

City agrees to look for runway grant

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

In a special meeting last Wednesday, the Oberlin City Council said yes to attempts to get a grant for a longer, wider runway at the Oberlin Airport to serve a firm that wants to buy the Jennings School.

City Administrator Gary Shike said he had met last Tuesday with Decatur County commissioners and members of the Oberlin-Decatur County Area Economic Development Corp. board, along with representatives of BCI, a bus company out of California which plans to buy the school.

The California firm hopes to create 20 jobs to start and then grow from there at a bus refurbishing plant at the old school. An upholstery firm might move in as well, bringing more jobs, but the firms want easy access for corporate jets. To improve the Oberlin airport, the city would have to get grants from the state or the Federal Aviation Administration, officials said.

The original idea was to build a 5,000-foot runway near Jennings so the company can fly large planes into the new location. Complications with the air strip stopped that

plan. Officials found out, for one thing, that it would be illegal to use county road equipment to grade a private runway.

Officials suggested improving the Oberlin Airport to provide a longer and wider landing strip for business jets. The plan shows a runway 75 feet wide and 4,800 feet long running northwest from the airport.

The council held the special meeting to discuss the plan with airport board members, a county commissioner and members of the economic development board.

Councilman Joe Stanley asked if the airport would have to be manned 24 hours a day. Bob Fraker, airport manager and fixed-base operator, said he didn't think so. At the McCook Airport, he said, they have someone on call.

In the past, said Mr. Shike, the Federal Aviation Administration has objected to the light poles in the parking lot of the fairground, saying that planes trying to take off and land have to go through that airspace.

Is an automated weather observation system still in the works for the airport? Gene

Gallentine, an airport board member, asked. It is, said Mr. Shike, but he would probably try to stall it if they go forward with a new runway so the equipment will be in the right spot.

There are a number of things that would be nice about having a longer runway, said Mr. Shike. It could help get the government to pay for runway lighting and could be a benefit for other businesses.

"I think we have to try this," he said. How much manpower is it going to take (See CITY on Page 8A)

Plan raises state payments by \$59 per child

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

Kansas school districts will get an extra \$59 per pupil based on a plan passed by the Legislature this month, but Oberlin school officials say they really don't know how much more money — if any — they'll have this fall.

Published reports show that the Oberlin School District will get \$119,412 more next year, said Superintendent Kelly Glodt, but that's based on this year's enrollment.

Just with the difference between the kindergarten and the senior class — 42 students graduating and 20 little ones expected this fall — there is a loss of 22 kids, he said.

Since the Supreme Court still has to rule on the bill, he added, there's no way to tell what will happen, and that leaves a lot of things up in the air.

Last year, districts received \$4,257 per student as the state base payment, the starting point for all budget calculations. With the increase, said Mr. Glodt, districts will get \$4,316 per pupil, but the new money is marked mostly for special programs. In the 2003-2004 school year the district received \$3,070,699 in the general fund and this last school year the district got \$3,222,549. That is a \$151,850 increase.

Last year's general budget is hard to compare because of the changed low enrollment and correlation weightings, said Mr. Glodt, so even

though there was an increase in the base per pupil aid, the district got less full time equivalency weighting. The district did get more money.

Although the increase is in the bill passed by the Legislature, the Kansas Supreme Court still has to approve the plan, he said. Oral arguments will be before the court on Thursday, June 22.

That leaves schools with a problem: Since the court hasn't said the plan is OK, Mr. Glodt said, districts can't do their budgets for next year.

In the last few years, he said, the budget process has been frustrating as school officials wait for the Legislature and the courts to act. Normally, he said, the school board tried to hold the budget workshops in early June, since the budget has to be done around Aug. 25. Normally, the Legislature is through with its work by April or May.

Since the oral arguments in front of the Supreme Court aren't going to be given until late June, he said, the budget workshops can't really start until after that. The court could say no to the plan. It could demand more money or force the Legislature to spread money around differently.

Mr. Glodt said he can play with numbers on paper, but that won't do much good, since they don't know for sure how much they will get. The district hasn't even started teacher contract negotiations for next year (See STATE on Page 8A)

Wheat shows stress during annual tour at plot west of town

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

Around 20 men and women got a look at 20 wheat varieties at the annual Wheat Plot Tour just west of town at the May family farm on Thursday.

The group met up at the 4-H building at the Decatur County Fairground for breakfast cooked by the Mays before heading to the field.

The varieties were planted on Sept. 19, and for the most part have been growing ever since, although at least one, Hatcher, didn't seem to grow at all.

With the lack of rain, said Roger May, there is a lot of variability in the plot.

Both Brian Olson, regional agronomist with Kansas State University, and Chuck Johnson with

AgriPro, talked about the wheat varieties in the field.

Before they started, Mr. Olson said he wanted Rich Shaw, who owns Shaw Aerial Spraying, to talk about what he has seen from his plane.

Mr. Shaw said on stubble fields from here to Goodland and from here to Smith Center, the fields look like a sunburst. It appears to be some kind of disease or virus that can be seen from the air and is spreading.

This year has been bad for wheat streak, said Mr. Olson. If you go south of here, you see a lot more drought-stressed yellow wheat.

If it doesn't get cold and stay cold in the winter, said Mr. Olson, the viruses stay active for a lot longer. (See WHEAT on Page 8A)

Water use drops a little in Oberlin

With rain and cooler days, Oberlin's water use stayed under 600,000 gallons in a day last week, a switch from the previous week when the city pumped up to 1 million gallons in a day.

Even though people used less water last week, don't forget that those on city water are still on the even/odd watering system.

That means people can water from 12:01 a.m. to 9 a.m. and from 8 p.m. to midnight on their designated day. Those with even-numbered addresses can water Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. Those with

odd addresses can water Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

No outside water use is allowed on Mondays or in the middle of the day.

The city pumped:

- 445,000 gallons on Monday, May 29.
- 453,000 gallons on Tuesday, May 30.
- 459,000 gallons last Wednesday.

- 505,000 gallons on Thursday.
- 545,000 gallons on Friday.
- 574,000 gallons on Saturday.
- 549,000 gallons on Sunday.



JUST ON THE SCENE the first time, firemen worked on the roof of Phil Erickson's house on East Commercial to put outside a fire inside. The firefighters were called back to the home early Sunday. — Herald staff photo by Kim Davis

Two fires destroy one Oberlin home

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

An Oberlin man's home was destroyed by two fires Saturday night and Sunday morning.

Firemen first were called to Phil Erickson's home at 1102 E. Commercial at 8:46 p.m. Saturday. Fire Chief Bill Cathcart said Mr. Erickson was out working in his yard when a neighbor came over and said the house was on fire.

When the firemen arrived, the chief said, there was smoke coming out of the eaves. The firefighters attacked it, said Chief Cathcart, and put it out pretty quickly.

The kitchen was destroyed by flames and the living room was

damaged. There was heavy heat and smoke damage in the house.

Although there was smoke rolling out of the roof, there weren't any visible flames from the street.

Chief Cathcart said the fire had started because of an electrical short in a lamp cord in the kitchen.

By 10:22 p.m., the volunteers were done. Everything was out and they headed back to the fire station. Chief Cathcart said they cleaned everything and reloaded so the trucks would be ready for the next call.

At 2:07 a.m., the next call came in, back to the same location.

This time there were flames leaping to the sky and the roof had collapsed.

For the second fire, Mr. Erickson

wasn't at home.

Chief Cathcart said he can't pin down exactly what happened to start the second fire. It could have been hot embers, he said, and there were some chemicals stored by the back door. The fire did re-ignite near the back door, he added.

He said they were unaware of the chemicals the first time they were at the house because they were covered by debris from the first fire.

It could have been that the containers of chemicals were damaged in the first fire.

After the damage of the second fire, said Chief Cathcart, the modular house is a total loss.

A little over three hours after the

second call came, the firemen went back to the station, where they cleaned everything and got ready for the next call. There weren't any other problems after that, said Chief Cathcart.

The volunteers had another call about 8 p.m. Sunday, when a transformer blew up near the old Star Motel on Frontier Parkway.

Dispatchers said a fire under the power pole was put out quickly, and firemen were told not to make the run.

A few homes in the area were without power for a while. City Administrator Gary Shike said he thought the problem was caused by a squirrel.

One last touch



AT THE SUMMERFEST CAR SHOW Saturday, a Nebraska man cleaned the windshield of his pickup. The show brought in more than 100 vehicles. See details about the show, plus photos, on the OH! Page in Section B. — Herald staff photo by Jim Merriott

Teenage girl missing

A 16-year-old Oberlin girl has been missing for over a week now.

Although the family has notified authorities and Chantelle Beneda's picture has been published and posted across the state, officials say there has been no word from the girl.

She is the daughter of Terese and Greg Vontz and Ron Beneda, all of Oberlin.

Mrs. Vontz said her daughter was last seen on Friday, May 26, heading south on U.S. 83 in her yellow 2004 Dodge Neon. She said they believe she is with Sean G. Fife, 21, who she became acquainted with in February.

Although Miss Beneda's parents didn't agree with her relationship with Mr. Fife, she said, the couple apparently stayed in contact. Mr. Fife is on probation in Decatur County for felony forgery, said Police Chief Wade Lockhart, basically for using his brother's identity. Mrs. Vontz said he also had some run-ins with the law in Tennessee.

She said her daughter, who will be a junior at Decatur Community High School next year, has never (See GIRL on Page 8A)