodt, superintendent of the Oberlin School District, to replace Ray Bryan on the economic development board.

Paper will be late for election

Next week's issue of *The Oberlin Herald* will be held a day to include results of the city and school board election on Tuesday. With races for the mayor, city council and Oberlin School Board, voters will want to know what happened. *The Herald* staff will come back in Tuesday night to find out,

and finish the week's paper after the votes are counted. Papers will be available on newsstands on Wednesday and in the mail on Thursday. Stories also will detail the vote for other candidates in the county, including Jennings, Dresden and Norcat.

Accident results in little damage

At mid-morning Saturday, two women had a small fender bender with little damage to their vehicles and no tickets written. Police Chief Wade Lockhart said Amy Portschy, 21, of Herndon, was driving a 1996 Chevy Suburban east on Hall Street behind Frances Vacura, 70, of Oberlin, who was in a 1986 Honda Civic. Mrs. Vacura said she slowed down for a dip. Ms. Portschy said she wasn't looking, and when she saw the vehicle in front of her, she slowed down and

swerved to miss the car. She hit the Civic in the back end. There was very minor damage, said Chief Lockhart. Gary King reported damage to the right step frame and a scratch to the exhaust cover on a 1997 Peterbilt he drives that is owned by Moore and Sons Inc., of Danbury. The semi had been parked in the Sinclair parking lot when Mr. King noticed the damage at 12:30 p.m. Friday. He said the truck had been parked there for a week and he believed it was damaged while parked.

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