

Company shows off new gear

By **KIMBERLY BRANDT**
City officials received a tour of the SBC central office and switching center Thursday morning as the company kicked off a new high speed Internet service now available in Oberlin.

The phone company held a coffee and ribbon cutting at the LandMark Inn beforehand and then took City Administrator Gary Shike, Councilman Joe Stanley, a reporter and Nor' West Newspapers Systems Administrator Evan Barnum on a tour of the plant.

With around 10 people from the company who work in northwest Kansas or on the systems here, the group headed into the telephone building, just west of the post office.

Along the first wall is equipment which runs the phone lines in the area. Darin Miller, area manager of external affairs for SBC Kansas, said the Ericsson switch was put in around 1990. Anyone using a phone in the area is getting a dial tone out of this equipment, he said.

He said an interesting thing about the switch is that each night it will run tests on itself and then the machine will fix itself and print out what it fixed for the technician. He said the switches in this area all run off of a master in Colby.

Down the next row is the new digital subscriber line equipment for the high speed Internet. Mr. Miller said the lines are available in a radius of 15,000 feet, which is about three miles. That means everyone in town and some in the country who are close enough to town can get the service.

He said the lines the company offer feature faster downloads and slower uploads. Oberlin was the first town in northwest Kansas to have the service turned on, about two weeks ago.

"High-speed access is becoming a necessity both at home and work, and SBC Yahoo! DSL delivers the features and applications that the citizens of Oberlin need," said Mr. Miller. "Whether it's a physician sharing X-rays or a sonogram in real time with a hospital hundreds of miles away, or a student going online for an interactive lecture from a major university, this service make all types of high-bandwidth applications possible."

The service differs from a dial-up Internet connection, he said, because a person or business can be on the Internet and the phone at the same time. Mr. Miller said customers can choose from several options and price plans. Prices start at \$29.95 a month when ordered online.

Ceabridge Connections, formerly Classic Cable, also offers high-speed Internet service in Oberlin through its television cable system. Pinpoint, a Nebraska independent telephone firm, offers a wireless high-speed service.

"To compete in today's marketplace, businesses need the high-speed access that DSL provides," said Glenva Nichols, Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce manager. "To enhance economic development and educational opportunities in Kansas communities, businesses, schools and the general public need high-speed Internet access. It's exciting that Oberlin is one of the first rural communities in Kansas to have this access."

Mr. Miller said residents in Oberlin can get more information online at sbc.com/sbcyahoo or call 866-SBC-YAHOO.

Delivering treats



GIRL SCOUTS across the county started to deliver boxes of cookies last week. That included Nakita Bose, who took two boxes to Rev. Barbara Pierce on Thursday afternoon. — Herald staff photo by Kimberly Brandt

County undecided on full-time worker

The Decatur County ambulance director presented a list of responsibilities for him and a full time assistant at the commissioners' meeting last Tuesday, but there still was no decision about the county hiring another employee.

Ambulance Director Patrick Pomeroy asked a few months ago if he could hire a full-time assistant. With a shortage of volunteers, he said, it would help the service to hire a full-time emergency medical technician.

The list of responsibilities was broken into several sections from administrative, planning, future facility needs, scheduling, training and employee supervision to name

a few. There are some things that only the director does, said Mr. Pomeroy, which include investigations, new medical practices, public speaking, liaison with dispatch office and facilities management.

Any technician can take care of the monthly schedule, billing, preparing weekly billing reports, vouchers, payroll and the oxygen tank re-fill.

The list Mr. Pomeroy prepared was a nine page outline.

Mr. Pomeroy told the commissioners Tuesday morning that hiring a full-time person won't eliminate his work load. He said it also won't take care of the shortage of volun-

teers, but it will help. It will limit the money the department has to spend, since there would be another full-time salary coming out of the budget.

He said hiring someone could create disillusionment among the volunteers and the service could lose some of them.

Taxes may have to be raised, said Mr. Pomeroy, to bring in more money. He said in his opinion, all the other options have been exhausted.

He asked Commissioner Ralph Unger if the job description was what he wanted.

Mr. Unger said he thought the whole commission wanted the list and it will work. Commissioner

Doyle Brown said Mr. Pomeroy had done a good job.

Mr. Pomeroy said he probably missed some things.

He said a full-time employee normally works 2,080 hours in a year. He said last year, he worked 2,200 hours and that doesn't include administrative work.

The commissioners held a 20-minute closed session for non-elected personnel to talk about the issue. There was no action taken.

Mr. Pomeroy said first responder classes had started in Atwood on Mondays and Wednesdays with 10 students.

The classes in Oberlin will be held Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Council looks at replacing air units

The Oberlin City Council has decided to look into replacing the heating and air conditioning unit which serves the council room, offices, lobby, hallways and meeting room downstairs at The Gateway with five smaller units.

Kent Ploussard said at a council meeting Thursday, Feb. 19, that the air conditioning isn't working at all and now they are having trouble with the heat.

He said the city spent a lot of money last year to repair it and it still isn't working.

Mr. Ploussard said he contacted all local contractors to see if they could replace the unit. Most said that the job was too big for them. Mr.

Ploussard then contacted Volz Plumbing, Heating and Air Conditioning in McCook and Garrett Plumbing, Heating and Electrical in Norton.

Representatives from Volz said that it was possible to replace the coils in the unit but they couldn't guarantee that it would be fixed. They said that the compressors may be bad, too. The repair estimate was \$11,975. To replace the unit would cost \$74,251.

Mr. Ploussard said Volz said they could replace the existing unit with five smaller units for \$38,260.

To replace the unit, Garrett would charge \$74,312. The company said it needs written approval from a

structural engineer, though, because the new unit would be heavier. It would take 14 to 16 weeks to get it, which would be June.

Mr. Ploussard said when a Carrier representative was here, he said they couldn't put five units on the roof because the new ductwork wouldn't fit.

The unit the city has now is 10 years old and Carrier isn't building them anymore. Mr. Ploussard said he thinks what isn't in the bids is having an electrician come in and hook the machines up.

Councilman Stan McEvoy asked if they would have to put the five units on the roof or if they could be on the ground.

Mr. Ploussard said he didn't know.

Councilman Joe Stanley asked if local people could do the five units. Mr. Ploussard said he had given them the option and assumes the problem is getting the old unit out.

To make this purchase, said Mr. Shike, the city will have to amend the budget.

Councilman Ray Ward said he thought the best thing to do was go with the five units, not just because of the price, but the likelihood of them all going bad at the same time is slim.

Is there any way to see if the five units will work? asked Mr. McEvoy.

Mayor Ken Shobe said if it doesn't work, the city needs to have an agreement that they will still pay the price of the five for one large unit.

City Attorney Steve Hirsch said the council should ask for a formal proposal for the five units with a finish date.

City accepts health insurance rates

The Oberlin City Council accepted new insurance rates for employees Thursday with an average 3.4 percent increase.

Last year, the rate increased 34 percent and the council delayed a decision to renew in April for several months so they could check costs with other companies.

This year, the city decided not to look into any other companies with the increase of less than 4 percent.

On the current plan, insurance for a single employee costs \$375 a month. With the increase, it will be \$388. A policy for an employee and a child now costs \$707 and will go to \$733. Employee/spouse coverage is \$806 and will rise to \$834. Family coverage costs \$1,130 and will go to \$1,170.

The city pays for all of the

employee's insurance and half of whatever else the employee carries.

City Administrator Gary Shike said he thought the city had budgeted for a 12 percent increase and didn't really think that would be enough, so the rate looks pretty good.

The council approved the insurance with the increase.

Service to haul convicts

Two state prison employees talked with Decatur County commissioners last Tuesday about a service they are trying to start which would haul prisoners from the jail here to other facilities so sheriff's deputies wouldn't have to.

Lyle Auker said Sheriff Ken Badsky had asked him and his partner, Terry Smothers, to talk with the commissioners about the proposed inmate transport service. Both men are employees from the Norton Correctional Facility. He said they are still waiting on approval from the Kansas Corporation Commission.

The name of the business is Safe Transport Inc. The men are planning to do the job on the side. They never said what they do at the prison.

Mr. Auker said they have an unofficial agreement with Norton County and wanted to offer Decatur County the same deal. He said they feel they can provide the service for less than it would take the county to pay a deputy for the job.

The plus side, said Mr. Auker, is with this service, the county's officers can stay at home, where they should be. He said the commissioners don't need to decide right away, but if the county wants the service, they can contact the men.

Mr. Smothers said the fee for trips over 300 miles is \$1.10 a mile and for shorter trips, there is a set fee.

He said they are also talking with Kelley Youth Services, which runs Sappa Valley Youth Ranch, and the firm is interested.

Mr. Auker said he heard it took several weeks to get a woman to transport a female inmate. Barring any setbacks, he said, they could have a woman here in a couple of hours. There is quite a pool of people who want to help.

How many trips does the county average a month? asked Commissioner Doyle Brown. Not very many, said Sheriff Badsky; it just depends.

If in the last two years, the county has averaged four, said Sheriff Badsky, then the agreement can be written for that number.

The closest place to get a service like this now is Topeka, said Mr. Smothers.

County Attorney Steve Hirsch said the county used the service out of Topeka once in the last 16 years and it was a bad deal.

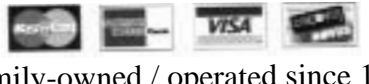
The men said between the two of them, they have 32 years of experience. Mr. Auker said he doesn't think they have anyone on the call list with less than five years of experience.

Any individual the men transport will be treated at maximum security level, said Mr. Smothers.

Commissioner Patricia Glenn said she wanted to read the information over before making a decision. Mr. Auker said that would be fine.

Mr. Smothers said when they get their permit, they will send the county a copy. He said the county can do an agreement with them, or if they just want to use the service by the trip, that will work too.

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