

County taxes could jump 8 percent

With increases in employee benefits and fuel prices, the Decatur County budget will jump \$100,000 next year, forcing an increase in county property taxes of about 8 percent.

At their meeting last Tuesday, Decatur County commissioners accepted the \$100,000 increase for the proposed 2006 budget, including 3.993 mill increase in the property tax levy. The amount that the

county brings in through taxes would increase \$100,000.

The budget shows a decrease in expenditures, but there is an increase in what the county will bring in through property taxes. Basically, there wasn't enough money to cover the expenses, said County Attorney Steve Hirsch. In this case some expenses were cut while others will be covered through the increase.

Last year, said Mr. Hirsch, the county went down 2 mills on the property tax levy. The county isn't getting any of the money it used to get from the state for the local tax reduction fund or city/county revenue sharing. When the state started to have budget problems, those programs were cut, and that hasn't helped the county.

The county budget is published in today's *Oberlin Herald* and a hearing will be Tues-

day morning, Oct. 4. Commissioner Ralph Unger said nothing will be final until the hearing and the commissioners vote on the budget.

For a taxpayer with a \$50,000 home, that means the owner would pay \$22.95 more a year.

County Clerk Marilyn Horn said the county expects a \$60,000 increase in employee benefits.

A lot of the departments and agencies that receive money from the county asked for increases this year, she said, but some of them stayed the same.

There was an increase in the county's valuation for 2006, she added, but not enough to cover the increase in spending.

Mr. Unger said they kind of knew the budget would have to increase this year. (See TAXES on Page 5A)

Law may force voters to use one polling site

Commissioners want comments about voting machines and polls

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

Decatur County voters might all be casting ballots at the same site because a federal law says that each polling place needs to have a handicapped-accessible voting machine, which could cost the county \$25,000 a year.

Maintenance on each machine will cost \$5,000 per year, per machine, and the county has five polling places.

Decatur County commissioners haven't decided how many machines to get. At their meeting last Tuesday, they said they wanted to hear public comments before they vote on a plan to go to a single polling place.

That would mean that voters in Jennings, Dresden and Norcatour would have to drive to Oberlin to vote, even in their own city elections.

The first year, said County Clerk Marilyn Horn, who is the election

officer for the county, the state will pay for the maintenance on the machines. After that, it is up to the county. If the county keeps the polling places in Dresden, Norcatour, Jennings and two in Oberlin, it will cost the county \$25,000 a year in maintenance, since each is \$5,000.

To have a polling place, she said, there has to be a machine available for handicapped voters. The idea is to help those who need a little extra assistance.

Mrs. Horn said the county will still use paper ballots and election judges will still be used to count the ballots. The machines are just for those who have trouble voting with paper ballots or using a voting booth.

Mrs. Horn said commissioners might want to get an opinion from voters about whether they want to spend that kind of money, or if they would rather come to one central (See POLLS on Page 5A)

Petition circulates to put Sunday sales on a special ballot

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

A petition to force an election on Sunday sales of beer and alcohol started to circulate last week.

At a meeting on Thursday, Sept. 8, the Oberlin City Council decided to allow the sales. The local option is new under a Kansas law passed this year. Voters had 61 days to comment or petition the decision before the stores would be able to open on Sundays.

Pastor Steve Smith talked with County Attorney Steve Hirsch on Friday, Sept. 9, about a petition, but it wasn't until last Wednesday that Mr. Hirsch approved the language.

The petition needs around 40 signatures so it can be certified, Mr. Hirsch said.

Signing the petition means the person wants a special election to be held on the question of beer and alcohol sales. After the petition is

turned in, said Mr. Hirsch, its has to be checked to make sure the signatures are those of registered voters. The city has 45 days from certification to hold an election. Since there isn't a scheduled election, it would have to be a special vote.

Mr. Hirsch said Pastor Smith wrote the petition, but he gave him the required language according to state law.

As of Monday, Pastor Smith said he has 43 signatures. Some of the signatures might be thrown out when the petition is verified, he said, so he wants to make sure he has enough.

The main reason that he is circulating the petition, said Pastor Smith, is because he thinks the voters should get to decide the issue, not the council. He said he is against the Sunday sale of alcohol, actually the (See PETITION on Page 5A)

Woman shocked by snake in yard

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

Still shaking, Connie Pomeroy showed her husband the body of a rattlesnake that had been waiting outside their back door only minutes earlier.

Last Thursday, Mrs. Pomeroy said, she walked out the back door of her house, behind the Decatur County Courthouse. After walking past the green two-foot rattlesnake curled up in the sun, she said, she couldn't walk back past him to go inside and call her husband.

She ran across to the courthouse and used the intercom at the back door to Bert Cool at dispatch. Undersheriff Randy McHugh came down and killed the snake by cutting off its head, which he buried for good measure.

Undersheriff McHugh said rattlesnakes will move to places where there is sunshine in the fall, and

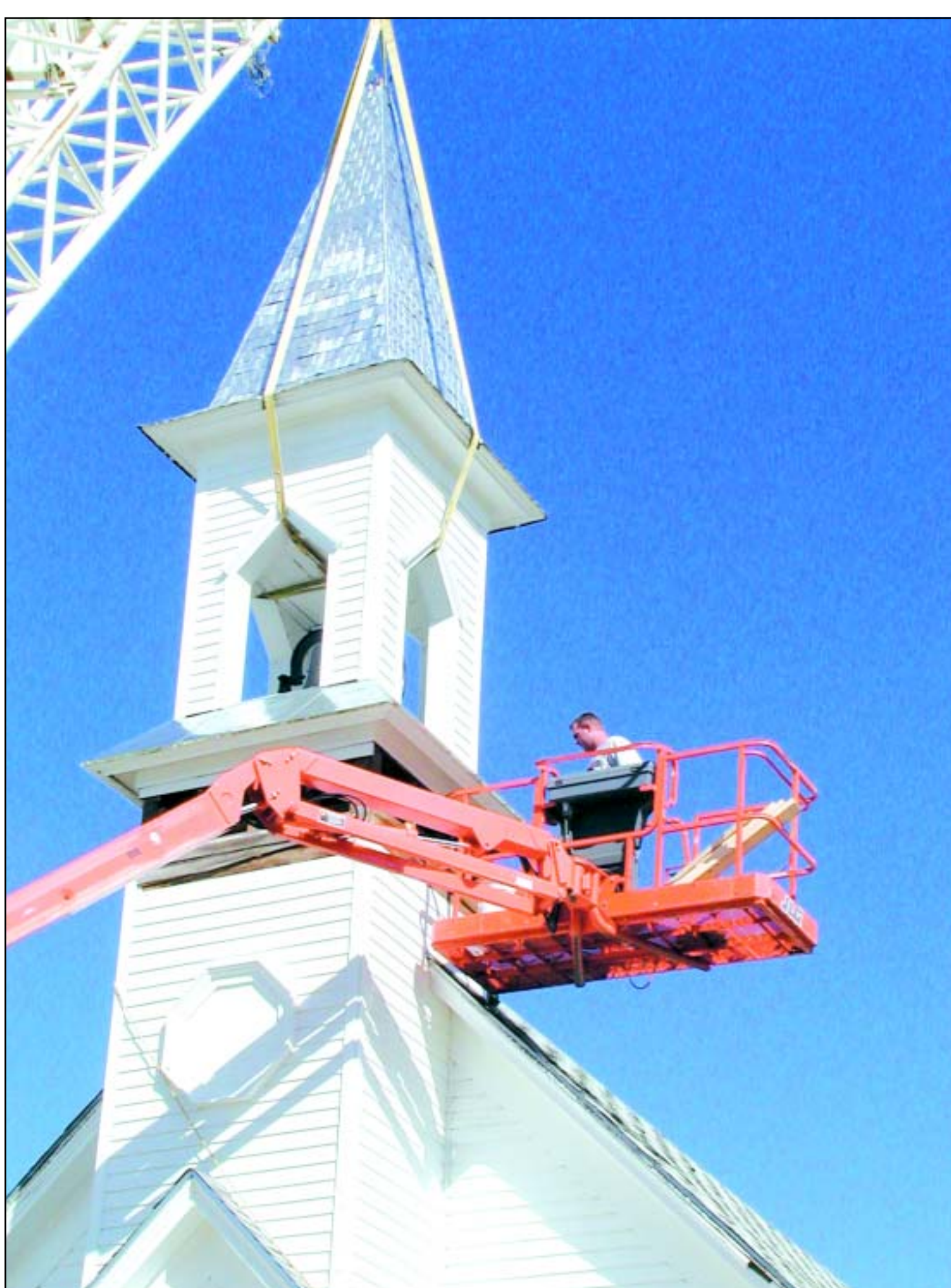
people need to be careful.

The snake, bright green, had four rings and a button on its rattle. Although the head was chopped off, the body continued to move in the dirt.

Suzanne Ahlberg, chief nursing officer at the Decatur County Hospital, said they can treat snake bite patients in the emergency room. She said it helps if the patient can identify what kind of snake bit them. If someone can kill the snake and bring it in, that's a good idea.

After a snake bite, she said, the victim should get to the nearest medical facility as soon as possible.

Mrs. Ahlberg said the hospital has the shots patients will need it bitten by a snake. The hospital also works with others in the area so they have vaccine in case the patient has to be taken somewhere else for further treatment.



WITH A LARGE CRANE, Doak Construction workers put the steeple back on St. Mark's Lutheran Church last Tuesday while a man on a lift (above) secured everything. Curator Sharleen Wurm (standing below), Barb Dehlinger (left) and Dorothy Moore watched. — Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

Steeple restored, put back on old church

The first refurbishing job on St. Mark's Lutheran Church since it moved to the Decatur County Museum has been completed, with the steeple back on top of the building.

In July, the museum made the payment to move the church into Oberlin from Norcatour. The 21-mile journey took a day and a half, but it required over a year of preparation.

Curator Sharleen Wurm said before the steeple could be put back on top of the church, some work needed to be done. The steeple was removed for the move since otherwise the building would have been too tall.

Since the steeple was already on the ground, the board decided to start at the top of the church and work down in restoration.

On the steeple, said Mrs. Wurm, they put new metal shingles that Board Member Greg Fidele made, although they were able to repair some of the old ones. The wood was patched and painted, the bell mount painted, the bell cleaned and polished and bird nests, which had been packed into the steeple over the last 117 years were removed.



All of the work, she said, was done by board members, staff and volunteers. One man even purchased the paint and then painted the steeple for the museum. Last Tuesday, the crew from Doak Construction returned to the museum and with their equipment, (See STEEPLE on Page 5A)

* Taxes might jump

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The commissioners have several options, said Mrs. Horn. The \$100,000 increase can be accepted by resolution or that much can be cut out of the budget. The employee benefits need to be kept, she said. The resolution has to be printed in *The Oberlin Herald*.

"I hate to do this, but \$60,000 of it is employee benefits," said Commissioner Doyle Brown, "What can we do?"

Just the increase in fuel costs for the county is going to require more money, he added, and no one knows for sure what prices are going to do. Mr. Brown said he didn't see any way out but to do the resolution. He said the commissioners have told department heads and agencies requesting money that they would do what they could.

Commissioner Patricia Glenn said she thought the county needed to accept the resolution for the increase.

Mr. Unger said the county is on a cash basis. Last year, a lot of the reserves were spent and he doesn't want to see the county without a carry over. Last time the county got into that spot, he said, they ended up having to borrow money with no-fund warrants.

The other option, said Mr. Unger, is to do a 6 percent cut in all the departments.

The commissioners, however, decided to accept the increase.

Mrs. Horn said the budget is an open record if anyone wants to stop by the office and look at it. She said she would walk people through it and explain the funds.

* Polls may merge

(Continued from Page 1A)

polling place.

She noted that the maintenance cost could mean an increase in taxes. Each mill this year brought in \$31,397, so the increase would be less than a mill. For a \$50,000 home, each mill costs a homeowner around \$5.75 a year.

The new program, said Mrs. Horn, has to be in place by Jan. 1, but the county might not get the machines until February. If the machines aren't here by then, she didn't say what would happen.

County Attorney Steve Hirsch said he didn't like the idea of one polling place, because when people go out to vote, that is often a day they go to the local diner to eat, or shop on Main Street in their town, or do other errands. By having everyone come to one spot, that will take away from the other towns' businesses.

The commissioners meet Tuesday mornings starting at 9 a.m. in the second-floor meeting room at the courthouse in Oberlin. Meetings are open to the public.

Commissioners didn't set a date when they would talk about the election machines again.

Cleaning up



TO HELP SPRUCE UP the Oberlin City Library, volunteer Sally Henningson cut back a bush while Rhonda May (not pictured) planted shrubs, bulbs and grasses. Mrs. Henningson said they just wanted to do something to help improve the quality of life in Oberlin. Two boys from Sappa Valley Youth Ranch helped.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

Council looks at audit prices

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**

The Oberlin City Council received bids from three companies to do the city's yearly audit, but didn't make any decisions.

The city has worked with Mapes and Miller out of Norton for over seven years, but since it is an expense, the council decided to ask for bids.

City Administrator Gary Shike said the council doesn't have to make a decision until next spring.

The council looked at the bids at the meeting on Thursday, Sept. 8, at The Gateway.

The first bid came from Contryman Associates of Scottsbluff Neb. For one year, the bid was \$10,000 and for a three-year contract, a total of \$25,500. In the three-year contract, the audit would cost \$8,000 for the first year, \$8,500 for the second and \$9,000 for the third.

The second bid was from Adams, Brown, Beran and Ball from Colby. For one year, the bid was \$8,900 and for a three-year contract the total was \$24,541.

The last bid was from Mapes and Miller. For one year the bid was \$8,934. The company didn't provide a bid for a three-year contract.

Mapes and Miller was the only firm represented at the meeting, with both John Mapes and Steve

Zodrow in the audience.

Mayor Ken Shobe said the council isn't unhappy with the service Mapes and Miller has provided over the years, but they thought they needed to look at other firms.

Mr. Mapes said his firm isn't the highest paid and isn't the lowest. He said they would put the job they do against any other firm in the state.

Councilman Jay Anderson asked Mr. Mapes why with six offices, the firm doesn't have an office in Oberlin. Mr. Mapes said there isn't an office here because there is a good certified public accountant here. Government audits, he said, are really a specialty area, something the Oberlin firm doesn't do.

It is up to the city what to do, said Mr. Mapes.

There are things that can be cut out of the audit to make it cheaper. He said he wouldn't feel comfortable doing that or making recommendation to cut items. Other government entities don't make those cuts, he said.

Mr. Shike said he wasn't comfortable with the idea of getting less information.

The council doesn't have to make a decision now, said Mayor Shobe. All of the bids are relatively close. The council decided to table the discussion until spring.

Machines need to be updated

The county's road and bridge supervisor says he wants to upgrade his department's equipment, since some of it was built in the 1960s and '70s.

Supervisor Tim Stallman said he is still negotiating on the price of a used dozer, but it is here and has been used on the bridge projects. The small dozer the department has will then be traded in.

At the commissioners meeting last Tuesday, Mr. Stallman said he

and the crew have been talking about the other equipment, trying to decide which ones needed to be traded off or sold.

Mr. Stallman said in the last rain, some of the roads in the northeast part of the county got washed. The crew has been working on them, he said. Some dirt was washed away from a bridge on the Kanona/Danbury Road by water accumulating in the draw.

The bridge needs to be removed,

said Mr. Stallman, so a culvert can be put in.

The crew, he said, is doing the dirt work around the five bridges that have been replaced, while others are blading roads and some are mowing.

He said they are still having a problem with one of the four Agco tractors. It seems if one has a problem with a part or breaks down, then the others are sure to have the same problem.

Papers feature church picture around the world

Oberlin was put on the map this summer as a picture of a 117-year-old church being moved into town made its way around the globe.

After the St. Mark's Lutheran Church was moved in July from Norcatur to Oberlin, a picture taken by the *Hays Daily News* was put on the Associated Press wire and picked up around the world.

The picture showed up in both Denver dailies, the *Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News*, a few days after the move.

The *Oberlin Herald* received a letter from Dorothy Sproul Stephens saying that the picture showed up in the *Fresno Bee* in California.

"Read the printing below the picture and noted it was the St. Mark's Lutheran Church being moved down U.S. Route 36 from Norcatur, Kan., to the Last Indian Raid museum in Oberlin," said Mrs. Stephens. "Small world! Good publicity, as I am sure it made it in several papers."

Gisela Fisher said she received a call from a friend in Germany and the picture showed up in a paper there. *Oberbergische Volkszeitung*, which is a daily in the vicinity of Cologne.

The headline over the picture read "Church on Wheels." Mrs. Fisher, who was born in Germany, said you just don't move buildings in that country. The roads aren't wide enough and buildings aren't built so they can be moved.

Museum Curator Sharleen Wurm said the picture also ran in papers in Virginia and Texas. People here who have relatives in those states brought in clippings.

The latest report is that the church ran in the *Sun* tabloid with the headline "Holy Roller! Abandoned church keeps on trucking to museum."

The article said that the moving of the building "was like a minor miracle."

* Steeple restored, put back on roof

(Continued from Page 1A)

raised the steeple to its original spot on top of the church.

Now that the steeple is back in place, the board and staff will start to focus on the church building.

Mrs. Wurm said the idea is to restore the entire building back to its appearance when it was built in 1888. That means painting and patching the entire outside.

Inside, said Mrs. Wurm, she wants to get rid of the plaster on the walls and go back to the wanes-

coating.

Although the church didn't have a heater or air conditioner in 1888, she said, they want to put both in so the church can be used in all seasons.

The museum is taking donations for the project, said Mrs. Wurm.

For the most part, she said, they have raised the money to pay for moving the church, although the entire bill hasn't been paid yet.

Anyone who wants to donate can call Mrs. Wurm at the museum, (785) 475-2712.

Group offers cancer support

The Cancer Support Group will meet at 7 p.m. next Tuesday, in McCook Community Hospital.

Mary Ann Madden and Jennifer Fortkamp, certified arthritis self-help course leaders from the Arthritis Foundation, will present the pain management self-help program.

Current cancer patients, survivors, family members and caregivers are encouraged to attend this meeting.

For details, call Susan Harris-Broomfield at (308) 345-8550.

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