

The County

Incumbent has 32-year record

With 32 years under his belt, Ralph Unger is seeking another four year term as a Decatur County commissioner serving District 2 in the Republican primary next week.

Mr. Unger said a lot has changed in the county since he was first elected in 1972. When he took office at the age of 27, the county didn't have a landfill, an ambulance service or an emergency preparedness director.

The biggest thing back then was the roads, he said. Now, he said the county is having to fight and live with state rules and regulations that didn't exist back then.

"I have dedicated my adult life to serving Decatur County," said Mr. Unger, "and I think I have something left to offer. I don't feel that the job is done yet."

He said over the years, he has built up a lot of contacts all over the state which are good for the county.

Mr. Unger said he decided after college to move back to this area. At one time, he said, he was encouraged to pursue a job in Topeka but he said he didn't want to live there.

As a commissioner, he said, he has dedicated a lot of his time to trying to keep things in the county. He said he wants to represent Decatur County not only here but outside the county boundaries as well.

He said he is disappointed that the state is taking things out of the communities, such as moving the Social and Rehabilitation Services office to Colby. The state didn't save any money, said Mr. Unger, but costs for citizens go up and the jobs are gone.

"We are not an island out here," he said, noting that what happens in Topeka affects us here. "We need to remain involved."

Mr. Unger said the county has a team that works together and demonstrates prudence in government. He said they try to be responsible with people's money and keep Decatur County attractive to new businesses.

Stability and consistency are good, he said, and the county has both those traits. Still, we can get better, said Mr. Unger, and the county works towards that.

In the past, the question has come up about a combined city/county law enforcement agency. Mr. Unger said the feedback he has received hasn't shown that

people are ready for a combined law enforcement agency yet. The community has to want it and be ready for it in order for the agencies to combine, he said.

He said he doubted if combining the sheriff's office and the city police would save money or jobs. Manpower could be utilized better in some ways, he said, but they would still need to have the same number of officers under one umbrella as two.

In the road system, said Mr. Unger, the county has made a lot of advances. He said he is certain the county has better roads than when he started. Most people living in the country have a gravel road from their house to a county road or highway today, he said, and when he was elected that wasn't the case.

Mr. Unger said he spent 12 years on the state Emergency Medical Service board, seven of those years as chairman. Currently, Mr. Unger serves as the chairman and commissioner representative of the Decatur Health Care Foundation and trustee of the Kansas Workers Risk Co-operative for Counties.

Mr. Unger is a member of St. John's Lutheran Church, where he serves as an adult Bible class teacher, is a past president and elder, serves as the chairman of the Lutheran Laymen's League Endowment Fund and serves Thrivent Financial for Lutherans as the area event coordinator. He is a member of the Oberlin Rotary Club.

Mr. Unger's family has been farming in Decatur County for the last 120 years. He grows wheat, corn, milo and cattle.

He and his wife Norma have been married for 39 years and have three children, Colleen, who works at the Decatur County Feed Yard; Rachelle, who is a family practice doctor in Missouri; and Ryan, who is a chiropractor here and in St. Francis.

Mr. Unger graduated from Kansas State University with a degree in education and political science. He taught government at Herndon for four years before running for the commissioner spot.

He said if re-elected, he will do the best he can for the people in county. Being a commissioner may be a part-time job, he said, but he will try to give it his full-time dedication.



Ralph Unger

Newcomer says time to change

Phillip Lahman said he wants to cut wasteful spending and get results for what the county does spend, and that prompted him to throw his name in the race for Decatur County commissioner for District 2.

The seat has been filled by Ralph Unger for the last 32 years. The two Republicans will meet in the primary election Tuesday.

Mr. Lahman has lived in Decatur County for 15 years. He works for Dust Cloud Construction Inc. and does some farming south of Colby. He said he is also a licensed air frame and power plant mechanic for aircraft.

He said he isn't sure if there is overspending in the county, but he would like to take a look. He said he would like to see the people of the county get the results they are paying for.

Mr. Lahman said he knows there has been some discontent in the Emergency Medical Service. He said the county has put some money in there and he would like to see if they have gotten the results the people needed. Mr. Lahman said it doesn't look like great strides have been made.

The road and bridge department, he said, is doing a good job.

The number of and use of county vehicles is one thing Mr. Lahman said he would like to look at, especially with fuel at \$2 a gallon. He said he hates to see a lot of fuel being burned for private use.

Although the combination of city and county law enforcement has been talked about in the past, he said he didn't think it would work. The step would take a

lot of progress as far as relations between the city and the county. He said he doesn't think it would work right now. He said a lot of people wouldn't go for it. It may be down the road, but a long ways.

Mr. Lahman said he would like to see a better working relationship with the fair board.

The county really needs to look at nursing homes and medical care, he said. The county has a dwindling population and it is hurting everyone all the way around, said Mr. Lahman. They may need to make some changes to make the medical facilities more self sufficient.

Mr. Lahman said if elected, he would like to take a role in economic development. The county needs to do anything it can to build business. He said he doesn't have the answer, but he is keeping his eyes open. This is an agricultural community and we need to be looking for alternatives.

Mr. Lahman said he has been talking with a lot of people and hopes to get letters out to the voters in his district before the primary.

He said he helped do some volunteer work to get the race track up and going and does restoration on older vehicles. Mr. Lahman carried a petition both times when the Oberlin School District wanted to increase the local option budget to bring the question to a vote. He said he wanted the people to decide if they wanted to pay more taxes.



P. Lahman

County crews will get radios

Decatur County fire, ambulance, sheriff and road crews, and possibly other units, will get new radios through a federal homeland security grant the emergency preparedness director has been working on.

At their meeting last Tuesday, Director Bert Cool told commissioners he has ordered 45 radios, some hand held and some car mounted. They will be assigned to the sheriff's office, fire department, ambulance service, emergency preparedness office and road and bridge.

County Attorney Steve Hirsch asked about the Oberlin City Police Department. They are getting three mobile radios, said Mr. Cool.

The radios will be programmed at NexTech, he said, adding that a grant next year also has been designated for communications. It will be used to update repeaters or buy new ones and put in additional towers.

All of this, said Mr. Cool, is for the transition to narrow bands being required by the Federal Communica-

County Countdown

At their meeting last Tuesday, the Decatur County commissioners:

- Heard that the Ford Expedition the sheriff's office wants to sell is ready to go, although they haven't received any calls or bids on it. Story to come.
- Decided to give all county employees a \$60-a-month raise starting with the July paychecks. Story on Page 1A.
- Talked with the emergency

preparedness director about the county emergency crews, road and bridge and other agencies receiving new radios through a federal grant. Story at left.

- Discussed projects the road and bridge crew is doing, including blading county roads and dirt work for the upcoming fair. Story on Page 3A.

tions Commission to create more public service channels.

Will the hospital be getting radios? asked Commissioner Doyle Brown. Mr. Cool said he would have some extra radios.

Does the grant pay for the installation costs? said Mr. Hirsch. It would, Mr. Cool said, but depart-

ments will have to pay for their own installation, which is \$90 a radio. He said he decided to go that way so they could get more equipment.

It will cost around \$6,000 for installation then? asked Mr. Hirsch. Mr. Cool said he thought several of the employees could install them on their own.

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