

## Voters to mark ballots in hometowns

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

Decatur County will have polling places in outlying towns for the general election on Nov. 7 instead of just one in Oberlin as there was for the primary election last month.

The county went to one polling place because it had only two of the new voting machines, one for people to use to vote and one as a back up. A new federal law says that every polling place has to have a machine to help people who have a hard time seeing, hearing or have a handicap that makes it hard to use a paper ballot.

After the primary in August, the Decatur

County commissioners got letters from the Norcat and Jennings City Councils complaining about the one polling place and asking for the county to reconsider the change.

The county didn't get more machines because of the cost of maintenance, about \$2,500 a machine each year. Commissioners said no one had complained, though they had discussed the plan at length and it was in the paper several times that the county would have one polling place.

On Monday, County Clerk Marilyn Horn, who serves as the county election officer,

said she picked up three more of the machines, giving the county five. That means the polling places in Jennings, Dresden and Norcat can open back up. Everyone who votes in Oberlin, she said, will still vote at The Gateway.

Mrs. Horn said she sent an e-mail out to all of the state's county clerks to see if they had any extra machines after the pool meeting in Jennings at the end of August. One clerk had three spares.

The clerk, said Mrs. Horn, thought she was going to need the three machines but after the primary realized she had three too

many.

She said the secretary of state's office paid for the machines and just has to agree that Decatur County will take over the maintenance.

On Monday afternoon, she said, she hasn't talked to any of the city clerks about the extra machines.

Before this year, people in Norcat voted at City Hall, those in Jennings at the Senior Center and those in Dresden at the Methodist Church.

Paper ballots offered at each location, since only about 250 people can vote on one

of the machines in a day.

Mrs. Horn said she is getting ready to send in the "smart cards" for each machine to the secretary of state's office to get the ballots for the general election made. The cards and paper ballots will be mailed back.

She said she won't send in the cards until after Friday. By Friday, Sept. 22, the county has to mail the ballots out to voters serving in the Armed Forces.

With the general election coming up, she added, the last day to register to vote is Monday, Oct. 25. The clerk's office will stay open until 9 p.m. that night.

## Feed yard celebrates 35 years

### Yard going strong

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

A community campaign, with help from area banks, the U.S. Small Business Administration and area investors, got the Decatur County Feed Yard going 35 years ago.

Today, it's known around the world as an innovator in the beef business.

In 35 years, the yard has changed hands, grown from 18,000 to 38,000 head and delved into technology.

Warren Weibert and his wife Carol started working at the yard in February 1977 and they now own the facility. Mr. Weibert said the yard employs 32 people now, consumes over a million and a half bushels of corn and thousands of tons of hay each year, buys cattle from both area and distant farmers and pay a lot of taxes.

Plus, it's a great economic development success story for the county.

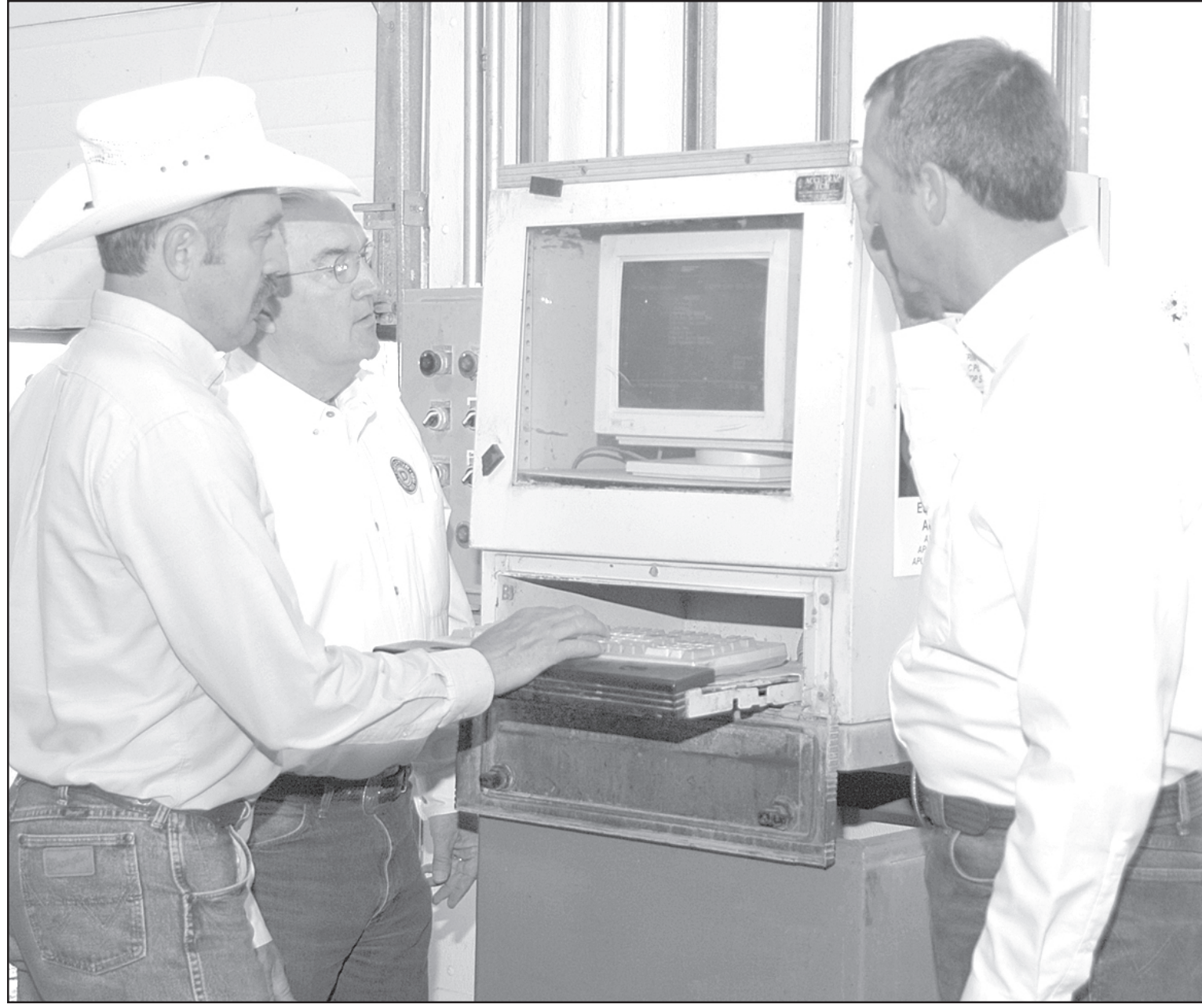
Mr. Weibert said he grew up feeding cattle. He was reared on a farm in Marion County and Mrs. Weibert grew up in Oberlin. They met at Kansas State University in Manhattan. After the two got married, they moved away, he said, but they moved back to Oberlin to raise a family.

The community movement to build a feed yard here got started in 1971 when Fred Willard was hired as the manager.

Howard Benton, then head of the Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce, led the effort. According to the Sept. 30, 1971, edition of *The Oberlin Herald* Mr. Benton was elected the president of Decatur County Community Yard Inc., formed to lease facilities from a separate development company and operate the feed lot.

Don Kump was elected president of Decatur County Area Development Inc., which was organized to obtain money from the Small Business Administration and lease cattle feeding facilities to the operating firm. The county's banks pitched in to make a loan.

In October, George Hardy was hired as the assistant manager. An article that month said the "SBA will guarantee its limit \$350,000 on a \$480,000 loan to be made by the five financial institutions in Decatur County. An additional \$270,000 is



ON THE COMPUTER, owner Warren Weibert, manager Kevin Unger and supply development manager Dan Dorn (above) monitored the progress of an animal in the electronic cattle management barn. One of the cattle at the feed yard (below) showed the electronic ear tags used to track animals. — Herald photos by Jeanie Unger and Kimberly Davis

to be raised in Decatur, bringing the total to \$750,000."

The four in charge of raising the money to get the feed lot on its feet were Mr. Benton, Harold Lohofener, Milton Nitsch and Bob Rapp. The goal of \$270,000 was met, the largest amount ever raised in a local effort.

In November 1971, grading started at the site five miles north of town. Mr. Willard started taking bids for construction. In the same edition, Mr. Willard said he planned to run the lot at 90 percent capacity, pushing through 38,000 to 40,000 head of cattle a year. When the lot got into full swing, he said, it would employ 18 to 20 people.

In February 1972, Dabco Inc. from La Salle, Colo., was hired as the general contractor. Nichols Construction Co., an Oberlin firm, was named to put up six metal buildings and supply concrete for the (See FEED YARD on Page 10A)



### Man's dream a reality

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

Since he was a youngster, Warren Weibert has wanted to work with cattle, and for the last 29 years he has been able to live that dream.

Mr. Weibert became general manager of the Decatur County Feed Yard in 1977 after his father-in-law, Milton Nitsch, bought the business. Mr. Weibert said he was working for Southwestern Bell in Wichita when Mr. Nitsch purchased the yard, which was six years old at the time.

He said working with cattle was what he really wanted to do, after he got a degree in agriculture from Kansas State University.

The feed yard is now celebrating 35 years of service, 29 with Mr. Weibert at the helm.

When he first arrived, said Mr. Weibert, everything was done on paper. Every load of feed information was transferred by hand from the truck driver to the ladies in the office. Every 15 days, he said, the women would hand write the bills and mail them out.

Things are different now, with computers keeping track of all of that. The man who orders the feed does it with the help of computer history, and the mill mixes the feed electronically for each pen. There is a memory card in the feed truck that the driver brings into the office and the information is then transferred to a computer on the truck.

Feed calling, milling, delivery, billing, said Mr. Weibert, all of it is done with computers now.

In 1994, said Mr. Weibert, the yard started to use electronic chips in the cattle's ears to track them. This meant they could start managing, sorting and selling the cattle as individual animals instead of by the pen.

Actually, he said, the yard started experimenting with the chips in 1993, but not until 1994 did Micro Beef Technologies make the computer program which connected everything.

The chips are strictly an identifier, he said. For some of the cattle, the number starts on the ranch where they are born and then is transferred to an electronic id at the feed yard. That number follows the animal (See MAN on Page 10A)

## State approves county's strategic plan

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

With the help of community ideas, a new five-year strategic plan has been written for Decatur County and approved by the State of Kansas.

Every five years, to be eligible for state and federal grants, the county has to have a new plan written and approved by the state Department of Commerce, said Connie Grafel, marketing director for the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp.

The plan allows the county to qualify for incentives from the state for new businesses, and to take part in job training that the state provides. It is also needed to help to become eligible for state and federal grants.

This year, people from around the county gathered at the high school

### Five county goals set

The Oberlin-Decatur County Area Economic Development Corp. has a new strategic plan for the next five years, outlining five goals the group would like to achieve. Those include:

- Sappa Lake: A beautiful, well-kept park encompassing activities that appeal to people of all ages and interests.
- Volunteer Network: Through cooperation and inclusion of all generations, develop a network of volunteers to fulfill the needs of our community.
- Marketing an Economic Development: Develop a vibrant community foundation that provides a financial re-

source for new and existing business development and marketing and community projects.

- Maximize Existing Facilities: Using existing facilities, identify short-range programs that can be implemented quickly, and long-range programs that can be completed in five years...so that regional communities think of Decatur County as "the place" to fill the need.
- Leadership Development: Develop and promote leadership and community ownership among generations.

cafeteria in March to discuss areas they want to see changed or im-

proved under the guidance of consultant Terry Woodbury, with Kansas Communities LLC. From that meeting came several ideas and goals that went into the new strategic plan. Several action teams formed to help the county reach those goals.

The economic development corporation paid Kansas Communities LLC \$3,000 which was raised in the county.

The county's old plan was written in 2001 with the help of Tequity Ventures out of Colorado. Ms. Grafel said several of the goals in the old plan were met and some weren't. The corporation paid Tequity Ventures \$20,000 for their services. That money was also raised in the county.

In health care, she said, one of the big goals was to maintain three phy- (See STATE on Page 10A)

## School enrollment down from last year

Since the beginning of the school year, the high school has dropped five students while the grade school has gained four.

At Decatur Community Junior/Senior High School, 223 students are enrolled, said Superintendent Kelly Glodt, and at Oberlin Elementary School there are 212. At the grade school, he said, that is one less student than at the end of the last year and at the high school 16 less.

The decrease in five students was because one moved away and four pre-enrolled and then didn't show up at the high school. The district was planning on those five

students since enrollment time this summer, he said.

The main reason there was such a large drop in students from last year to this year is because of the size of the graduating class and the incoming kindergarten class.

The state's official count day, said Superintendent Kelly Glodt, isn't until next Wednesday, Sept. 20. The count that day will be sent to the state Department of Education for budget purposes.

Although the number of students matters, said Mr. Glodt, the difference in the number of students won't change the amount of (See SCHOOL on Page 10A)