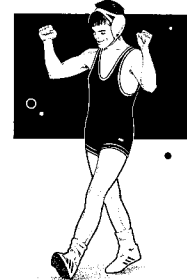




Good job at state!

Wrestlers take third! See Page 6A.



THE OBERLIN HERALD

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16 Pages, 2 Sections

Wednesday, March 3, 2004

126th Year, Number 9

Tax increase for schools fails 613-404

Voters say 'no' to request for higher property levy

By KIMBERLY BRANDT
Voters in a special election said "no" Tuesday, defeating a question to raise the Oberlin School District's local option budget to 25 percent of the general fund by 209 votes.

School officials have said they will have to eliminate the equivalent of nine teachers if the tax increase failed, but only about five if it passed. Decisions may come at a school board meeting Monday.

There were 613 no votes and 404 yes, nearly the opposite of a similar vote last year. With only two polling places, one at the Decatur County Courthouse and one at the Norcatatur city office, volunteers were done counting the ballots by 7:30 p.m.

Out of the 2,133 people registered to vote in the district, only 1,017, or just less than half, took part in the election, including 102 people who voted early. That means 48 percent of the registered voters made the decision.

Superintendent Kelly Glodt, tracked down at a Red Devils basketball game in Hoxie, said he would be lying if he didn't say he was disappointed.

"That is why there are elections," he said. "The public has spoken."

"The administration and the board will just have to do the best

with the hand they have been dealt. We will still provide the best education possible with the resources we have."

The board approved a resolution to increase the local option budget, which comes from a property tax levy, from 18.11 percent to 25 percent of the general fund in January.

At the time, Phil Lahman, who builds terraces and owns two house in Oberlin, asked the board to skip the petition process and go to an election. The board decided not to do that, and Mr. Lahman circulated a petition with help from others, including Gary Baldwin and Shayla Williby.

On Jan. 30, the petition was turned into the county clerk's office and certified with 134 signatures. It needed only 106, or 5 percent of the voters in the district.

The petition forced an election, allowing voters to decide if the district could raise taxes. The increase had been estimated at around 7 mills.

This is not the first time the board has been through this process, but the results were different. Last July, the board passed a resolution to increase the local option budget from 13.11 to 18.11 percent. A petition was filed, and in a special election, (See TAXES on Page 10A)



TEN MINUTES before the polls closed Tuesday evening, LaMoine Wolfram cast his ballot in the school election at the Decatur County Courthouse. At that time, around 820 people had voted. — Herald staff photo by Kimberly Brandt

Jennings school is open

Board vows to keep going

By KIMBERLY BRANDT
The Jennings School District expects to have fewer than 50 students next year, but board members say rumors of the district's demise are exaggerated.

Board members and Superintendent Lee Stieben signed a letter to parents last week assuring them that the school will be open next year.

At least for now, Mr. Stieben said, there is no talk about consolidating or closing the school. Financially, he said, the district is doing fine and the school will stay open as long as it can. Basically, he said, that means until the money or the students run out.

This year, there are 61 students at the school, although that is expected to drop. There are 12 seniors graduating and just one kindergartner expected for next year.

School Board Vice President Vickie Bailey said Monday that the board hasn't even considered consolidation. The numbers are getting low, she said, low enough that the board may have to start looking into some things.

But, she said, rumors that the school will close are simply not true. The budget is in good shape and the district will have the money for at least the next two years.

Mrs. Bailey has been on the board for at least the last 12 years and been the vice president for three. She said the board has been planning for the last 10 years and have looked far into the future so that there would be money. She said they have grouped classes together so there isn't a lot of waste when it comes to teachers.

The other thing, said Mrs. Bailey, is that the board and teachers have done some unique things with salaries. Instead of giving raises every year, she said, they do a lump bonus at the end of the year once the supplies are purchased.

The teachers are good, she said. They are conservative and don't waste anything.

Although there will be 13 fewer students next year, the district will (See BOARD on Page 10A)

Fliers against school tax increase paper the town

By KIMBERLY BRANDT
Fliers appeared this week on car windshields, in the grocery and at the gas stations against the Oberlin School District's local option budget increase to 25 percent.

On Wednesday, Pastor Steve Smith handed out a flier stating that between the 2001-2002 and 2002-

2003 school years, there was an increase of \$290,283 in the school budget. He said he got the figures off the Kansas Department of Education website.

Superintendent Kelly Glodt said what the flier didn't say was that between those years, the state decided to take away the special edu-

cation fund and add it into the general fund. That is why the general fund went up \$290,000, adding that it is accurate to say that state aide has increased.

The same flier claims that last year *The Topeka Capital Journal* reported that the Legislature had been considering increasing the

maximum allowed on the local option budget from 25 to 35 percent. He says that a yes vote is a yes to the additional 10 percent increase when it becomes law.

The election on Tuesday would have authorized a 5 percent increase in the local option budget to 25 percent of the district's budget. That is

the highest now allowed under state law. Mr. Glodt said the board can't go to 35 percent and the Legislature hasn't even decided if the maximum will go up.

Pastor Smith handed out another flier on Saturday after he did more research. He said the whole thing (See FLIERS on Page 10A)

Family leaves over \$1 million to nursing homes

Decatur County received nearly \$1.3 million last Tuesday from the Cochran family estate, with half of the money going to the Decatur County Good Samaritan Center and half to Cedar Living Center.

Both nursing homes received checks for \$634,255 from Leonard Cochran, a nephew of the couple who left the money, at the regular county commission meeting.

County Attorney Steve Hirsch said a tax closing letter on Phyllis Cochran's estate had been received in the past week. Her parents were Shirley and Laura Cochran. Mr. Hirsch said the parents had set up a trust for their daughter, and then when she died a few years ago, the money was to be split between the two nursing homes.

Mr. Cochran and Phyll Cramer are trustees for the family. Mr. Hirsch said Mr. Cramer wasn't able to be there.

Shirley Cochran, said Mr. Hirsch, was a farmer. Their daughter was born in 1930. The family lived on several farms in the Oberlin area until 1970 when they retired and moved into town.

Mr. Cochran died in 1992.

Shortly after that, his wife and daughter moved into Cedar Living Center. In 2000, Mrs. Cochran died at the age of 91. In 2002, her daughter died at the age of 72.

Mr. Hirsch said there is still one investment that can't be liquidated, so there will be another check coming for a few hundred dollars.

Good Samaritan Administrator Janice Shobe, Activities Director Jan Badsy and Director of Nursing Loretta McFee were there to accept the check.

Mrs. Shobe said there are some building needs that need to be addressed. She said the bulk of the money will be invested and the center will use the proceeds each year.

"We are very appreciative of that type of support from someone in the community," said Mrs. Shobe. "I think both Cedar Living Center and the Good Samaritan Center are very honored to be entrusted with that type of donation."

Hospital Board President Charles Frickey was at the meeting in the place of Administrator Lynn Doeden, who was out of town.

Mrs. Doeden said there haven't been any decisions made about (See FAMILY on Page 10A)



THE COCHRAN FAMILY left over \$1 million to the county: Shirley, Laura and their daughter, Phyllis, in a photo from the early 1930s.

Steady rain falls, forcing school buses to use 'mud routes'

The skies opened up Sunday, letting a soft rain dampen the ground and lifting some spirits.

In all, Oberlin received 1.14 inches of rain, which gave the wheat a good drink and made county roads muddy.

Sunday afternoon, Cass Avenue, otherwise referred to as Canal Street, had a steady flow.

Later in the evening the rain turned to snow and the wind kicked up.

Some students began to think that maybe it would snow enough to cancel school.

Although there was a 90 percent chance of the white stuff in the fore-

cast, by Monday morning there wasn't much to look at and the school busses went out on storm routes, using the paved highways only.

Parents have a designated spot to take the kids to ride the bus. Normally, the bus goes to each student's house to pick them up, but on mud route days, the busses stay on the pavement so they don't get stuck.

As of Monday night, the school didn't know if they would run mud routes for Tuesday or not. Superintendent Kelly Glodt said the decision wouldn't be made until 5:30 a.m. when Transportation Director Brian Simonsson calls him.

Investors take over Norcatatur elevator

A group of area farmers purchased stock in Norcatatur Grain from long-time owner Bob Rapp recently, but the elevator is still open for business.

Glenn Streyve, one of the investors, said that some of the stockholders for the business have changed. He said the business has been

around for 100 years and it is going to stay open. It is business as it has always been, he said, although there is reorganization going on.

Mr. Streyve would only say that there haven't been any major shake-ups.

He said the former owner, Mr. Rapp, has moved to Manhattan.

Ashes to ashes

* Board promises school will be open next year

(Continued from Page 1A)
 be able to use the number from this year to draw up its budget, she said. That way, for at least the next two years the money will be there.

She said she hadn't heard the rumors, but people brought them to the board. Mrs. Bailey said they don't want teachers jumping ship or kids leaving because of the rumors.

The superintendent said there are so many rumors that the school was going to close next year that the board thought a letter to patrons and parents was a good idea.

Mr. Stieben, who has been in the district for two years now, said plans haven't changed.

The board has always wanted to keep the school in Jennings as long as they can. The district is struggling just like any school in northwest Kansas, he said, and enrollment keeps going down.

At this point, he said, the board hasn't had to make any major cuts,

but if enrollment keeps going down, they may have to look at some.

Mr. Stieben said there is bill in the Legislature that would allow the state to shut down schools with an enrollment under 100, but it hasn't passed.

If the board had to make a decision, he said, he didn't know what would happen. Jennings is a long ways from other schools in the area. He said he assumed it would be more of a dissolution than a merger.

Mrs. Bailey agreed, saying she wasn't sure the district would have much success with consolidation because the town is far away from other schools.

The school is important to Jennings, she said, and the kids get a good education. When the school goes, she said, Jennings will probably lose its bank and everything else.

"The spirit of the town dies, too," she said.



ON ASH WEDNESDAY, the Rev. Doug Hasty of the Oberlin United Methodist Church taught young members, including Sabrina Dellere, about the day of penance. Then he put a cross of ashes, made from palm leaves and mixed with oil, on their foreheads.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Brandt

* Tax issue loses

(Continued from Page 1A)
 voters approved the increase 606-393.

Even with the extra money, the board started to cut back on spending as enrollment declines eroded the budget. Cuts included limiting field trips, reducing the overall athletic inventory, eliminating the "C" team for football, reducing the amount spent on classroom supplies from \$500 per teacher to \$300 and reconfiguring the elementary staff rather than replacing a fifth-grade teacher.

Later, the board decided to drop the curriculum council for the year, delayed ordering textbooks, asked the teachers to take a lower insurance plan, put a freeze on salaries and cut five days out of the school year.

Mr. Glodt said at the March board meeting on Monday, the board will have to do resolutions of intent not to renew certified staff members. Non-teaching staff will be reviewed later, he said.

* Fliers passed out against increase

(Continued from Page 1A)
 started when he wanted to learn the history of the local option budget and he came across other information.

This year, he said, there is a bill in the Legislature that would allow the board to raise the local option budget as high as it wants without a public vote. The bill has not been passed.

There were two other fliers circulated this week. One wasn't signed and the other was compiled by Mike Helm and Shayla Williby.

Mr. Helm and Mrs. Williby talked about wages for the superintendent and other administrators. It states that the superintendent makes \$80,000 a year plus benefits. (Mr. Glodt actually makes \$80,794 which includes board-paid fringe benefits of \$3,394.)

The flier says that if the school was going to close, then all of the board members would have been at the informational meetings the district held about the increase.

Mr. Glodt said everyone has a right to put fliers out. He said he has tried to be as accurate as possible and has talked with people one on one, in small groups and at the public meetings.

Mr. Glodt said the local option budget had gone up every year until last year, when it hit 13.11 percent. That was as high as the old board

resolution said it could go. At that time the board decided to ask for a 5 percent increase to 18.11 percent. The request was challenged by a petition, which forced a public vote last year. The increase passed by 606 to 393 vote.

As of Monday night, there weren't any fliers circulating in support of the increase. Supporters have put out some yard signs and Mr. Glodt has been making the rounds of coffee shops and restaurants. Pastor Smith has "vote no" signs in his yard.

Chamber, radio station to host home show

The Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce and KFNF Radio are gearing up for their first home show on Saturday and Sunday, March 20 and 21, at The Gateway.

The show will be open Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Chamber Manager Glenva Nichols said they already have 23 booths signed up, including banks, appliances, air condition-

ing and heating, hardware, gardening and computer and phone lines.

There is room for 40 booths in the arena at The Gateway, said Mrs. Nichols, and the chamber's goal is to fill all the spaces.

There is still time to register for a booth, she added, noting that they would like all registrations in by Friday. To register, call the chamber office at 785-475-3441.

The booths cost \$75 for a 10x10 spot or \$125 for a 10x20 spot. Mrs.

Nichols said for an additional \$50, KFNF will mention the names of the businesses with the booths several times on the air and they will do a live interview both days the show is open.

This is the first home show for the Chamber and radio station. Royce Wilson, who died last year, formerly held a home show annually, Mrs. Nichols said. The Chamber decided to keep the show going this year to help people learn about things that

are available for their homes, and asked KFNF if they wanted to co-sponsor the event.

Mrs. Nichols said the show is a great way for homeowners to see the new line of products that are available and also a way to visit with professionals.

The Gateway staff will be running a concession stand both days.

The home show is free for spectators.

* Family leaves estate

(Continued from Page 1A)
 how the money will be spent, but she said she is sure the board will take into consideration whether to do stocks, bonds or mutual funds, then use the interest for capital purchases.

"This indeed is a very generous gift," said Commissioner Ralph Unger as he thanked Mr. Cochran.

"I never thought I would live to see something like this," said Commissioner Doyle Brown, adding that it made him proud to be a Decatur Countian.

The county has received gifts before, said Mr. Unger, but this is probably the biggest. The county receives gifts from "average people," he said, "but with larger than average hearts."

County to test storm sirens

Storm sirens in Decatur County will be tested weekly during tornado season, starting at 10 a.m. Monday.

Emergency Preparedness Director Bert Cool said the sirens will be tested every Monday from then on at 10 a.m. until the violent storm period is over, normally late August.

There are four sirens in Oberlin, by the hospital, at The Gateway, by the city shop downtown and at the ball park. There are also sirens in Norcatur, Jennings and Dresden.

Mr. Cool said an oscillating noise means take cover and the solid tone means it is all clear.

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