

Jennings school to call it quits in 2006

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

With enrollment dwindling away, the Jennings School Board has decided that next year will be the last for its school.

The board plans to disorganize the district on July 30, 2006.

Superintendent Emery Hart said the district counted 30.5 students full-time equivalency this year. It has 30 students, 16 in high school and 14 in grade school.

Next year, he said, enrollment will drop because the high school is graduating six

seniors and there are only one or two kindergartners coming in.

In the last few years, the Jennings district has seen a decline similar to most in the area. During the 2002-2003 school year, the district had 79 students. The next year, 2003-2004, that number dropped to 61. During the 2003-2004 school year, a school custodian was arrested on charges of molesting a child. Last fall, the district started the 2004-2005 year with just 30 kids.

Next fall, Mr. Hart said, the district will

send students in grades 6 to 12 to Oberlin and Hoxie schools. He said the board offered a contract with the Norton School District also, but Norton turned it down.

The Jennings board, said Mr. Hart, is in the thinking stage right now. Members are listening to suggestions from the superintendent and patrons before they decide anything else, like what to do with the building or how to suggest dividing the district's land.

Mr. Hart was hired in November when

former Superintendent Dave DuBois left for a job in Los Angeles. He said the board knew then that the district's future was dim. Despite that, he said, board members have organized themselves and are doing a good job.

"The board is asking people for suggestions," he said, "not just doing things. That is what makes positive things happen."

Disorganization, he said, means the Jennings District's territory will be divided among its neighbors, the Oberlin, Norton

and Hoxie districts.

The board will hold a public meeting at 6:30 p.m. next Wednesday at the Jennings School to discuss the process. Everyone is welcome to attend, Mr. Hart said. A regular board meeting will start at 7:30 p.m.

Board President Lawrence Carter said the board decided to disorganize because the district is just out of students. If Jennings consolidates with another district, he said, then everything — students, land, building (See JENNINGS on Page 10A)

Good Sam gives first graders money for books

Center to give \$500 to grade school for First Hand Friends program

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

The First Hand Friends program at the grade school will be receiving a \$500 gift from the Decatur County Good Samaritan Center soon to help purchase books for the students.

The program, which pairs a first grader from Oberlin Elementary School with a resident at the center for reading once a month, started over 17 years ago and is still going strong.

Janette Votapka, a former teacher, started the program. She said the idea was to help the first graders learn to read and give them a reason to practice.

It worked into the curriculum at the time, she said. Not only did it help the students read better, but it fit in with health classes, helping kids learn how our bodies change as we age. It also helped the kids introduce themselves and carry on a conversation with others, she said.

A lot of the kids didn't have grandparents who lived here, said Mrs. Votapka, and the program helped them get used to being around elderly people.

The kids didn't just read books.

She said they wrote their own stories and the program helped them develop a sense of independence.

Some of the students developed close relationships with their First Hand Friends, she said, and continued throughout the summer and when they got older. Some of the students had to deal with death during the year when they lost their friends.

Mrs. Votapka said it was exciting for her to watch how the students and residents grew to care for each other.

In 1995, she retired from the first grade, but that didn't mean the program stopped. Teachers Marty Olson and Audrey Pavlicek took it over. After Mrs. Pavlicek's retirement, her replacement, Diana Steinmetz, continued the program.

Mrs. Olson said they have two first-grade classes at the school. Her class goes to read from 10:30 to 11:15 a.m. on the second Tuesday of the month and Mrs. Steinmetz' class goes the fourth Tuesday.

On parent night, said Mrs. Olson, a letter goes home with the first

(See FRIENDS on Page 10A)

County discusses money options for new ambulance

The Decatur County commissioners and ambulance director continued discussions about purchasing a new ambulance at the meeting last Tuesday.

Ambulance Director Patrick Pomeroy said a new Med Tech ambulance was in town last week. He said he talked with a Med Tech salesman about financing, and the man told him the county could lease the ambulance.

Commissioner Doyle Brown said the county purchased a scrapper for the road department through a lease agreement.

The problem with a lease, said Commissioner Ralph Unger, is that the county is paying someone else interest rather than setting aside money every year to purchase a new truck. If the county gets a grant, said Mr. Unger, that would pay for an ambulance.

The ambulance department has \$47,500 set aside for equipment at the end of March.

County Clerk Marilyn Horn said that is without any carryover from last year.

When the idea of saving money

each year for equipment started, said Mr. Unger, the commissioners figured the department could buy a new truck every five years.

The last new ambulance was purchased in 2003.

Mr. Pomeroy said he received some paperwork from Amy Griffey with Northwest Kansas Planning and Development Commission on grants. He said he expects to get some more.

In order to get a grant this year, he added, everything would need to be completed by Oct. 1.

Mr. Pomeroy said the man told leasing an ambulance doesn't prohibit the county from getting grants.

Mr. Unger said the difference between trying to purchase an ambulance now and past times is that they need two, one for Jennings and one for Oberlin.

The commissioners didn't make any decisions.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Heard the ambulance crew has been busy, with nine calls the week before and four through Tuesday last week.

Council may revise triggers for water

The Oberlin City Council will discuss the water conservation plan to make sure the triggers don't need to be lowered in time for summer.

The plan, said City Administrator Gary Shike, is reviewed every year. It has been activated the last three summers, putting city water users on an even/odd system to water their lawns.

The council asked at the last meeting in April if they needed to look at the plan again this year and if triggers needed to be lowered.

Mr. Shike said he hopes to have something back from the swimming pool committee about a contract for concept services from Water's Edge Aquatics. The council received the contract at the last meeting in April. Copies were made and it was passed on to the pool committee for recommendation.

Mr. Shike said the council needs to appoint a city attorney.

The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at The Gateway. It is open to the public.



AT A COUNTY COMMISSIONERS meeting last Tuesday, Gannon Reichert, Kelsey Gallentine, Megan Barrett, David Barth and the rest of the senior class learned about

the life of a public official. Commissioner Doyle Brown (below) told the students about the county's project to name its roads. — Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

Seniors get a glimpse of local government in courthouse visit

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

The Decatur Community High senior class went to the courthouse for government day last Tuesday, going from office to office to learn about the jobs of county government.

At 10 a.m., it was time to meet with the "big three," the county commissioners. The 26 seniors filed through the door one at a time. Some stood in the back, while five took open seats near the table, including the one that County Attorney Steve Hirsch normally sits in.

In addition to a little civics lesson, the students learned a lot about the plan to name roads and fix addresses for rural parts of the county.

Elected for four-year terms from fixed districts, the students learned that the commissioners approve all county business, from budgets to wages to appointments to county boards.

Principal Charlie Haag said he thought the talk Commissioner Doyle Brown had given at a Rotary Club meeting about naming the county roads was good. Public officials, he said, are never off duty, which is a good message for kids who want to run for office.

County Roundup

At their meeting last Tuesday, the Decatur County commissioners:

- Agreed to have the road and bridge supervisor to do the paperwork to get the county's bridges back on the state and federal five-year plan. Story to come.
- Talked with seniors from the high school about the road naming project. Story to left.
- Continued discussions of ways to purchase one or two new ambulances, but no decisions were made. Story at far left.

Mr. Haag asked Commissioner Patricia Brown to explain some of the county's projects to the students.

The county will be eligible for grant money from the 911 fund, said Commissioner Brown, but the roads must be named and addresses given for each home in the county. Each house has to have an address, he said; a postal box won't work.

Grant money is something that doesn't have to be paid back, Mr. (See COUNTY on Page 10A)



Relay for Life needs more teams to walk

With only a month and a half until the annual Relay for Life, the committee is looking for more teams to sign up to walk.

So far, the committee has 10 to 12 teams. Members will take turns walking around the track all night starting Friday, June 17, and ending on Saturday, June 18.

In the past, team members have walked in one-hour intervals.

With the relay starting at 7 p.m. and ending at 7 a.m., that would mean one team member is needed on the track during the 12 hours, but the first hour is taken up partly with opening ceremonies and the survivor lap.

Then at 10 p.m., the luminaries are lighted, which takes some time from that hour.

Teams have to be signed up by Tuesday, May 10. At sign-up, each member has to pay \$10 and

provide a shirt size. Captains can get team packets from Chris Dempewolf or Jane Carlisle.

Luminaries are on sale for the event for \$10 a piece. These can be bought to honor of a cancer survivor or in memory of a cancer victim.

They can be purchased from any committee member or by calling Jean Hale at 475-8103 or Carla Depperschmidt at 475-2122.

In the garden



IN THE GARDEN at the corner of City Park, at Marks Avenue and Commercial Street, (from left) Tyler Shields, Caitlin Shields and Nolan Henningson did a little community service with their 4-H group, Stick-To-It. — Herald staff photo by Steve Haynes

* Jennings board works on plans to dissolve in a year

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and equipment — would go to that district. If Jennings disorganizes, then the territory will be split.

There are already students who once went to Jennings attending school in Norton, Oberlin or Hoxie, he said.

The final decision, said Mr. Carter, on how to split up the district is up to the state Board of Education, but they are interested in what the Jennings board suggests.

Basically, he said, the Jennings Board is only in the preliminary stages of its plan.

Through the whole process, Mr. Hart said, he has worked closely with the state board and its attorney.

The Jennings board can suggest how to divide up the land, he said. Then it will be the state board's decision which district gets what.

While contracting for secondary students next year, said Mr. Hart, Jennings will still be a school district. The grade school will be open for the next school term if there are enough students.

The boards in Oberlin and Hoxie have worked with him, Mr. Hart said, and with the Jennings board. He thinks all the board members in the other districts understand the difficult situation Jennings is going through.

"When you lose a school in a community, you lose a lot," said Mr. Hart. "In fact, it is the backbone of a town."

The Jennings board members have taken into consideration the families in the district, he said, and have tried to do what is best for them.

Mr. Hart said the board hasn't decided what they will do with the school building.

He said the district will probably end up having an auction and sell some of the buses and other stuff, but none of those decisions has been made yet.

The board is still looking at everything. Some of those decisions will happen this summer. Mr. Hart said the board members want to make sure that they look at all the options and study everything.

* Friends program to receive money

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graders asking if there is anyone at the center the student wants to read to. Those who don't know anyone are paired with a resident based on personalities.

During the first session, said Mrs. Olson, the students and the residents fill out a traced hand on paper. On each finger they put something about themselves, including their favorite nursery rhyme, birth date, their family, favorite food and favorite song. That way, they get to know a little bit about each other before the students start reading.

Mrs. Olson said from then on, students take books to the center. She said they start out with easier books

and as the year progresses, so does the students reading.

The residents get excited about how the kids are learning and the kids are excited to go see their friends.

This year, the center staff decided to give the program \$500 to purchase books for the students to read to the residents. At 2 p.m. on next Tuesday, the center will hold an ice cream social as a fund raiser. They hope to match the \$500 for the program.

Since the center got a \$1,000 grant, the staff will take the other half of the money to buy books that stay there. That way kids won't always have to bring their own.

Health agencies, school get grants

Two health agencies and the high school received a total of \$2,500 in grants from the Wal-Mart Supercenter in McCook.

Principal Charles Haag, Activities Director Jan Badsky at the Decatur County Good Samaritan Center and Hospital Administrator Lynn Doeden received checks from Wal-Mart in March.

The high school got \$500, Good Samaritan \$1,000 and the hospital \$1,000.

Mr. Haag said the school plans to use the money for concession-stand equipment that can be used both indoors and outdoors.

At the hospital, Mrs. Doeden said, the \$1,000 was included with

money raised during the golf benefit last August, which was used to buy hearing equipment for newborns.

The hospital knew the grant had been awarded, she said, but Wal-Mart could only give it out at certain times. Mrs. Doeden said the hospital has the golf tournament each summer to raise money for equipment.

Mrs. Badsky said Good Samaritan would give half the money to the grade school to buy books for the First Hand Friends program, where the first graders come and read to the residents. The other half will be put toward purchasing books for the kids to read that will be kept at the center.

* County visit helps seniors learn civics

(Continued from Page 1A)
Brown explained. The project will take a lot of time, but the commissioners want to keep the plan as simple as possible. They want to keep the road names short enough that three-foot signs aren't needed. The county will have to put up about 900 signs, he said.

Commissioner Brown looked at the students, then asked them to please not steal the signs. Commissioner Ralph Unger said for each sign and post that is stolen or damaged, it costs the county between \$100 and \$150.

Is the county going to have an address just where people live, Mr. Haag asked, or will there be one for every building site in the county?

The commissioners have discussed having an address for every site, Mr. Brown said. That way, if a farmer is working at a vacant place and gets hurt, dispatch can still give out an address.

The commissioners, said Mr. Brown, would love to hear people's ideas on the project. The three are meeting with dispatchers, appraisers, law enforcement officers and post office employees.

looked at using names from the 1900 census or wheat variety names for the roads, he said, nothing has been decided.

Commissioner Brown said none of the addresses in the city will be changed.

The students toured the jail, clerk's office, register of deeds, dispatch, the appraisers office, treasurer's office, court system and the road department while in the courthouse. The event was sponsored by the Decatur County Farm Bureau.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Approved a pharmacy and stop-loss plan on the employee insurance through Corporate Plan.

- Appointed Pam May, Cody Richards and Sonya Gillespie to the Decatur County Fair Board. The commissioners hadn't received a required form from Ron Montgomery, whose term is up, so he wasn't reappointed.

- Agreed to hold the next road-naming meeting at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, May 10.

- Agreed not to meet the first Tuesday in May, since there are five Tuesdays in the month.

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