

## Schools ask for increase in local taxes

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

The Oberlin School Board approved raising the district's local option budget to 25 percent of the total general fund, which is the highest it can go under state law.

Last year, the board asked for a 5 percent increase which brought the local option budget up to 18.11 percent of the general fund. Voters filed a petition, and there was a special election on the increase, which passed. The district had to pay \$2,577 for the election.

The 5 percent increase is only good for five years. The resolution the board passed Monday night was for a continuous and permanent authority, allowing the board to levy

### School roundup

At its meeting last Monday night, the Oberlin School Board:

- Approved a resolution to increase the local option budget to 25 percent of the total general fund, increasing property taxes for next year. Story to left.
- Met behind closed doors for an hour and 20 minutes to talk about personnel. The board didn't make any

decisions. Story to come.

- Received a special education audit, which said the district could probably cut one full time teacher or could have all the teachers and para-professionals hired by the Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center and then have them work in the district. Story below.

up to 25 percent each year.

That doesn't mean that the board has to levy 25 percent each year, said

Superintendent Kelly Glodt. If the district only needs 13 percent, then the board would only levy that

amount.

The local option budget comes from a property tax levy paid by the taxpayers in the district.

Mr. Glodt said he thought the board absolutely owed it to the teachers and staff to ask for the full amount. The district faces the need to cut as many as nine teachers if the increase is not approved.

The superintendent said if the resolution isn't petitioned, then the board will ask for 25 percent for next year, but it doesn't have to stay at that level forever. He said the increase would generate about \$180,000 a year.

Mr. Glodt said in a normal year, the increase would boost the

district's property tax levy about 6.9 mills. Mr. Glodt said he doesn't know what the levy will increase to next year.

If the district can increase the local option budget to 25 percent, he said, the board may only need to reduce the staff by five teachers, instead of nine.

Board President Chris Bailey said increasing the local option budget is a tough decision in the face of the continuing drought and slow economy.

"Let's face it," he said. "It is dry out there, but this is something that needs to be done."

Board Member Barb Olson said she thought the community needed

to make this decision.

District taxpayers have 30 days from publication of the board's resolution to protest the increase. A petition would have to be signed by at least 5 percent of the qualified voters in the district, about 100 signatures.

Board Member Dewayne Jackson said he feels good about asking for the increase. He said people will let them know one way or another how they feel about it.

Should the district wait and see if anyone starts a petition before scheduling public meetings on the increase? Mr. Glodt asked, or should it be done now? Board Member (See TAXES on Page 12)

## Evaluation shows ways to save cash for schools here

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

A representative from the Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center told the Oberlin School Board last Monday night that the district could save some money by cutting back on its special education program.

The representative said the district could cut one full time special education teacher or it could save money by having all those teachers and aides provided by the service center.

The district has 11 aides and four certified teachers in the special education program, which serves students with any special needs.

Months ago, Superintendent Kelly Glodt asked the service center to do an audit on the special education program. Since then, Kathy Kersenborck-Ostmeyer has been working on the information.

Monday night, Ms. Kersenborck-Ostmeyer said if the district wanted to go to bare bones in special education, they could cut around two teachers, but one of those would have to be replaced by someone still in the district.

In this area of the state, she said, districts do a good job and provide the best in special education. She said she isn't really ready to go to the bare bones, but the district could cut one full time teacher and everything would still work.

The aides' load is pretty much right on track, said Ms. Kersenborck-Ostmeyer. She said she doesn't see any places where they can be cut.

Ms. Kersenborck-Ostmeyer said the only way to do the audit was to look at what the district has this year and then look at the numbers.

She said if the district goes through the service center, rather than hiring its own teachers, it would save the district around \$25,000. She said aides hired through the cen-

### School board meets tonight

The Oberlin School Board will hold a special meeting at 7:30 p.m. tonight at the district office to act on personnel and resignations.

There is a closed session scheduled for negotiations for 2004-2005 so the board can get a letter of intent out to teachers before the beginning of next month. This is done every year.

There will also be a discussion on meal prices. There may be action on increasing the prices.

The board meeting is open to the public.

ter don't have insurance.

For the certified staff, she said, she looked at what the district pays and plugged the numbers into the salary schedule. If the district would have been with the center this year, it would have cost around \$53,977 for teachers, and instead it was \$87,490.

The pay scale is a little lower at the center, she said.

Some of the money the center gets is paid from federal money, she said, and it pays for a lot of the base-level programs.

Mr. Glodt said if the board considers going with the service center, then the aides would not have health insurance. The district would terminate their jobs as part of its reduction in force.

Ms. Kersenborck-Ostmeyer said the people would then have to apply for jobs, but the center works closely with the districts and they try to hire the people who have been working with the district and who know the (See BOARD on Page 12)



IN THE LEFT EAR of this animal at the Decatur County Feed Yard is a small flat yellow dot. That is the electronic

tag that is used to keep track of the vaccines received and weight gained.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Brandt

## Electronic tags allow cattle to be tracked

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

A small electronic tag sticks out of the top of the ear on every cow or steer at the Decatur County Feed Yard.

The device — small, round and flat — isn't noticeable unless someone points it out. The tag allows feed yard employees to measure everything about that particular animal and store it in the computer from the time the animal enters the gates at the yard north of Oberlin to when the ear is chopped off at the packing plant.

The feed yard started the electronic tag program in 1994, said Warren Weibert, owner and gen-

eral manager of the yard. The idea, was to give the ranchers the opportunity to follow their cattle through the feed lot to the packing house and to capture as much value as possible.

The feed yard here and another one pioneered the program. The other feed yard isn't doing the program anymore, Mr. Weibert said, but the Decatur County Feed Yard has kept it up. Use of electronic tags on cattle is growing in popularity, he said, but the yard here still has the most sophisticated system in the United States for tracking animals and performance.

He said most of the cattle have

three tags in their ears. The first one is placed by the original owner. That is a number the rancher gave that animal so it could be identified. That tag is quite visible, hanging from the inside of the ear.

Mr. Weibert said most ranchers put the id tags in the animals' ears when they are born, but the feed lot has a group of cattle from a large ranch in Florida that don't have the origin tags.

On the other ear is a colored tag placed by employees at the feed yard. That tag has two numbers on it. The top one shows what year the animal was brought to the feed yard and what group it was in. For

example the number 4002 means it entered the yard in the second group of 2004.

The bottom number on that tag is a unique number, said Mr. Weibert; no other animal has it.

The third tag is the electronic one.

Mr. Weibert said there are times when an animal rips out one of the numbered tags. Then employees can read the electronic tag and know which animal it is.

Each of the cattle at the feed yard gets an electronic tag placed in its ear the first day at the barn. Each animal is seen two more (See CATTLE on Page 12)

## Baby boy wins prizes

Twelve days into 2004, a boy born at the Decatur County Hospital became the county's New Year's Baby.

Garrett Leighton Carter was born at 9:45 p.m. last Monday, Jan. 12. His mother had labor induced that morning. He weighed 7 pounds, 8 ounces and was 18 3/4 inches long at birth.

Garrett is the first child for Mark and Michelle Carter of Jennings. Mrs. Carter said having a son was a surprise, since they hadn't found out what the sex of the baby was in advance.

Mr. Carter is a farmer near Jennings and his wife works at the hospital in Phillipsburg.

Mrs. Carter's parents are Pat Mahan of Kingman and Woody Fowler of Texas. Mr. Carter's parents are Lawrence and Carol Carter of Dresden. Garrett's great-grandparents include Anna Fowler of Tulsa, Helen Lamb of Kingman, and Naomi Carter and Agnes Wahlmeier of Jennings.



WITH THEIR SON Garrett Leighton in between them, Mark and Michelle Carter rested on the couch of their hospital room. Garrett was the first baby born in 2004 and the first in the Carter family.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Brandt

The Carter family has 60 days to claim prizes at area businesses for Garrett. Those include a \$25 gift certificate from Addleman Drug Store, a special gift from Ray Jewelry, a photo album from Custom Trophy and Engraving, a \$25 savings bond

from First National Bank, a gift from Fredrickson Insurance Agency, a case of baby food from Raye's Grocery, a gift certificate from the Dresser, a pizza for two from Pizza Hut, \$10 gift certificates from Stanley Hardware, Ward Drug

Store and McCook's Ben Franklin Store and a year's subscription from *The Oberlin Herald*.

KFNF and American Family Insurance offer their best wishes to the new family as sponsors for the contest.

## Former governor explains plans to improve fishing

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

The secretary of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks told an Oberlin crowd last week about plans to improve fishing and recreation at Sebelius Reservoir near Norton by leasing irrigation rights to keep the lake level up.

Secretary Mike Hayden, an Atwood native who has served as governor and as speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives, has held the wildlife job for two years now, making the transition from Gov. Bill Graves to Gov. Kathleen Sebelius.

"There have been some tremendously exciting things in natural resources happening in Kansas," he told about 60 people at The Gateway last Wednesday night.

In this part of the country, he said, it seems people sometimes take natural resources for granted. People here are close to the land and see the wildlife, he said, but changes to natural resources take place slowly, and people don't look at the long term.



SECRETARY Mike Hayden talked with around 60 people last Tuesday about water.

The secretary said he is looking at the long term of natural resources, mainly water, in the state.

(See MAN on Page 12)



# \* Man talks about projects from Norton to Topeka

(Continued from Page 1A)

He is working on three projects to protect water including a contract to lease water from the Almena Irrigation District, which will help keep the level up in the Norton Reservoir; to purchasing the Circle K Ranch near Larned and retire the water rights which will be bought with it and make the land a public hunting area; and to use land in Topeka which is expected to be donated to the state by the Menninger Foundation as a public park with waterfront access to the Kansas River.

Norton Reservoir, he said, was built as a place for recreation and irrigation. Irrigators have the right to pull so much water out of the lake each year.

Gradually, said Mr. Hayden, the lake has started to go down. In many years, the lake has been so low that it couldn't be used for irrigation and the recreational uses were lost.

During those early dry years, many irrigators put down wells. Then the wet years of 1993 and 1995 refilled the lake.

After almost 30 years, the lake was finally back to the level it had been in the 1960s, he said.

For about four or five years after that, there were tremendous recreational and economic use opportunities at the lake.

Then the area entered the latest drought. The lake is now about eight feet above dead pool, he said. When it gets to dead pool, no water will be able to be drawn off of it.

If those eight feet of water are drawn off the lake, said Mr. Hayden, there will be no recreational value. The boat docks won't be usable and the state park will be farther from the water.

What has happened, he said, is the area is over appropriated — that is

there are more water rights out there than there is water available.

Mr. Hayden said they have to find a balance between what is taken out of the lake and the amount of water that is recharged. The long-term solution is to retire enough water rights to irrigate 1,000 to 1,200 acres.

He said the state is proposing to lease the Almena Irrigation District water rights for \$120,000 a year for the next two years.

Mr. Hayden said the money is in the budget although if the agreement works as planned, it will have to be approved by the Legislature.

Hopefully, he said, this will lead to the buying of water rights in other areas.

Mr. Hayden said the state would also like to purchase the Circle K Ranch and its water rights, which are owned by the City of Hays.

Mr. Hayden said there is a proposal to buy the land and then the state will retire the water rights. The land along the Arkansas River, he said, will make a great place for public hunting.

The state hasn't done something like this since Cheyenne Bottoms, in Great Bend, the secretary said.

Hays purchased the land hoping to run a pipeline to town for municipal water. However, the proposal never worked out. Mr. Hayden said his department is working to convince the cities of Hays and Russell to build a reverse osmosis system off of Wilson Reservoir. The water is close to both cities but it is too salty to use for municipal water.

The federal government, said Mr. Hayden, will reimburse the state on a purchase like this for public hunting up to 75 percent.

The last project Mr. Hayden talked about was a new state park his

department is working on in Topeka. When the Menninger Foundation moved to Texas last year, they left behind a 90 acre parcel next to Cedar Crest, the governor's mansion, and a frontage to the Kansas River. Mr. Hayden said he asked for money in the budget to start the park.

"Even in these tight budget times," said Mr. Hayden, "we do have some exciting things happening."

Gary Anderson from Oberlin, asked Mr. Hayden if the state has any vision for Sappa Park, which used to include a lake just outside of the city limits.

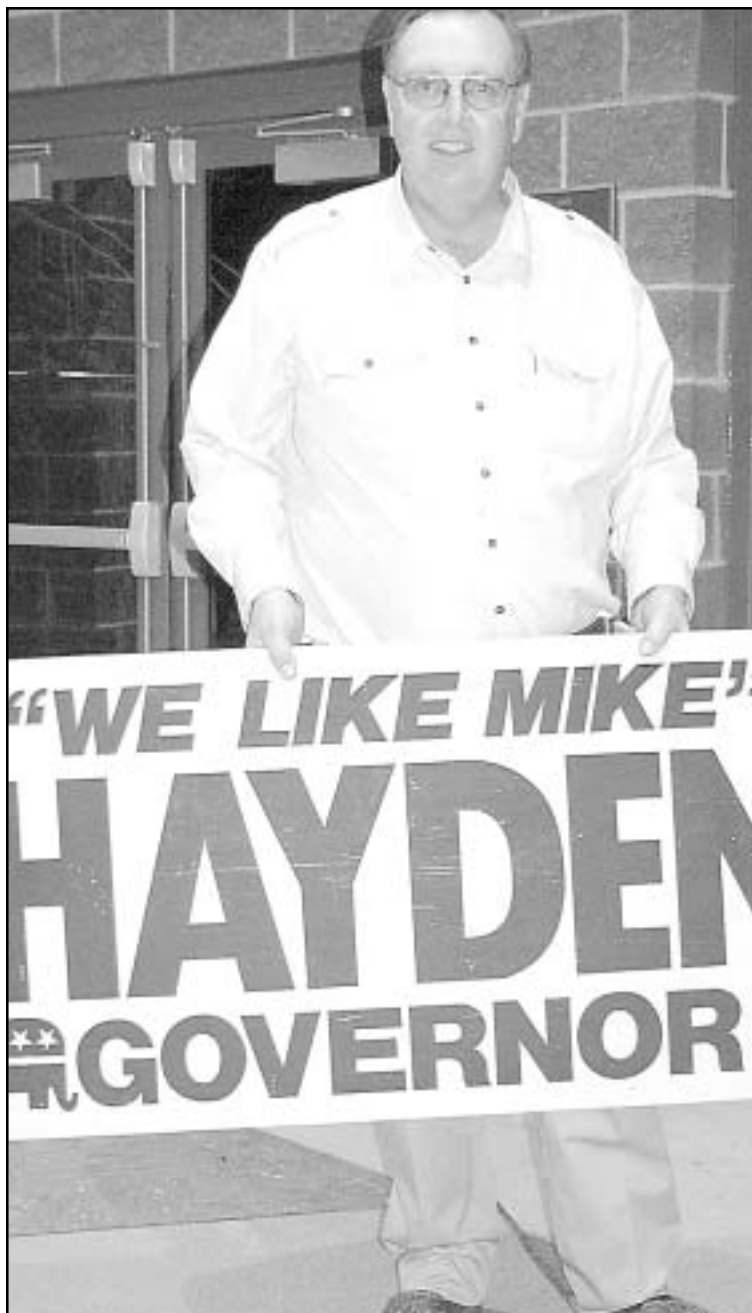
Mr. Hayden said he has thought about it a lot, especially after the lake in Atwood was brought back to life. He said in Atwood, they had to try two to three times to pass a bond issue to fix the lake. Today it is very low because of the drought and there is very little stream flow.

Lake Atwood and Sappa Lake, both built during the depression, suffered the same fate from silt and low water levels, he said.

Mr. Hayden said one option is creating a wetland. Even if the silt in the lake was removed, he said, there is very little likelihood of getting enough water in the creek to sustain anything.

Mr. Hayden said Liberal uses storm runoff and sewer water and runs it through several wet lands and then has three lakes set up with the water that are used for recreation.

Another man asked if Oberlin would need the same kind of water right to impound or pump water into the lake bed. Mr. Hayden said it is



A SIGN from years ago was brought to the public meeting last Tuesday by Bruce Wendelin from Herndon. The sign was put on display outside the theater at The Gateway.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Brandt

the same process to get the water rights whether it is pumped or not.

He said the city could start buying water rights.

# \* Cattle tracked closely

times in the barn where the tag comes into play.

The barn has a machine that reads the tags. Mr. Weibert said employees can then give medicine or track weight and enter it in under that tag number. Mr. Weibert said they can follow the medicine given to sick or ailing cattle, see what effect the medicine has on the gain ability and profitability of that animal.

He said the tags play a part in safety issues, too. Whenever cattle are to be shipped, he said, the yard gets a list of the ones that can't be moved because they have received medicine within a certain time.

Mr. Weibert said he has always felt that food safety is an issue. The more information a rancher keeps about the vaccinations and food the cattle has had, he said, the better. All of this is to maintain food safety for the consumer.

He said the numbers and the electronic tags make it possible to track the cattle back to their origin.

Despite the recent scare of mad cow disease in Washington, Mr. Weibert said, they have never had a case at the feed yard here. Most cattle at the yard are shipped to packing houses when they are less than 24 months old, he said, and the disease doesn't show up in a cow until it is around 6 years old. The disease isn't transmittable from animal to animal, he added.

The feed yard owns 30,000 of the tags. They are reused once they are cut out of the ear at the packing plant. The tags are then sanitized and ready for use in another animal.

# \* Board discusses ways to save cash

(Continued from Page 1A)

kids. There are pros and cons of going with the center, said Mr. Glodt. For one thing, the district would have less control.

Board Member Dewayne Jackson said it looks like if the district hires the employees, then it is like losing federal money.

That's true, said Ms. Kersenborck-Ostmeyer, but the district isn't eligible for it anyway.

High School Principal Charles Haag asked if the center has an abundance of people who apply for paraprofessional positions. Ms. Kersenborck-Ostmeyer said sometimes there are slimmer pickings

than others. She said they try to hire aides here. In some instances, she said, they have to travel or people will have to be moved around until all the positions can be filled.

Mr. Glodt said there was no intention for a decision to be made that night. This is a decision the board can make in the future, he said.

One thing to look at, he said, is that any special education staff cut would only be like cutting half of a regular teacher because the district gets reimbursed from the state for special education based on a formula done each year.

The board didn't make any decisions.

# \* Taxes will increase with resolution vote

(Continued from Page 1A)

ber Jeanie Martin said she thought people were misinformed the first time and some didn't understand they were signing a petition and that the district would have to pay for the election. She said they should start

informing the people now.

The board agreed to have two public meetings, the first at 7:30 p.m. on Monday at the high school cafeteria. The second meeting will be at 7 p.m. next Wednesday at the Norcatur city offices.

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