



Happy New Year!

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Schools lead list of top stories for 2004

Cutbacks, closings, tax issues

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

Over the last 12 months, wheat and corn crops, weather, house fires, city and county government, schools closing and others having financial difficulties, and people's generosity have made headlines in *The Oberlin Herald*.

Here is a review of the stories over the last year that made headlines, changed lives and entertained readers.

In **January**, a house fire off of U.S. 83 left Mary Kimble, Holly Martinez and Chris Dickey out in the cold. The city council decided to look for grants to help lower the costs of a new sewer plant which had been in the works.

The Oberlin School Board decided to eliminate three employees because of money problems. With fewer students, the district received less money. This was just the first step in an ongoing budget battle for the district in 2004.

In **February**, the area was hit with a snowstorm which closed schools but gave the crops a much needed drink.

The state Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services office on Main Street closed. Officials from the Hays office talked with county commissioners and citizens about setting up "access sites" in the county, but state jobs fled to larger towns.

The Herndon High School Beavers played their last sporting event, a basketball game at the high school, which closed at the end of the school year in May.

The Oberlin School Board asked for more money in the "local option budget," raising property taxes. After a petition drive by opponents, the issue was taken to a vote and lost.

The town's two nursing homes,



CANCER SURVIVOR ISABEL GRAFEL, 3, had help from her mother Melinda and her brother Kade when she set a basket of white doves free to start Oberlin's annual Relay

Cedar Living Center and the Good Samaritan Center, received \$500,000 each from the estate of Shirley and Laura Cochran.

In **March**, the Oberlin School Board decided not to eliminate five teachers and cut five other spots to

part-time to help the district stay in the black.

The Decatur County Hospital took over management of Wheat Ridge Terrace senior apartments and agreed to pay off the bonds.

With plans for a new sewer plant

underway, the City Council increased sewer rates in Oberlin by \$5 a month.

Decatur County officials discussed the possibility of losing polling places with a possible federal requirement to go with voting ma-

chines instead of paper ballots.

By **April**, people started to discuss the wheat crop, which looked poor because of the drought, although the area had received snow and rain.

The city started to discuss closing

the alley between Fidele Electric and the old cafe on Main Street because owner Greg Fidele wanted to put in a lumber yard. After some protest, the council agreed to close the alley.

Eight rattlesnakes were found by police in an aquarium in a man's home in the city.

The council decided to continue the search for more water, drilling test holes under existing wells.

The Oberlin School Board decided to cut one of four teachers who worked with at risk students under the Title I program to part-time.

Gisela Fisher published the story of her life, "It is Well."

In **May**, the Decatur County Fair made *National Geographic* magazine in a story about the High Plains.

The Rawlins County School Board decided that the grade school in Herndon would not open in the fall because it would not have the minimum 10 students enrolled. Under a merger agreement with the Atwood schools, the Herndon school was to have stayed open for at least five years.

A county prisoner, 18-year-old Dustin Rhodig, broke out of the fourth-story jail and climbed down a rope made of bed sheets tied together. He left the rope dangling from the window, causing all manner of remarks about the jail.

A cold snap on May 14 destroyed much of what was left of the wheat crop.

In **June**, a leak in the city pool meant a late opening. A committee formed to look at options for the pool jumped into high gear. By the end of the month, the pool was patched and open for swimming.

State Sen. Stan Clark, 49, was killed in a car accident on I-70 during a dust storm.

Tornadoes were spotted near Dresden and Jennings. In the same storm, the corn crop suffered from wind damage.

Kansas officials switched to a new way to get drivers licenses, with people getting a temporary receipt, then getting the license through the mail.

In **July**, the Oberlin School Dis-

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Food drive meets goal in final hours

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

The annual Stanley Hardware food drive ended Friday with 85 items over the goal of 2,000.

Since Thanksgiving, people have been leaving food at the hardware store. It was taken to the Decatur County Food Pantry in the United Church on Monday. Owner Joe Stanley said on Thursday that the junior high student council was going to help move the food.

All of it needed to be loaded into boxes and then put in the back of a pickup and trailer. Mr. Stanley said people donated a lot of paper products this year, which are also needed.

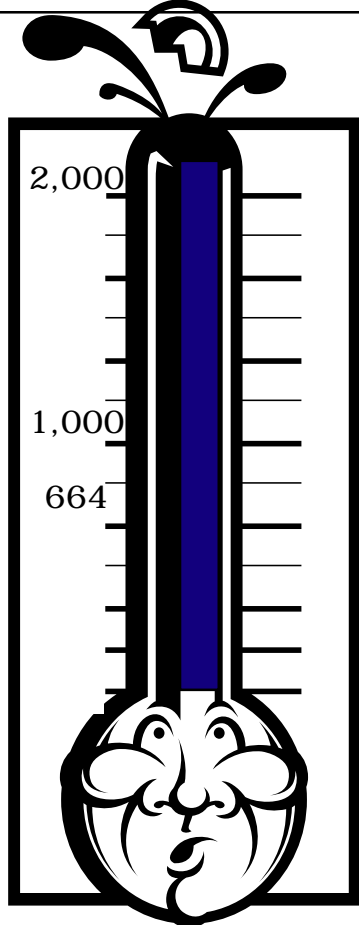
This is the fifth year for the drive. Last year, he said, they had around 2,500 donations of nonperishable food and other items. Mr. Stanley said he wasn't sure why the number was down this year. Some of the organizations which brought food in last year, he said, didn't this year.

There were lots of people who did donate. Mr. Stanley said the grade school had a fairly large drive. They set up an area in the school where kids and staff could bring in items and then they boxed it up and brought it down. Families, individuals and groups donated food.

Mr. Stanley said towards the end of the drive, one person brought in 14 bags of food. There were so many items, he said, that they didn't all fit in the window. Some had to go on the floor.

Mr. Stanley said he thinks putting the food in the window of the store with a tote board showing the count of items works well. People can see the donations adding up, he said, and seeing that helps people remember to bring in items and reminds them that there are people who need a little help.

More and more families use the



pantry every year, Mr. Stanley said. Five years ago when the first drive was held, there were 70 to 75 families who used the pantry regularly. Last year, he said, there were over 90.

Youth leads city officers on chase through Atwood

A runaway from Sappa Valley Youth Ranch stole a pickup from a farm home and led Oberlin police on a chase through two counties last Wednesday before running out of gas near McDonald.

The boy may face some serious charges in Rawlins County, where he allegedly rammed the undersheriff's vehicle four times.

The boy, 17, reportedly from the Topeka area, was taken back to the sheriff's office in Oberlin, where he had a first appearance in District Court last Wednesday, then was taken to the juvenile lockup in WaKeeney.

Undersheriff Michael French said the youth was charged in Decatur County with stealing a 1997 Mazda pickup belonging to Bob Russell, who lives about three miles east and a mile and a half south of Oberlin. The pickup had about \$3,400 in damage.

Police Chief Wade Lockhart said the youth was reported missing about 2 a.m. Officers and ranch employees were searching the area, he said, when Officer Scott Zeigler spotted a car on a gravel road south

of U.S. 36 and east of the ranch.

Mr. Zeigler said the vehicle stopped when the driver saw him, so he waited for it to come out. When he tried to stop it, the driver took off, speeding through Oberlin, past a roadblock set up by the chief, then on west on U.S. 36.

Chief Lockhart said he got ahead of the pickup, and the driver tried to ram his car. He and Officer Zeigler tried to stop the boy with a "rolling roadblock" just past the Rawlins County line, one car behind and one ahead, but he got away.

In Atwood, the chief said, the boy went into the ditch to avoid a roadblock and kept on going. Officer Zeigler said the driver turned off the highway and sped through residential parts of Atwood, losing most of the pursuers, but eventually found the road west.

West of Atwood, the chief said, the driver got off on a county road, but ran out of gas. When officers got to him, he said, the boy had locked himself in the truck and cranked up the sound system.

"He was just boogying to the music," the chief said.

A Rawlins County officer used his baton to smash a window so officers could get the youth out and handcuff him.

In Rawlins County, Undersheriff Ken Higley said, the boy may face charges of aggravated battery on a law enforcement officer, fleeing and eluding, possession of stolen property, speeding and reckless driving, at the least.

Chief Lockhart said at one point in the chase, he was in front of the pickup, trying to block it, and the youth tried to ram his patrol car.

"I just goosed it," he said. "I had that new car, and I wasn't about to let him hit that."

He said the youth wore at least four layers of clothing and several pairs of socks. Boys at the ranch are not allowed to have coats or shoes, just street clothes and flip-flops, but those who try to escape usually bundle up the best they can.

The escape was the second of the month. A week earlier, a boy walked away, eluded searchers and stole a van in town. He was stopped near Dresden by a Sheridan County reserve deputy and a state trooper.

Storm leaves streets coated with ice, closes schools, but few problems noted

Freezing rain left an invisible coat of slick stuff on cars, porches and roads overnight Sunday, causing dangerous conditions for drivers Monday morning, with another winter storm on the way Tuesday.

Decatur County officials reported just one wreck, a pickup which slid off the road and overturned north of town about 1:30 a.m. Undersheriff Michael French said the driver had promised to come in Monday and make a report.

Oberlin schools canceled classes because of the slick roads, though buses had started their routes. Later Monday, classes for Tuesday were canceled as well.

The National Weather Service was expecting more ice and up to 6 inches of snow on Tuesday.

The forecast office in Goodland put out a Winter Weather Advisory around 2 p.m. Sunday.

Patrick Burke, a meteorologist at the office, said freezing drizzle started around 7 p.m. from Leoti to Hill

City. When the ground is cold, Burke said, freezing rain creates a slick surface immediately as it hits roadways.

"We are advising people to drive defensively," he said, "as a combination of black ice and fog will make for hazardous conditions."

Burke said he expected more drizzle Monday night and conditions to worsen into Tuesday morning. Snow accumulations should reach from 4 to 6 inches with higher amounts north of U.S. 36.

"We're expecting the second and more powerful storm to come through Tuesday," he said, adding that snow may continue into Wednesday morning.

Highs today are expected to remain in the 20s with overnight lows in the single digits.

"People should definitely prepare themselves for a winter storm," he said.

In Kansas, travelers can call 511 for road conditions and weather information.



A LIGHTNING-CAUSED BLAZE sent fireman Bill "Barney" Noone across a field near Jennings in April. The wind-whipped flames drew volunteers from three departments before they were subdued. — Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

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* Schools cut jobs to fit budget

(Continued from Page 1)
district recalled one teacher for a first grade position.

The boiler at the swimming pool died and the council decided to wait until next summer to replace it.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius visited to campaign for her brother-in-law, Doug Sebelius, who was running for the Legislature. A lunch was held for her at The Gateway and then she toured Sappa Valley Youth Ranch before heading home.

In August, the old-fashioned soda fountain at Addleman Drug Store celebrated its 75th anniversary.

Jennings School enrollment was down by half the students compared to the previous year. The school board had to hire a new superintendent to keep things together.

The City Council decided to hire Water's Edge Aquatic Design to evaluate the pool, and the firm started the next month when engineer Michael Fisher did a "hammer test" on the concrete.

In September, dry land corn crops started to shrivel up with the area still in a drought.

In October, Decatur County celebrated its 125th anniversary with entries in the Homecoming parade.

Health care officials heard that the county might not get any flu vaccines this year because of a national shortage.

The pool evaluation was completed with suggestions that the city build a new pool instead of repairing the old one.

The Jennings School Board and patrons started to study options for the district, with its declining enrollment.

First baby will collect lots of stuff

It's 2005, and the first baby born at Decatur County Hospital is eligible for all kinds of gifts from area sponsors.

This year the parents of the first baby born in 2005 will receive a \$25 gift certificate from Addleman Drug Store, a case of baby food from Raye's Grocery, a pizza for two from Pizza Hut, a photo album from Custom Trophy and Engraving, a gift from Fredrickson Insurance Agency, a \$10 gift certificate from Ben Franklin Store, a gift from Ray Jewelry, a \$10 gift certificate from Ward Drug Store, a gift certificate from The Dresser, a \$25 savings bond from First National Bank, a \$10 gift certificate from Stanley Hardware, a \$40 gift certificate to Rocking R, a year's subscription to *The Oberlin Herald* and best wishes from KFNH Radio.

All of the gifts and services have to be used within 60 days of the baby's birth.

By November, farmers got the chance to start harvesting corn. There were some surprises, with spotty fields and areas, but some got good yields of grain.

The Oberlin School Board decided to start classes two hours late on the third Wednesday of the month to help teachers with the "No Child Left Behind" program. Parents weren't given a chance to comment on the change.

In December, the Jennings School Board talked with Oberlin and Hoxie school districts about a cooperative agreement for the high school students for the next school year. With the agreements, the Jennings Board plans to keep the grade school open as long as it can.

Sponsors of the Angel Tree asked for help to get the names of kids in need. With the state Social and Rehabilitation Services office closed,

no one spread the word to welfare clients. The response was nearly overwhelming, and state officials got letters out.

The county Health Department received flu shots and started to administer them to high risk people.

The year has been full of changes for people in Decatur County. Here's to the new year and the many more stories to come.

Let the Gorilla help sell your stuff



If you're planning a garage sale, be sure it's in The Country Advocate

Invite the 900-pound Gorilla to help with your next garage sale. You'll have more customers, sell more stuff and make more money. That means more in your pockets at the end of the day, and less junk to haul off to the dump. How does it work? Simple. While the paper reaches most families here in town, The Country Advocate goes all over northwest Kansas. It reaches 41,860 readers in 11 Kansas counties, plus parts of three in Colorado and four in Nebraska. That's why it's the 900-pound Gorilla of Northwest

Kansas Advertising, reaching more homes and more people than any other publication, broadcast station, cable system, Internet page or advertising medium. Reader after reader has tried The Advocate for their advertising. The results? Stuff sells. People drive for miles to find a good sale. They don't want to walk away empty-handed. The Gorilla works. Your newspaper makes it easy for you to be in The Advocate. Just call or stop by and place

your ad. You'll be surprised how easy it is, and how affordable. You'll be surprised — and happy — when your phone starts to ring or people show up at your door. But call today. Deadline for The Advocate is noon Friday, ONE WEEK BEFORE a weekend sale. Sure, you can get an ad in the paper later, but it won't be the same. Call the Gorilla. It works.

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170 S. Penn Ave.
Oberlin, Kan. 67749
(785) 475-2206

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