

## City needs \$300,000 a year for sewer

After looking at seven scenarios to bring in money to pay for the waste water treatment project Thursday night, the Oberlin City Council asked its engineer to bring back numbers for a rate plan that would bring in around \$300,000 a year.

Thaniel Monaco, with Miller and Associates, provided seven scenarios from lowering minimum usage, to increasing the base rate to increasing the usage rate.

Last year, the city increased the base rate from \$9.50 to \$14.50. The minimum usage

was cut from 500 cubic feet to 300.

Mr. Monaco said in the scenarios, he assumed the same number of services as last year and allowed for a 10 percent reduction in use of the system. Built into the amount that the city needs to raise is \$100,000 a year for operation and maintenance of the system and \$167,000 for debt retirement on the new lagoons. Either of these figures, he said, could be higher or lower.

It is good for the council to stay ahead in the project, said Mr. Monaco, but it isn't a

good practice to raise rates and then lower them.

He said he wanted to know what the council wanted to raise and then he could come back with some more numbers.

The project is estimated to cost \$3.358 million and the city received a \$400,000 community development grant.

It looks like the balances in the sewer fund are increasing more than what was projected, said Mr. Monaco. The idea was to raise around \$8,000 extra a month and the

city is actually seeing an increase of around \$10,000 a month.

When is the normal time to set a new rate? asked Mr. Monaco. City Administrator Gary Shike said it has to be in effect the first of April to show up on the May billing.

Mr. Monaco asked if the council wanted him to get the figures together to produce an average revenue of \$300,000.

If the city agrees to change the minimum usage, that is going to be a big chunk of people affected, said Mayor Ken Shobe, and

that is a concern.

Mr. Monaco said he needs to get some update numbers on the averages and users. He said he can get more precise numbers with a little research.

Are we sure the debt retirement won't be higher than \$167,000? asked Councilman Patrick Pomeroy. That is the projected number, said Mr. Monaco, and he thinks it is conservative.

What is the operation and management (See RATES on Page 10A)

## Folks burned by high bills for winter heat

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

Gas bills set records last month, scorching consumers' pocketbooks as temperatures plunged and the price of natural gas soared.

Bob Helm, manager of corporate communications in Hays for Midwest Energy, said people kind of got hammered by the bills. He estimated that bills received in January for December were 35 to 40 percent higher than normal.

The major reason people saw an increase this month, he said, is because the area had the coldest January since 1996. The past nine years weren't nearly as cold, he said, and that weather made a huge difference in the gas bills.

Also, Mr. Helm said, the price of natural gas is higher than it has been in the last two or three years.

There is no way for Midwest to change the weather or the price of gas, he said, but customers do have some options.

The cooperative charges for gas on a "flow through," he said, so when the market price goes up, gas bills go up. The firm can't make it higher or lower.

The good news, Mr. Helm added, is that so far February has had seasonal temperatures, not as cold as last month, and gas prices are down

a little. This may help with the bills next month, but it still depends on the weather.

Mr. Helm said Midwest read meters in seven cycles in January. Some of the bills were for 30 to 35 days, which means the next bill will probably be a shorter period.

Besides the weather and price, he said, the bill depends on what people have the thermostat set at inside their home. Some people may have received those bills and decided to turn down the thermostat, he said.

Mr. Helm said it is hard to compare neighbor to neighbor, because it really depends on lifestyles, too. If there are kids in the house who go out and in a lot, or if a person likes to keep it really warm, the bill may be higher.

Once winter is over, he said, things start to level out and bills start to drop off. Normally, he said, that happens around the end of February or the first of March, but it depends on the weather.

If people are having a hard time paying their natural gas bills, he said, they can call one of Midwest's 10 local offices and set up budget billing, which means the bill will be an average of the use over a year. The customer won't have highs or (See HEAT on Page 10A)

## School board plans summer projects

High school students may find classrooms a little cooler next fall, and warmer next winter, while students at the grade school shouldn't have to worry anymore about a window landing in their laps.

The Oberlin School Board discussed summer projects to replace the heating system in the old part of the high school, replace the windows at the grade school and continue work on the new building at Sappa Valley Youth Ranch.

Superintendent Kelly Glodt said the old part of the high school is heated by a steam boiler, which is in terrible condition. He said the district is paying to keep it in shape, but it needs to be replaced.

It would cost about half of what the district is paying to keep it running to replace it with a forced-air heating system, he said. That would mean that the old part of the building would also have air conditioning.

The other half of the building has a hot water heater.

By putting in a newer heating system, said Mr. Glodt, the district will cut its gas bills and the money spent to upkeep the boiler. There is a chance the project will get started this summer, he said. There aren't any bids yet and the board hasn't decided to take any yet.

## Late school start changed to March 9

The scheduled two-hour late start for the Oberlin School District has been changed from the third Wednesday of the month to the second Wednesday for March only.

Instead of students starting school at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, March 16, it will happen on Wednesday,

March 9.

Superintendent Kelly Glodt said the board agreed to change the dates because Brad Potts, the Kansas Teacher of the Year, will talk with the staff on the second Wednesday. He also will do a program for students at the high school.



### Playing in the sun

IN THE SUN Monday afternoon, third graders at the grade school played on the merry-go-round (top) at recess. Jamie Soderlund reached out to catch the kick ball (above) while Hannah May and Elizabeth Nedland (right) went up and down on the swings.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

## City hopes to kick junk vehicle habit

The Oberlin Police Department sent out 13 letters in the last month to people who have inoperable, untagged or junk vehicles on their property in the city limits.

Two of the property owners, Rob McFee and Jerry Miller, asked for hearings at the City Council meeting at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 3, in the Morgan Theater at The Gateway.

Police Chief Wade Lockhart said his office hasn't received a lot of complaints about the vehicles, but have noticed them when out patrolling. Some are vehicles the officers drive past every day, he said, but other times they have been looking for the

inoperable or junk vehicles.

The letters went to people who have vehicles that are untagged, don't have current tags, are visibly wrecked, have weeds growing around them, tires missing or are visibly inoperable and have been for some time.

Chief Lockhart said in most cases, the officers have taken pictures of the vehicles to document them before sending the letters out. Most of the pictures are taken from the road. If the officers need to go on the person's property to take a picture or inspect it, he said, they can. If the owner refuses the officer entrance to their property, there is a separate ordinance (See CITY on Page 10A)

## Man tells stories about expedition

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

Dressed in a traditional military uniform from 200 years ago, Neal Correy entertained kids from Jennings and Oberlin with a program at Oberlin Elementary School last Tuesday.

Mr. Correy, who lives in McCook, said that each year he helps re-enact the Lewis and Clark Expedition for several months out of the summer with the expedition club he belongs to. One mission of the club, said Mr. Correy, is education, which includes talking to people like the kids at the school. Club members are able to do this because of donations and grants they receive.

The Lyceum, sponsored by the Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce, brought Mr. Correy and his wife Mary to Oberlin for the af-

ternoon.

The year 2004, said Mr. Correy, marked the 200th anniversary of Lewis and Clark leaving Washington for the West. He said they started the trip by horse and then came down the Ohio River on boats.

Mr. Correy asked the students if any of them had heard of the Lewis and Clark Expedition or if they had heard of the Louisiana Purchase.

President Thomas Jefferson named two men, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, both U.S. Army officers, to explore the 850,000 acres the United States had purchased from France, known as the Louisiana Purchase.

The club, said Mr. Correy, does a lot of its travel on river boats. The men built the boats according to (See MAN on Page 10A)

# \* Rates may increase

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cost going to be in 10 years? asked Mr. Pomeroy. In the future, there has to be a line item in the budget for replacement of mechanical equipment, said Mr. Monaco. The \$100,000, said Mayor Shobe, is an average for the lifetime of the loan. The costs should be lower in the beginning and then increase with time.

Mr. Monaco said in the beginning, it should cost only around \$40,000 a year to run the plant, and then it will go up from there.

Mr. McEvoy said he didn't want to lower the allowable usage and neither did Mayor Shobe.

An increase in the usage rate, said Councilman Ray Ward, would only affect those who use more than the minimum.

There are a lot of people who are here half of the year and gone half of the year, said Mr. Monaco. Maybe they aren't paying their fair share. The city doesn't want to penalize them, he said, but everyone should be paying for what they use.

Mr. Ward said he didn't want to see the minimum usage lowered. He suggested maybe \$1 could be added to the base rate and then the other increase could be on the usage rate.

Is it possible that this could be the last rate increase for some time, depending on what the council decides to do? asked Mr. Ward. Yes, said Mr. Monaco.

Councilman Patrick Pomeroy said he doesn't disagree about the leaving the minimum usage, but if the usage rate is increased then the increase will be put on the hospital, high school and restaurants.

Other towns have gone to no-base rates, and everyone pays for what they use, said Mr. Monaco.

Mayor Shobe asked Mr. Monaco to come back with scenarios with a revenue of \$300,000.

Mr. Monaco said it is important to remember that these improvements don't deal with the collection system at all. This is for the waste water treatment plant, but at some time the council is also going to have to talk about the sewer lines.

# \* City says no to junk

(Continued from Page 1A)

called right of entry. Basically, he said, the officers have the right of access.

The letters give the owners 20 days to remove the vehicles or repair them. If the vehicle isn't removed or fixed in the 20 days, the person can be written a ticket with a penalty of \$100 or time in jail. After the initial ticket, one can be written every day, he said, until the vehicle is removed or fixed.

Chief Lockhart said the officers haven't written any tickets yet for inoperable or junk vehicles.

There are some owners who received tickets for the same vehicles last time and they were never taken care of. They have been served a letter again and will receive tickets if they aren't removed or fixed this time.

Chief Lockhart said this is being done to help clean up the town. Allowing the vehicles to sit in yards makes the owners' property look bad, as well as their neighbors'. It is a health hazard to have the vehicles sitting around because they are a good breeding place for rodents, he said, and children who play on or around the vehicles to get hurt.

# \* Schools may get new heater and windows

(Continued from Page 1A)

"that is not conducive to learning. That is all we should be about, learning and making it a better, easier process for the kids."

Mr. Glodt said the other big project this summer will be possibly working on windows at Oberlin Elementary School.

Since he has been in the district, three years, he said, two windows at the grade school have been blown into classrooms. This is a big safety issue, he said.

They are looking at new aluminum framed windows, he said, and the board talked about reducing the glass area and putting in more insulation.



**AT THE GRADE SCHOOL** last Tuesday, Neal Correy (above) demonstrated to students how he prepared his gun to shoot. His wife Mary showed students what an American flag looked like 200 years ago, in the time of Lewis and Clark, with only 15 stars and 15 stripes.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

# \* Man follows expedition trail

(Continued from Page 1A)

what they found in the journals from the expedition — 55 feet long and nine feet wide, propelled by a sail, oars, poles and sometimes even pulled on the river by men.

The group keeps within two days of where Lewis and Clark were 200 years ago, he said.

The club is made up of all men, he said, although his wife drives a mobile home along the route, runs the store and acts as the nurse. Mr. Correy said each of the men has a role to play: he is Capt. Hugh McNeal.

Since the expedition was a military mission 200 years ago, they do things the same way today. They wear authentic military uniform, from back then, get up in the morning and raise the flag, and the sergeant gives the orders for the day.

"We are very patriotic," he added. Around half of the meals are cooked on an open camp fire, Mr. Correy said. Other times, people in town bring them food or they go in to a church or somewhere for dinner.

One of the kids asked what happens if they run out of food. Mr. Correy said that since they aren't really living 200 years ago, if they run out of supplies, they can always go to a grocery.

Mr. Correy showed the kids how they take a flint rock and piece of steel, make a spark and start a fire. The kids oohed and aahed as he did it.

It is the same way with their guns, he said; a spark caused when the metal and flint connect sets a round off. He demonstrated the spark without any ammunition in the gun.

Mr. Correy said their group is fortunate to include actual descendants from Mr. Clark and other men on the original expedition.

Last year, said Mr. Correy, he spent 110 days on the river. They stay in tents along the way or sleep in the boats.

He said he has a bear skin rug he lays out on the floor of the boat and then he puts a wool blanket on top of him.

The kids asked Mr. Correy what they ate. A lot of times, he said, there is a kettle on the fire with stew made

out of deer, elf or buffalo. They catch fish and sometimes others bring them fish.

Mr. Correy said they have a rule on the river that if anyone waves the American flag at them, they will shoot off their cannon. Two hundred years ago, he said, the flag had 15 stars and 15 stripes. He and his wife held up a flag resembling the one of the period.

Before closing the program, Mr. Correy put on his coat and hat to show the kids the full military uniform. Mrs. Correy talked about a woman's outfit.



# \* Heat priced high

(Continued from Page 1A)

lows that way. The firm has offices in Colby, Atwood, Hoxie and Hays, but not in Oberlin.

"We are always willing to try to work out a payment plan with people," he said.

There is also the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program through the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, and the Red Cross has some money for heating bills. People can get applications for the Red Cross on-line or at a Midwest office.

The main thing, he said, that people need to do is to make some kind of payment on the bills to avoid being shut off.

Mr. Helm said he doesn't foresee a change in natural gas prices, although they may drop slightly in the summer. New power plants generate electricity by burning natural gas. In the past, he said, the natural gas companies have been able to build up a reserve in the summer which helped keep prices low in the winter. There is very little reserve now, he said, so demand forces the price up.

Customers might want to think about doing some more winterizing around their homes, he said. As spring arrives, people should continue to tighten up windows or doors to stop air infiltration.

# Tricks to light stage

Lazer Vaudeville will perform at 3 p.m. on Sunday at the Colby High School Auditorium.

The first 15 minutes are in black light, and no latecomers will be admitted during that segment. The audience will view tricks with laser beams, a neon cowboy kicking up a luminescent rope-spinning display, and an escape from a straight-jacket by a member of the audience.

The program is sponsored by the Western Plains Arts Association. Admission is by season pass or at the door, \$10 for adults and \$5 for students.

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