THE OBERLIN HERALD

75¢ (tax included; 54¢ delivered at home)

18 Pages, 2 Sections

Wednesday, June 1, 2005

127th Year, Number 22

Fire ruins town bowl and lounge

State fire investigator finds evidence of arson

By STEVE HAYNES

Centennial Bowl south of town in the morning, only to be called ruined the bowling alley and the back at mid afternoon to help the adjacent Red Crown Lounge.

A state fire marshal's investigator, after nine hours of mucking is that the bowling alley is a total through the debris and checking loss," Chief Cathcart said. "The orithe building, declared the fire an gin is suspicious. The state fire mararson.

One thing officers looked for was the various cash boxes and (the glass out of) the south door." bags kept in the building, which housed a lively alumni dance the Garden City, took back evidence night before. They stopped short of sealed in about half a dozen steel saying the fire had been set to cover cans and a couple of trash bags. a burglary.

the fire, but he was sure it had been checking doors and power connecset.

building, he said; the front door to break into all the others.

most of the interior had heat, water and smoke damage.

enough to rebuild.

decide," Mr. Zodrow said. "We're still in shock," Mr. Morgan said.

Volunteer firemen spent the night A fire about 3 a.m. Monday at the battling the blaze. Most went home fire marshal move debris.

"About all I can tell you right now shal is going over it now.

"There was an explosion. It blew

Mr. Dale, who drove up from

He arrived about 10 a.m.and in-Investigator Melvin Dale said terviewed witnesses and the ownhe'd have to wait for lab results to ers. He made his own check of the say exactly what was used to start interior, then toured the outside, tions. He asked firemen to set up There was no forced entry to the lights and begin removing debris.

Volunteers, some of whom had was unlocked, but the firemen had been out all night, were called back for shovel duty, clearing the floors Fire Chief Bill Cathcart said the to look for burn patterns and other brick-faced building appeared to evidence. Help was called from the be a total loss. While the lanes were Jennings and Norcatur volunteer not involved in the fire, he said departments. That took until nearly 6 p.m.

Fireman Patrick Pomeroy, the The chief estimated the loss at county's ambulance director and a \$750,000. Co-owners Ken Mor- volunteer fireman, said he was gan and Mory Zodrow said they about the second one in on the call. had insurance, but probably not He said he was hoping it would be something minor, "but when I hit "We'll let you know what we the bridge, I could see the smoke billowing out of the roof." He said the large stained-glass

(See FIRE on Page 5A)



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Emergency grant OK'd for city to re-drill a well

killed in Iraq

Soldier

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

He was a normal western Kansas boy who loved the outdoors, photography and taking pictures, a wide variety of music, his two younger brothers, two younger sisters and his wife.

That's how Allen Morton of Wright described his son, Sgt. Benjamin Morton, who was killed in action on Sunday, May 22, while serving in Mosul, Iraq. Benjamin, said Mr. Morton, felt the conviction to be doing what he was doing.

"He was proud to be in the service," said his father.

Mr. Morton said Benjamin never lived in Oberlin. Mr. Morton said he was born here. His grandparents, Rex and Billie Morton, farmed near Oberlin. Mr. Morton said he and his parents lived near Oberlin for a year or two and then moved to Rexford. The family lived there until Mr. Morton was high school age and then moved to the Dodge City area.

Only 24, Benjamin had been in Army for almost five years.

His father said his son, the oldest of five kids, decided to enlist in July 2000 and left for basic training in Fort Benning, Ga., shortly after. Benjamin wanted to raise some money for college, said Mr. Morton, so about a year after he graduated from high school, he enlisted.

That Thanksgiving, said Mr. Morton, his son graduated from basic training and went through jump school. He was stationed in Korea for a year and then assigned to Fort Lewis, in Washington.

In October, Sgt. Morton was sent to Iraq to serve.

He was with the 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, also known as Deuce Four. The group had already lost 10 soldiers in Iraq.

Last May, he and Elaina Salinas of Kansas City were married. The couple had been married only a year (See SOLDIER on Page 12A)



ON CANAL STREET Saturday morning Willard Perrin used a backhoe to try to clean tumbleweeds out of the front of the storm drain. Water backed up into front yards after - Photo by Sandy Zeigler the rain storm

Wheat fields get some relief as streets in the city fill to brim

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

drink this weekend as several storms passed through the area, opening up the skies.

It may have been enough to save a few fields, although some have already been burnt up, said Brian Olson, Kansas State University extension agronomist for northwest Kansas.

said Mr. Olson. No amount of rain is going to bring them back to life, but for those that are still green there is hope.

He said there are several fields around Oberlin that still have a good chance. Some of the tillers have been lost, he said, which drops the yield potential, but as long as the wheat flowered, the berries will get bigger with the help of the rain.

The timely weather could help farmers have some big plump berries come harvest time. That will in-

crease the yields, but he said he didn't think it would Wheat fields across Decatur County got a long be a huge benefit. If it had rained a couple of weeks ago, the story would be different.

If the area hadn't gotten the rain, said Mr. Olson, the fields would have produced nothing.

The cooler weather which is forecast for the next 10 days will also help out, he said.

Oberlin recorded 2.09 inches of rain, which in-Fields that have already turned brown are gone, cluded a brief storm Saturday morning that filled the streets with water. It was sunny and five minutes later, the skies turned gray and hail and rain started to fall.

Cass Avenue filled up quickly. Water rose over curbs south of Commercial Street as debris and tumbleweeds blocked the drain. After the rain stopped, Willard Perrin, with the city water department, used a back hoe to try to clean out the front of the drain.

The water crept up into the yards on South Cass Avenue.

(See WHEAT on Page 12A)

Oberlin has received the OK on a \$414,000 emergency grant from the Pump and Well out of Hoxie which U.S. Department of Agriculture to re-drill well No. 9 and re-work well No. 10.

hear about the Emergency Water supply wells. Located east of town, Grant, the City Council held a special meeting Thursday night to sign the paperwork.

Dave Barber, with the Rural Development, brought the papers for well could be re-drilled for summer the city attorney to look over and the mayor to sign.

Thaniel Monaco, with Miller and Associates, the consulting engineer on the job, said he would start the contracts Friday, but it will be 40 to 45 days before the contractors can mobilize.

The city will be using Woofter gave the lowest bid back in February

The council decided to re-drill After almost a year of waiting to well No. 9 since it is one of the main it is too close to well No. 10. The two wells can't be pumped together for very long.

The idea was to get the grant so the use. The grant didn't move through the state office or national office as fast as they had thought it would.

Mr. Barber said from this point, it will take five business days for the politicians to put their stamp of approval on the award, then the money will be sent to the city.

Power contract signed just in time

The Oberlin City Council approved a new power contract with Sunflower Electric Corp. at a special meeting Thursday night which included a \$12,500 credit for overpayment over the last five years.

The power contract expired last September, said City Administrator Gary Shike, and the city has been running under extensions since then.

Sunflower, a "generation and transmission" cooperative based in Hays, is really the only game in town, he said. Even if the city went with another provider Sunflower, owns the line that runs by the town. The power would still have come through them.

The last extension was scheduled to expire on Tuesday, which is why

(See POWER on Page 12A)

Council Roundup

At a meeting last Thursday, the Oberlin City Council:

· Received the OK on a \$414,000 emergency grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to re-drill well No. 9 and rework well No. 10. Story on Page <???>.

 Approved a power contract with Sunflower Electric, which included a \$12,500 credit for overpayment over the last five years. Story on Page <???>.

 Approved a recommendation of the planning commission to allow a therapeutic massage business at <where??>. Story on

6 a total loss9

* Fire destroys buisness

(Continued from Page 1A) window on the west side of the Red Crown was bulging out, but did not break. The explosion shattered the front, or south, door of the bowling alley, throwing shards of glass and score sheets 90 to 100 feet.

Mr. Dale said he didn't find a source for the explosion, but it could simply have come from the rapid buildup of heat in the fire. Flames and smoke were rolling out the west end of the bowling alley roof, over the kitchen, where the fire was most intense. There, the steel roof warped and buckled.

"At this time, I'm going to call the fire arson," he said. "As to how it was set, I'm not going to say at this time. I'll have to wait until tests are back from the lab."

Dale Heyen, who owns Oberlin Tire to the west of the bowling alley and lives in the apartment upstairs over the old lumber yard, said he got up around 3 a.m. He said he almost went right back to bed, but stopped at the kitchen table, where he always leaves a glass of water, to get a drink.

Mr. Heyen said he heard a roaring noise like there was a tornado. He said he looked out the south window and saw the flames coming out of the building next door. He called 911. Mr. Heyen said he didn't see anyone around.

While the flames were knocked down fairly soon, the crew was still mopping up hot spots five hours later.

Mr. Dale said it would take up to 30 days to finish his report and file it with the sheriff's office. Deputy Randy McHugh had been on duty the night before and caught the call for the fire.

He spent most of the day helping Mr. Dale with the investigation and gathering his own evidence. Undersheriff Michael French helped out, and reserve Deputy Barry Richards blocked off the parking lot entrance all day.

down leads on the case. He said he couldn't tell if anything was missing yet.

Mr. Dale released the building to the owners so they could board it up, and a crew of friends and relatives stood by, ready to

company," Mr. Dale said.

The investigator praised the volunteer fire

"About 95 percent of Kansas is covered the men a bonus, say \$50, for the labor.



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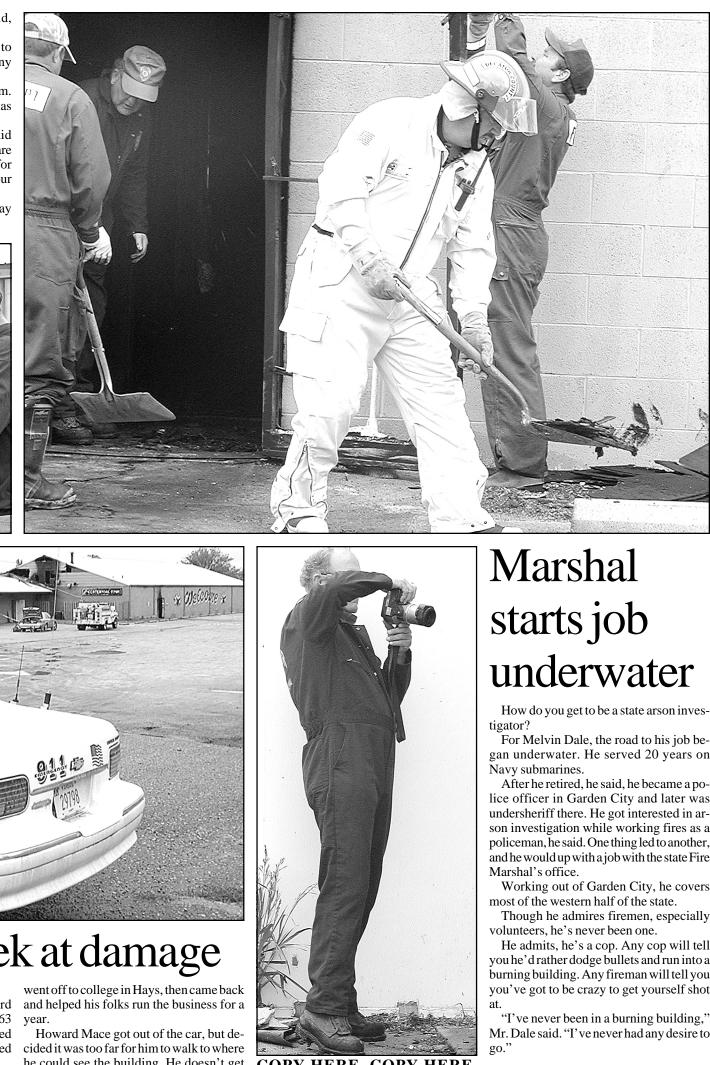
by volunteer fire departments," he said, 'and they never say 'no."

About a dozen volunteers turned up to Deputy McHugh said he will be tracking help clear the floor, he said, though many had been up all night.

"Some of them were out here from 3 a.m. 'til morning," he said, "and all they got was their \$7 bucks.'

The Decatur County firemen get paid \$12.50 a call regardless of how long they are "They have to preserve it for the insurance at the scene. The city firemen get \$12.50 for a call and then if the call lasts over an hour they get paid around \$5.25.

He said he thought the county should pay









Former owner takes a peek at damage

Joan Mace of McCook stood looking at 83 near the fire. the ruins of the Centennial Bowl and shook her head.

"We lived in that building for 11 years," she said.

Deputy Barry Richards allowed the family to stop for a closer look. Most drivers were being asked to keep moving on U.S.

She said she and her husband Howard Mace had operated the business from 1963 to 1974, when her husband Howard decided to go back into trucking. The family moved to Nebraska then.

They lived in a mobile home out back and around too well, his wife said. later in a house in town, she said.

the bowling alley from seventh grade on. He home and he drove all over the country."

he could see the building. He doesn't get

"Howard went back to trucking," his wife Their son Henry recalled helping out in recalled. "I stayed in McCook in a mobile

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