

Plant hums along, boosting voltage

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

There's a loud buzz in the air, almost like a hum, a constant hum.

Inside the brick building, people had to stand close and almost yell at each other in order to be heard.

Step inside, and the temperature jumps. Even with the large circular fans whirling, it was hot, hotter than the 90-some-degree weather outside.

Just about every afternoon this summer, City Foreman Dan Castle and Ron Solko have worked with the vibration, the humming and the heat, running the Oberlin City power plant.

Nearly every day since May, the men have received the call from Sunflower Electric Power Corp., which supplies energy for the city.

Mr. Castle said in past years, it has been normal for the city plant to run from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. to help with peak daytime air conditioning loads. This summer, he said, Sunflower has been calling earlier and run-

ning later. He said he doesn't know why they have been asking for more hours; all he can do is speculate.

The city can boost the voltage for Oberlin on the Sunflower system when they run. Sunflower has trouble maintaining the proper voltage so far away from its plant, so Oberlin's plant boosts the supply and holds it where it is supposed to be.

When the city runs, said Mr. Castle, they produce about 1,000 kilowatts an hour to boost the Sunflower supply. Normally, that is just one engine running and creating a steady supply of power.

He said the plant can supply the entire town, although it would be hard to do in the summer.

Even though the plant can generate 6,900 kilowatts with its five engines, it can hold steady at 3,000 kilowatts.

The plant has huge radiators to keep the machines cool which sit outside on cement slabs. Between 1985 and 1990, said Mr. Castle, the City Council decided to sell one

Entire county loses lights as transformer blazes up

Shortly after the carnival closed last Wednesday night, the county went black after a transformer at a substation in Herndon caught fire.

City Foreman Dan Castle, who runs the power plant with Ron Solko, said it was about 11:30 p.m. and the entire county was dark with the exception of some blinking lights on top of a tower that

must run off of batteries. Sunflower Electric Power Corp., which supplies the area's power, was out.

He said he decided to start the generators at the city power plant and they picked up half the town, then called Sunflower.

Mr. Castle said that is when they (See FIRE on Page 10A)

city didn't have the plant, it would be at the power company's mercy and the city would have to pay what the company wants.

In September 2004, he said, the city will have to renegotiate the contract with Sunflower.

Though valuable, the plant can be expensive to run. The city recently purchased a new bushing, which is an insulator on a circuit breaker, for the plant which goes outside. The part cost \$2,040, Mr. Castle said.

He said that he has heard that the weather will break by the end of August, allowing the plant to shut down for the winter. Normally, he said, the city doesn't have to run in September.

In order to start generating, he said, they have to turn on all auxiliary pumps and start with 200 pounds of air pressure. The engines are dual fuel; they start running on diesel and then are switched to natural gas.

Although the city owns six engines, one that was purchased in 1932, is obsolete. The newest engine was bought in 1973.

Council decides to go mechanical for sewer plant

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

The Oberlin City Council told engineers Thursday that they would like to head in the direction of a mechanical system for a new waste water plant.

The council chose from among five options, two of which were lagoons and three which were mechanical. Although the council didn't decide what kind of mechanical plant they wanted to go with, they did decide to go in that direction.

The three options are counter current aeration, oxidation ditch and sequencing batch reactor which range in price from \$2.265 million to \$2.347 million.

Thaniel Monaco, with Miller and Associates, the engineering firm on the project, met with the council Thursday night to talk about the possibilities. He said they tried to set up assumptions based on a 300,000-gallon-a-day capacity.

Mr. Monaco said the counter current aeration proposal is the cheapest option he sees.

City Administrator Gary Shike said the decision the council needed to make was whether they want to go with mechanical or lagoons. Some of the options, he said, can be thrown out and then they can possibly get it down to two choices. Some of the mechanical plants share similarities, he added.

They need to discuss each mechanical plant in detail, said Mr. Monaco. The city needs to think about everything and decide if they want to throw out any of the options.

Councilman Jay Anderson asked how the state looks at discharging lagoons. The state is fine with it, said Mr. Monaco, but if discharge standards change down the road, the city could have to convert a discharging lagoon to complete retention.

Mr. Shike said he doesn't think

Council Round-up

At a meeting Thursday night, the Oberlin City Council:

- Told the engineers they would like to go in the direction of a mechanical system for the new waste water treatment plant. Story at left.

- Decided to let the race track use water from an irrigation well, effluent from the waste water treatment plant or wells No. 5 and 6 instead of water from the municipal system, since the city is on water restrictions. Story on Page 10A.

- Approved resolutions dealing with water, new projects or ones that the council has to sign every year. Story on Page 3A.

the city has the land for a complete retention lagoon system, and discharging should be designed at maximum capacity of 450,000 gallons, but with a mechanical plant it could design for low end and then expanded.

A mechanical plant, said Mr. Monaco, has to be designed with piping ready to go for expansion and the capability to install a filter at the end of the plant if needed down the road.

On the current plant, the running average is 220,000 gallons a day, he said, so a 300,000-gallon plant can take the peak loads if there is a large storm. If the city grows and need a 450,000 gallon plant, it would be possible to expand the plant.

Mayor Ken Shobe asked if Oberlin is the only town around here doing this kind of a project. Mr. (See SEWER on Page 10A)



WITH A MICROPHONE IN HAND, Debbie Gosser of WaKeeney sang her heart out (above) during what she calls her signature song, "455 Rocket." Bill Welch of Fort Leavenworth (below) took second.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Brandt

Music comes to fair

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

It was a toe-tapping good time as 10 singers from Kansas, Colorado and Nebraska took the stage Friday night to compete in the Colgate Country Showdown at the Decatur County Fair.

Each aspiring artist had the opportunity to present two songs, either one picked up from other country musicians or original pieces.

There was a little bit of everything, music from way back to a song written by a Norton man about Sept. 11.

Cash prizes were awarded for first, second and third place in the form of cash. First place winner Stacie Smith took home \$100, second place winner Bill Welch received \$75 and third place winner Roxanne Wade received \$50.

Miss Smith also gets a chance to move on to the state competition and the chance at nationals.

Miss Smith, an 18-year-old from Wray, Colo., said she has been singing for about 12 years. Friday night, she performed "Concrete Angel" and "Wild Angel" by Martina McBride. She said this is the second year she has performed in the show-down. She heard of the contest



from her grandmother, who lives in Benkelman, Neb., and heard it on the radio.

The show was sponsored here by Coyote Country Radio 105.3 out of McCook.

Miss Smith said she also performed this year at the McCook fair. She said she loves being in front of people and gets excited when she sings. This is what she

wants to do for the rest of her life.

Before the show started, each contestant got a chance to warm up in front of the grandstands on a flatbed trailer. Behind the trailer, a table was set up where the contestants sat and chatted waiting to go on stage.

Doreen Deines of Collyer said this was her third time in the (See CONTEST on Page 6A)

School time is near

Students head back to class

It's that time a year again, the time that students dread and parents have been counting down the days — back to school time.

Classes in the Oberlin School District will start bright and early next Wednesday with the heat schedule in effect. That means students will be in their seats by 7:20 a.m., ready to learn.

Some students may groan at the thought of that start time, which means if a student has to ride the bus or drive in from the country, alarm clocks will be going off in the 6 a.m. region.

The good news is that classes end at 1:30 p.m., and for the younger students that still leaves enough time to hit the pool or the park before dark. For those in junior high and high school, there will be plenty of time for sports practice and other activities.

The district plans on 457 students, five up from where it ended last year, but the official count isn't taken until Sept. 20. The district thinks they will have a few more enrolling at the high school.

Students at Oberlin Elementary School may notice more changes than normal at the beginning of the year. In the upper grades, classes will change a little from the previous year.

Fourth graders will have computerized classrooms, fifth graders will have "technology-rich" classrooms and the sixth graders will have more teachers than they're used to. After the district decided it couldn't afford to hire a new sixth grade teacher, the decision was made to use the teach- (See SCHOOLS on Page 6A)

Water usage plunges

In the last week, Oberlin water users have kept usage down to under 1 million gallons a day every day.

With the even/odd watering system in place, people have used 500,000 to 800,000 gallons of water a day. The weather has been a little cooler, and it's rained at least four times, but the water emergency is still in force.

Last week the city pumped:

- 745,000 gallons on Sunday, Aug. 3.
- 598,000 gallons on Monday, Aug. 4.
- 749,000 gallons on Tuesday, Aug. 5.
- 704,000 gallons last Wednesday.
- 921,000 gallons on Thursday.
- 696,000 gallons on Friday.
- 553,000 gallons on Saturday.
- 645,000 gallons on Sunday.

Convenience store gets service award

Ampride, Decatur Co-op's convenience store and gas station, has been honored with a Circle of Pride award for customer service, cleanliness and quality of product.

Manager Cindy Fowler said the award was given to Ampride by its supplier, Cenex, one of the largest farmer-owned petroleum providers in America.

Mrs. Fowler said Cenex hired an independent group to inspect stores and sent out mystery shoppers. The workers at Ampride didn't know when the mystery shoppers were coming.

The shoppers judge the scores on customer service, cleanliness and quality of product. In each area, the store could receive a grade anywhere between 1 and 4, said Mrs. Fowler, with 4 being the highest. Only stores that received a score of 98 or better got into the Circle of Pride.

Of 800 stores rated, she said, 169

got an award.

She said they found out about the award about a month ago and then Cenex representatives came out and presented it.

The station received a plaque, which has room for four more awards, lapel pins for employees, two free classes, \$100 to spend on the employees and pump toppers.

Mrs. Fowler said they have all been working hard on getting the place cleaned up and having it nice all the time for the customers.

As a team, said Mrs. Fowler, employees want to receive Circle of Pride awards for the other four spots on the plaque, which has been hung in the hallway.

Mrs. Fowler said Ampride has been open since 1995, although there has been a station at the location for much longer. She said the station is owned by the Decatur Co-op, which is owned by farmers in this area.

* Fire causes outage

(Continued from Page 1A)

learned of the fire and that Sunflower had made the decision to shut off the 115,000-volt line which pretty much carries all of Decatur County.

He said he doesn't know what other towns might have been affected. Rural customers started coming back on about 11:42 and by 11:52, parts of the city had lights.

The next morning, power went out again during a thunderstorm. This time it was 5:30 a.m.

Mr. Castle said the same switch they had opened during the fire at Herndon had opened again. It took him 10 minutes to get to the substation and close the switch on the north side.

A third outage was reported Sunday evening when a fuse blew, leaving homes between Marks and East out for a while. Mr. Castle said the crew just had to replace the fuse, but it took some time to find exactly which one was out.



JUST TO MAKE SURE everything ran smoothly, Foreman Dan Castle checked the gages of an engine at the city power plant. —Staff photo by Kimberly Brandt

Track to get wet on irrigation water

With races coming up this weekend, the Oberlin City Council suggested that water from the irrigation well the city owns be used to help put the track back together instead of municipal water that is being rationed.

City Administrator Gary Shike said the Demolition Derby was going to use the track area, and in order for that to happen, the part closest to the stadium had to be torn up. Mr. Shike said the track group wants to work on Friday to get the track back in order for a Saturday race.

The city has well No. 5, which was contaminated with fuel, and No. 6, which is high in nitrates that could both be used. The track boosters would like to use the fire hydrant that is close to the track, which is what they normally do.

Wells No. 5 and 6 probably dispense at 100 to 150 gallons per minute. They guessed that the hydrant dispenses at 350 gallons per minute plus no travel time to haul water.

Councilman Ray Ward asked if

there was any way they could pump out of the new well. The council discussed the fact that access could be an issue because they thought there was cane planted in the field.

Debbie Beard, manager of the waste water treatment plant, suggested using effluent from the plant. There is no reason that water couldn't be used for race track construction. She said she uses the water for irrigation.

Councilman Stan McEvoy said he thought the fastest option would be the irrigation well if they can get to it.

Mayor Shobe listed the options as first to attempt using the irrigation well, then using effluent water and last using wells No. 5 and 6. Mayor Shobe said that it isn't foolish to water the track, but there is municipal water that can be used instead of municipal water since the city is in a crisis. He said he personally didn't want to see the track use the municipal water that is being restricted.

Councilman Patrick Pomeroy agreed.

* Sewer plant must get major upgrade

(Continued from Page 1A)

Monaco said Atwood had to upgrade to meet new requirements, St. Francis had to expand, and Norton, Goodland and Colby are looking at mechanical plants. Everything is driven by state and federal requirements, he said.

The plant the city has now is probably most similar to a counter current aeration system, the engineer said.

Councilman Patrick Pomeroy asked how long the city has before it has to renew its permit.

The city has a permit which was effective January 2002, Mr. Monaco said, but the plant is not meeting state requirements.

The time line says that the city will submit this plan this month, said Mr. Monaco, and the construction has to be done by December 2005.

The council needed to decide that might what to do, said Mr. Shike.

Is there danger of seepage out of a lagoon to the water supply? asked Mr. Shobe.

There has to be a liner, said Mr. Monaco, that will help with some of the seepage. There are options for liners. There is only so much that is allowed to seep in a day.

If the city wants to look at lagoons, he said, then they will bring in a geotech engineer to drill in the area and see what is in the ground and if the soils will help provide a liner.

If the city has to put bentonite clay over the soil, it could be expensive. The way the city would save with a lagoon, he said, is the yearly operating cost.

The positive side to complete retention is that the city won't need a

permit to discharge, he said.

Councilman Stan McEvoy said one of the things that concerns him about the mechanical plant is the yearly maintenance cost and the cost of equipment replacement.

With complete retention, though, the city would have to clean out the lagoon.

Councilman Patrick Pomeroy asked about U.S. Department of Agriculture financing. Mr. Monaco said the city met the Rural Development Administration requirements with the water project. Rural Development has a level the city can get to and get a grant.

If there are other things that need to be done, like sewer lines, they should be fixed at this time, he said. The city has 918 sewer connections, some of which are bigger than others.

Mr. Monaco said with payments for the project, it would increase monthly residential bills to \$24 on average for U.S. Department of Agriculture funding.

It would be unrealistic with any facility to say that the monthly bill would stay at \$24 a month for 40 years, he added.

Other funding options include a state revolving loan fund, which would be a 3 percent loan, but the state has no grant money.

The council talked about whether they have enough land for a lagoon or where they would put a mechanical plant. Mr. Monaco said they just have to give a direction, not the details. He suggested that the council go look at plant ideas in other cities.

The council decided to go with a mechanical plant, but didn't choose one out of the three. Yes

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