

Owners say holiday business mixed

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

The shopping season is officially over and store owners downtown have mixed reviews about how it went this year.

Overall, merchants say, some things sold well, but only certain items. Other than that, there wasn't a lot of business and sales slowed toward the middle to end of the month.

Gary Anderson, owner of Oberlin Mercantile, said that earlier in December, business seemed a lot better. Then things trailed off. He said it helped on the weekends when

the LandMark Inn had a tea or buffet.

Mr. Anderson said the biggest two items that sold were "ice cube" people and defusers, which are warmed up waffle bars made of wax and let off fragrances. Both were new this year, he said.

He said cookie jars and teapots didn't seem to go as well as they have in the past.

Business was down a little bit from last year, he said, but last year the LandMark Inn cookbooks had come out and quite a few of those sold in December, so it is hard to compare the numbers.

At Goldts' Home Planning Center, Dana Marintzer said business was about the same as it was last year. She said the hottest item were probably tool sets which included a wide variety of tools. A lot of the wooden, painted and other craft items in the basement seemed to sell well, too, she said.

Other than that, said Mrs. Marintzer, the crafts seemed to go pretty slow.

The business stayed open evenings when the others downtown were open. Mrs. Marintzer said she thought business was slower because of the economy. People just

aren't buying.

At Addleman Drug Store, owner Rusty Addleman agreed. He said business wasn't any better than last year.

People just weren't spending money, said Mr. Addleman. He said he thinks it is the whole atmosphere. There isn't any moisture and he said he keeps hearing worries about there being no crops.

He also said people continue to go to McCook to Wal-Mart, and he doesn't know how to fight that. Mr. Addleman said he kept the store open at night and on some Sundays,

but sales then didn't even pay for the lights.

He said he had expanded the line of college memorabilia and Nascar items. He said he has had about as much luck with them as he has with anything else.

Mr. Addleman said he knows his store has something to offer.

They have had a special every week, but with the economic climate, things are not moving.

He said in the last two or three years, with the recession and drought, people have just stopped buying.

Official to visit Oberlin

Public dinner set for secretary

Former Gov. Mike Hayden, who now serves as the secretary of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, will be in Oberlin at 7 p.m. Tuesday at The Gateway for a meeting with the public.

A statement issued last week said that Secretary Hayden plans to speak on issues affecting the natural resources, including water rights, hunting and fishing. A plan for the state to buy water rights and keep the level of Norton's Sebelius Reservoir up for fishing and hunting will be on the agenda.

The evening will begin with a dinner sponsored by the Oberlin Rotary Club. The cost of the meal is \$10, and reservations would be appreciated by Friday. Call Glenva Nichols, Decatur County Chamber of Commerce manager, at 475-3441 or Connie Grafel, Gateway and economic development marketing director, at 475-2400.

Secretary Hayden, raised near Atwood, served as the speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives from 1983 to 1987 and then as the 41st governor from 1987 to 1991.

He later served as the assistant secretary of the interior for fish, wildlife and parks and was a lobbyist for wildlife issues in Washington.

In January 2002, Gov. Bill Graves (See TALK on Page 12)

Hospital gives food to drive

Decatur County Hospital employees delivered 456 items to Stanley Hardware last Wednesday for the store's annual food drive.

Administrator Lynn Doeden said the boxes and bags which the women carried into the hardware store to be put in the window were a mix of nonperishable items, including soap, shampoo, toilet paper, cleaning supplies and food, vegetables and meat.

On Dec. 13, Mrs. Doeden said, hospital employees started a program to dress up for the 12 days of Christmas. Those who decided they didn't want to participate were asked to bring in a food item.

Dec. 13 was star day, and employees were supposed to have a star on their desk or on them somewhere. Mrs. Doeden said they only asked them to bring in one item if they didn't want to participate.

Then, Mrs. Doeden said she would match anything the staff brought in. She said they brought in 216 items, so that's what she had to buy. She ended up purchasing 236 items.

Mrs. Doeden said she did all her shopping for the items in town, at Raye's Grocery and Dollar General.

Dressing up for the 12 Days of Christmas and the food drive was just one way to have fun at Christmas time, the administrator said. She said people can get moody this time of year, and this is a way to have some fun and help out the food drive.

Mrs. Doeden said she got the idea when she saw a poster at the school, though the idea was if the person didn't dress up they owed \$1. She said she didn't know what the hospital was doing.



Snow provides work, fun

USING A SLED as a snowboard, Ryan May (above) went down the hill in a neighbor's yard on North Beaver several times Sunday morning in the fresh snow. Across town, a county employee (right) cleaned the snow off Columbia Street near the hospital. The area received two to three inches Saturday night and early Sunday morning.

— Herald photos by Kim Brandt



Fire leaves three people homeless, house in ruins

A fire early Monday apparently caused by a faulty furnace left three people out in the bitter cold, watching as city and rural firefighters tried to save their house.

Though firemen answered two calls, the house at 105 S. Buffalo was badly damaged. All three occupants escaped unhurt, thanks to their dog.

Fire Chief Bill Cathcart said the first call came in around 2 a.m. be-

cause the owners "smelled something hot." The chief said he and Assistant Chief Larry Ayers went to the house at U.S. 83 and Commercial. They found that the furnace was making the house smell hot.

He said they checked everything on the furnace and the safety devices were working. Chief Cathcart said they also made sure the smoke detectors in the house were working.

About 4 a.m., they left and went

back to the station.

At 5:15 a.m., a call came in that the house was full of smoke. Chief Cathcart said the co-owner, Mary Kimble, said that the dog was "throwing a fit" and woke her and her daughter, Holly Martinez. He said Chris Dickey also lives in the home.

By the time firefighters arrived, though, the fire had gotten a good start, Chief Cathcart said, adding

that it appeared something had malfunctioned on the furnace.

He said the furnace is on the second floor, which is a finished attic. Chief Cathcart said when the attic was finished, little crawl spaces and compartments were left around the edges and the fire was in those.

After getting the main part of the fire knocked out, he said, the firefighters went through the house and found the hidden smoldering areas.

The fire burned through the upstairs and totaled the bedroom on the first level below the furnace, he said. The rest of the house has moderate smoke and water damage, but some of it can be salvaged.

The firefighters got back to the station around 10 a.m., he said.

Chief Cathcart said the other owner of the home is Shirley Hickert. He estimated the damage at \$30,000.

Snow covers the area

County still in a drought

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

Light, fluffy snow blanketed the area Saturday, but most places had no more than 2 to 3 inches, hardly enough to wet the ground. Total moisture recorded was .15.

Despite the snow, it'll come as no surprise to people in Decatur County that northwest Kansas is still in a drought. What may be a shock is that the area received an estimated 17 inches of precipitation last year.

John Barnley, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Goodland, said the agency was missing numbers for the month of May in Oberlin, but he estimated 17 inches for the year. That includes about 11 inches of rain and six inches of moisture from snow.

Normal precipitation for the year for the area is 22 inches, said Mr. Barnley.

This past year, the first snow storm was in February, where the area received 1 inch. Already 2004 is ahead of that, with the snow that fell over the weekend.

Again in late February, the area received more snow. The county received precipitation twice in April, once at the beginning of June, once in July, at the beginning of August, in late November and the middle of December.

Mr. Barnley said the area is still in a drought, basically because of the lack of precipitation. The ground water right now has been recharged to a point, he said, but the surface water, including lakes and ponds, is definitely below what is normal.

Decatur County and Oberlin aren't the only areas that are in the drought.

Mr. Barnley said most places in the Tri-State area are in the same situation. Despite a promising start last year, and nearly normal rain through July, the area just isn't getting the normal amount of precipitation.

It has been like this for at least three years, he said, and the only way to get out of the drought is to get two good years of normal precipitation or one year of heavy rain. Even then, he said, it would probably take three years to really get the area back to normal.

Basically what is happening, said Mr. Barnley, is that the storms coming in over the Rocky Mountains just don't get out here. The storms aren't packing abundant moisture, so it just doesn't snow or rain here.

Although meteorologists know why the drought is happening, he added, there is no way to fix it.

Mr. Barnley said that the long-term outlook for the area doesn't look good.

For the next 24 months, he said, it shows that there will still be a drought with a slight precipitation deficit for the next 12 months. Basically, he said, it is going to remain dry.

* Talk features water issues

(Continued from Page 1) appointed him as secretary of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

He also serves on the Pew Oceans Commission, which is an independent group of American leaders working on policies to restore and protect living marine resources in U.S. waters.

As the chair of a state sub-cabinet on natural resources made up of heads of the Kansas Department of Agriculture, Kansas Water Office and Department of Wildlife and Parks, Secretary Hayden will let people know about some state

projects and issues. Some of those include the state's plan to buy the Circle K Ranch on the Arkansas River for its water rights, negotiations with the Almena irrigation district for water rights in Sebelius Reservoir near Norton, and the governor's budget comments in the State of the State address.

Doug Sebelius, who is the Norton County attorney and a brother-in-law of the governor, will join Secretary Hayden for the event. Mr. Sebelius is a member of the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission, which advises the secretary. Everyone is welcome to attend

Insurance agent charged with felonies

A Selden insurance agent has been charged with 10 felonies by the Kansas Insurance Department.

Stephen C. Carman has been charged with seven counts of failing to pay over consumers' insurance premiums to a company, two counts of forgery and one count of theft.

The charges were brought against Mr. Carman by the Kansas Insurance Department, Sheridan County Attorney Mike Haas and the state attorney general's office.

The Kansas Insurance Department Fraud Unit has been investigating the case. Insurance Commis-

sioner Sandy Praeger established the unit in October, 2003.

"The overwhelming majority of insurance agents in Kansas are honest and dedicated to providing good service for their customers," said Commissioner Praeger. "Our department will not tolerate agents who break the law."

Scott Holeman, communications director with the Kansas Insurance Department, said there was no further information on Monday. He said the charges were filed in Hoxie.

Mr. Haas could not be reached Monday afternoon.



WITH TWO BAGS full of food, Jodee Carman, a Decatur Health Systems employee (above) walked into Stanley Hardware last Wednesday to contribute to the store's food drive.

Hospital Administrator Lynn Doeden (below) carried in a bag of food.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Brandt

* Food drive ends with 612 extra items

(Continued from Page 1) hospital would do with the money, so they decided to do an item of food instead. It was a way to help the community as a group, said Mrs. Doeden.

She said some brought in food and dressed up, and then there were some who didn't want to participate at all.

All in all, said Mrs. Doeden, the drive was a success.

Some of the employees suggested for next year doing challenges with



others and getting businesses in

town to do the same. She said they would probably have to do a challenge with the school system just because of the number of employees.

The food brought in by the hospital bumped the food drive from 2,156 to 2,612 items.

The food will be taken this week to the Decatur County Food Pantry at the United Church of Oberlin with the help of the junior high student council.

Joe Stanley, owner of Stanley Hardware, said the drive went very well this year.

It was probably the most items ever collected. Although the drive started out slow the goal of 2,000 items was met two days after Christmas.

The food brought in by the hospital was good; there was quite a bit of stuff.

Mr. Stanley said other groups too have helped out including both of the kindergarten classes who bring sacks of food in and walk to the store as a field trip.

This was the fifth year for the food drive, he said, and he plans to do it again next year.

Deadline looms for business loans

Businesses in some Kansas and Nebraska counties have until Jan. 14 to file applications for low-interest disaster loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The economic injury disaster loans are available for businesses which depend on farmers and ranchers who suffered crop losses due to drought after July 1, 2002.

Farmers and ranchers are not eligible for these loans, but hurt by drought disasters can apply. Businesses in Norton, Decatur, Phillips, Cheyenne, Jewell, Rawlins, Republic and Smith

counties in Kansas and Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Red Willow and Dawes counties in Nebraska are eligible.

Applications can be obtained by calling toll-free at (800) 366-6303 or TDD (817) 267-4688 for the hearing impaired.

These loans are intended to help businesses offset working capital losses suffered as a result of the severe weather reducing the crop income of the farmers and ranchers. Businesses physically injured by the disaster are not eligible.

Chamber banquet to be held next week

The Decatur Area Chamber of Commerce is gearing up for its annual banquet at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 15, at The Gateway

The steak dinner will cost \$15 and the Chamber needs reservations to be called in at 475-3441 by Friday.

The chamber board has invited Randall M. Thies, a cultural resource specialist and archeologist with the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka, to speak.

The subject will be gravestones, and Chamber Manager Glenva Nichols and her husband Harold have spent a number of hours in cemeteries in the county getting pictures.

Mr. Thies has served as a research

assistant and field supervisor for archeological digs in the Midwest since 1974. He was project archeologist for the Kansas Unmarked Burial Sites Preservation Board.

Over the years, he has helped identify and transfer burial remains to Kansas Indian tribes.

Mr. Thies earned a Bachelor of Arts in sociology and anthropology from Washburn University and a master's from Iowa State University. He has taught archeology at both Emporia State University and Washburn University.

In 2000, he joined the Kansas Humanities Council Speakers Bureau and is a speaker for the state historical society.

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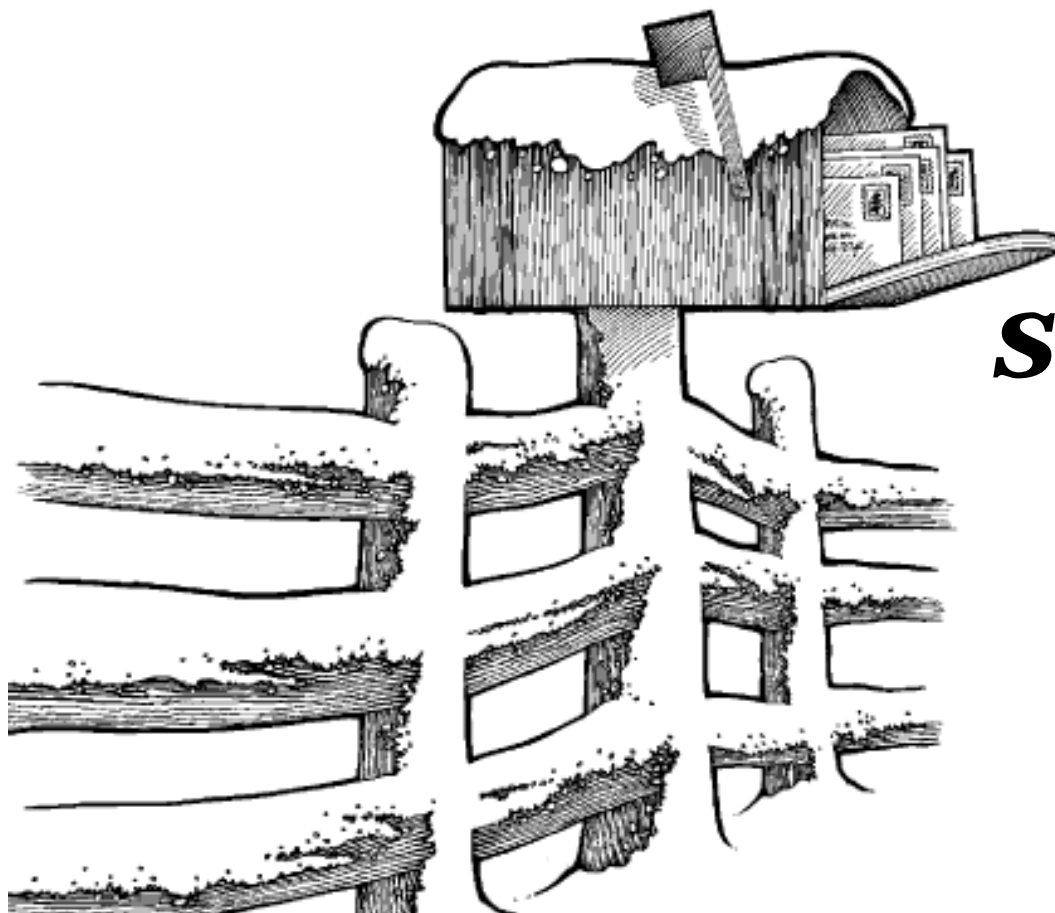
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