

* State OK's plan

(Continued from Page 1A)
 sicians, a nurse practitioner and surgeon, which has been done. The hospital is doing more marketing and retaining quality health-care providers, she said., and they have worked with Rep. Jerry Moran on health care issues.

Education, a school bond issue to improve buildings didn't pass, but the district has put money into technology equipment, and that will probably increase. The district has been able to attract quality young teachers.

The real estate offices here have marketed houses outside the county. Ms. Grafel said they have done a great job with that through websites.

One of the main things out of the old plan was to use Tequity as a contact to get businesses here. Ms. Grafel said the Colorado company did send some contacts, but none of them worked out.

Ms. Grafel said some of the same areas are touched on in the new plan, which is broken into several areas including youth improvement, community improvement, citizen engagement and the goals.

The five goal areas include Sappa Lake, building a volunteer network, marketing and economic development, maximizing existing facilities and leadership development. For each area, an action team has been set up with volunteers.

Under Sappa Lake, the goals are in two years to "market a lake, disc golf course, walking trails — with identifying signs, maps and trash receptacles for visitors from far and near."

The other goals include: to create a management team that will coordinate activities, seek donations through the Decatur Area Development Fund and keep the walking trails and disc golf course maintained.

Under volunteer network, the goals include expanding the county's volunteer pool.

With marketing and economic development, the goal is to establish a foundation with \$500,000, establish a marketing program with a paid marketer, mentoring program and Internet support.

Under maximize existing facilities, the action team will identify the community's assets and programs and see how they can be enhanced. Some of those include: the schools, The Gateway civic center, hospital and clinic, golf course, Sappa Park, theater, Main Street, museum, fair and pool.

Under leadership development, the idea is that half the graduating class will get some exposure to the four sectors of what Mr. Woodbury calls the "public square," government, business, education and health/human services. The idea is to contact organizations and have them invite students to meetings, set up seats for the youth on boards, do an intergenerational mentoring program and set up programs to develop youth leadership.

The plan was signed by the county commissioners before it was sent to the state.

Most of the action teams have started to work on their goal areas, said Ms. Grafel. Besides the possible incentives the state can offer for businesses, it is good for the community to get together every five years and talk about goals and a path they want to follow, she said.

* School loses count

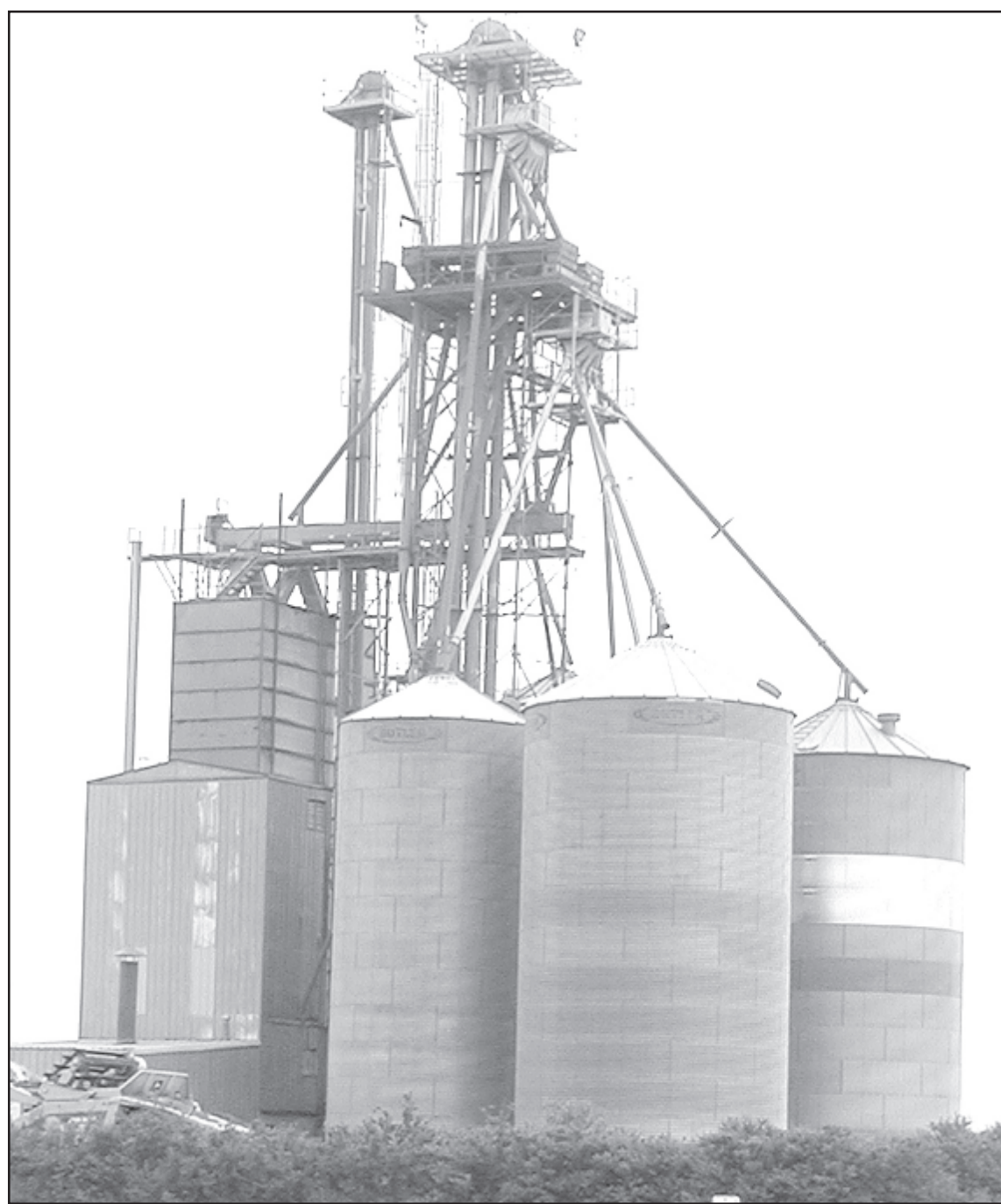
(Continued from Page 1A)
 money the school district gets. The full-time equivalency number used for the budget was 405 and it will stay at that number.

Each year, he said, the district has can choose among a three-year average, this year's number or last year's number, depending on which is the highest.

The highest number was 405, last year's number, so the district is using it. Last year, said Mr. Glodt, was the first year in a long time that there was an increase in students.

The only way the count will affect this year's budget is if there is a huge increase in kids before count day.

Next year, said Mr. Glodt, the district will probably use the three-year average for the number of students. If the average is less than 405, then the district might face a budget cut.



AT THE FEED YARD north of town on U.S. 83, the grain towers stand tall and can be seen from the highway.
 — Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

Investors helped start business

Thanks to 45 investors, the Decatur County Feed Yard was able to get a start back in 1971.

Since then, the ownership has changed hands, but people in the area still remember when the business north of town got its start.

One of the original investors was Howard Kessinger, who owned *The Oberlin Herald* at the time and now owns *The Marysville Advocate*.

Mr. Kessinger said the feed yard wouldn't be here today without the pushing of the Kenny Rydquist. Mr. Kessinger said the Oberlin Chamber of Commerce had invited Earnest Langley of Hereford, Texas to speak at its annual dinner. A lawyer, he told how the "Golden Spread" of the Texas panhandle feed yards had developed and the huge impact the yards had on Hereford and Deaf Smith County.

Either Mr. Langley or some other leaders from Hereford, said Mr. Kessinger, had given a similar talk in Goodland and that had prompted feed yard development there.

Mr. Langley, said Mr. Kessinger, invited people from Decatur County to visit Hereford, "which had a small industry perfected in having visiting communities come by busloads to

that friendly, booming town to tour the yards, slaughterhouses and visit with coming leaders."

Mr. Rydquist, the incoming president of the Oberlin Chamber, announced that they were going to Hereford. A bus load went and the Texans provided entertainment at a dinner one night.



H. Kessinger

"Oberlin's night was carried by Co-op Manager John Juenemann, who sang 'I've Been Everywhere,' better than the guy who wrote it," said Mr. Kessinger. "When he finished singing and playing his guitar, Langley announced they wanted John back to run for governor the next year."

People came home with enthusiasm to work on a feed yard here, he said. The community raised money in a matter of days. Both Milton Nitsch and Harold Lohofener were keys in getting this done, Mr. Kessinger said.

"Another positive step was the development of the Decatur County Chamber of Commerce," said Mr. Kessinger, "which, like the Deaf Smith County Chamber, has been a positive force for community betterment."

"My thoughts often turn to the founding of the Decatur County Feed Yard," said Philip Finley of

Colby, "and all the great residents of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcatur and across Decatur County for their courage and foresight to have such a strong economic generator working today to supply wages for employees."

"Years ago, when four, then 10 and then more community leaders gathered together with such a bold proposal," said Mr. Finley, "I was a county extension agriculture agent, but it was a moment I shall never forget and will cherish all my years."

Herschel Betts, Oberlin, said he and his sister Phyllis Lohofener inherited stocks in the feed yard from their father.

Mr. Betts said in 1977, the stockholders were meeting at the American Legion. At that time there was some discussion that the stockholders needed to put cattle in at the yard. He said he and his sister discussed it and decided it would cost more than they could stand, but they put in a pen of cattle.

When he sold that pen, said Mr. Betts, he bought his first John Deere tractor with an enclosed cab.

He said the same year they were having the meetings at the Legion, Mr. Nitsch bought the yard and called his son-in-law, Warren Weibert, to come run it.

"Warren has done a wonderful job," said Mr. Betts, "and has built a wonderful feed lot."

* Man brought changes to yard

(Continued from Page 1A)
 through the process to the packing house to a carcass on the train.

The numbers are unique, said Mr. Weibert. A device reads the chips and then on the computer, you can read how many days an animal has been at the yard, its weight and a guess on when the animal will be ready to leave. Basically, managers can track the production of the steer.

Other feed yards are coming up to speed with this process, he said, but the yard here was one of the pioneers.

Part of the reason these ear tags are important, said Mr. Weibert, is because places like Japan, Korea and the European Union now insist on knowing the birth date of each animal because of mad cow disease. People want to know what older cattle ate seven to nine years ago, and many countries allow only younger beef to be imported.

Since they started using these electronic chips in 1994, said Mr. Weibert, the process has been modified and refined.

Part of the 35 years of success at the yard has been because of Mr. Weibert's willingness to join and learn from others in the field.

In 1977, he joined the Kansas Livestock Association and became a director in 1978 or 1979.

He was on the Feeders Council Board a few years later. In 1985, he became the chairman and in 1989, the president.

The same year, Mr. Weibert served as the president of Cattle Facts, which let him work with cattlemen all over the United States doing market analysis and providing information about the industry.



Warren and Carol Weibert

Cattle Facts picked people to study trends and cattle. Mr. Weibert participated in this group, which he said exposed him to industry leaders from across the country. It helped him study the future of the cattle business, he said.

Being a member of those organizations also helped lead to attracting customers to the yard here, because the business is aggressive, progressive and offers new technology, he said. Now the yard has customers in 23 states from coast to coast.

Mr. Weibert said none of this would be possible without the support of the staff. He said his wife, Carol, has worked alongside him. She was very pregnant with their first child when the opportunity came up, he said.

"She has been a tremendous asset to me," said Mr. Weibert.

The Weiberts have a son, Chris, and daughter, Julie.

* Feed yard open for 35 years here

(Continued from Page 1A)
 \$599,000 project. The Decatur Co-op Association supplied posts.

That same month, construction started on the project with Mr. Willard saying that the lot would be taking cattle by the beginning of July. In April, the yard was 65 percent complete.

In June, the yard started taking cattle from Texas, New Mexico and Louisiana, nearly two weeks ahead of schedule. The first load of cattle was shipped from the facility later that year. The animals belonged to Weldon Brooks, Clayton

Five years later, Mr. Nitsch, father of Carol Weibert, bought the yard from the community groups.

"We have agreed to purchase all of the 2,590 outstanding shares of the two corporations involved," said Mr. Nitsch in an article in *The Oberlin Herald*.

The same article said that the original investors who retained stock certificates realized a healthy profit, as the face value climbed 150 percent.

Mr. Weibert moved here to be-

come general manager.

Since the yard started, said Mr. Weibert, the biggest change in the business is that cattlemen are being paid today for the quality of beef they produce.


At the yard they manage cattle as individual animals, which would have been unheard of 35 years ago. Cattle used to be finished at 1,100 pounds, he added, and now they make 1,350.

"We now use computers in every aspect of the job," he said, noting that they didn't even have computers when he first got here.

Besides Mr. Weibert, the yard has had four managers, starting with Mr. Willard, then Mr. Hardy in 1973, Dave Haresnape and Kevin Unger, the present manager.

The yard has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Drovers Magazine*, *Beef Magazine* and many others, including one publication in Germany.

Mr. Weibert said two employees have worked at the yard for a long time: Danny Eiler, 30 years, and Douglas Horn, 22 years.




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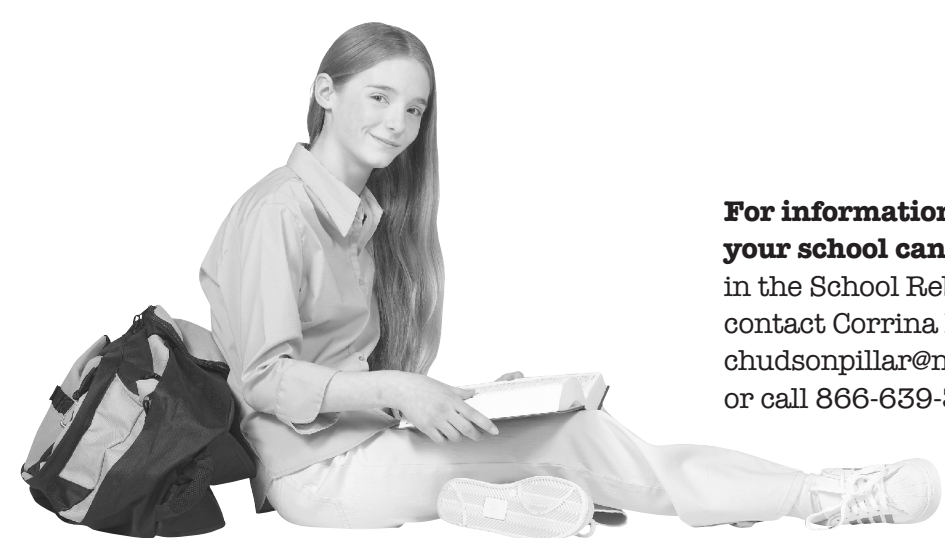
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