

Stranded couple celebrates

By CYNTHIA HAYNES

Drs. Brian and Wendy Mehaffey weren't planning to spend their anniversary in Oberlin, but a warm room and a steak-and-crab dinner made the stranded couple feel a lot better.

The Denver-area chiropractors were on their way home from Wichita, but gave up after what he called "nine hours of white-knuckle driving," and got a room at the LandMark Inn. They were in time to get a New Year's Eve dinner special at the Teller Room to help celebrate their first wedding anniversary.

Mrs. Mehaffey said the couple was supposed to fly out of Denver on Dec. 22 to join relatives for a vacation in the Dominican Republic when the first big holiday storm arrived and closed the airport.

The couple should have been celebrating their anniversary on New Year's Day, Mrs. Mehaffey, said but that didn't work out either.

"We were supposed to be married on New Year's in Cancun," she said, "but Hurricane Wilma blew the hotel away."

This year the couple decided they weren't going to be denied their vacation, she said, and though the airport was closed, the roads weren't too bad. They decided to fly out of Wichita.

"We tried to get a rental so we could just fly back into Denver," Mr. Mehaffey said, "but that didn't work."

So the couple drove to Wichita, flew to the Dominican Republic and had a great time. Then they flew back to Wichita and right into the teeth of the second holiday blizzard.

With I-70 closed, the couple drove northwest to Oberlin, hoping to catch U.S. 36 into Denver but the trip, they said, was slow and slippery. By the time they got to Oberlin, it was dark and they had had it for the day.

The trip home took 15 hours, Mrs. Mehaffey said on Tuesday from her office in Denver. The Oberlin-to-Denver leg was about six hours, she said, 50 percent longer than usual. After leaving Oberlin on Monday morning, the couple wove their way past closed roads to I-70 at the state line and on into Denver.

The weekend was "interesting," Mrs. Mehaffey said, but their stay in Oberlin was a good break.



TUESDAY AFTERNOON, Scott Vineyard (above) cleaned snow out from in front of his house at Broadway and Cedar. Mr. Vineyard had to move the snow from his parking space, which the city had plowed in, burying his truck so badly he had to get it towed out. Enjoying a New Year's Day sled ride

down the hill near the home of Dr. Doug and Sandy Fair were Justin Williams (below on bottom), his half-sister Sophie Williams and his half-brother Noah Nelson. Justin and Sophie are the Fair's grandchildren, and all three were staying with the Fairs for the holiday. — Photos by Steve Haynes and Sandy Fair

* Storm hits area with lots of snow

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to rent. "We did have one herd of cattle that moved and we've got to get them back home," he said.

The cattle strayed from Rock Hill, near Traer, to a wheat field on U.S. 36, somewhere between seven and nine miles from where they were supposed to be, he said.

"They're up on at U.S. 36 on a wheat field and have been for two to three days," Mr. Cool said.

County Clerk Marilyn Horn who lives at the business her family owns, Trader Horn, just west of Oberlin off U.S. 36, said it took her husband, Steve, and son, Darren, four hours with shovels and a snow blower to dig them out.

Her other son, Doug, who works at the Decatur County Feedlot, went

to work at 5 a.m. on Saturday and didn't get off until 7 p.m., she said, and it was almost that bad on Sunday.

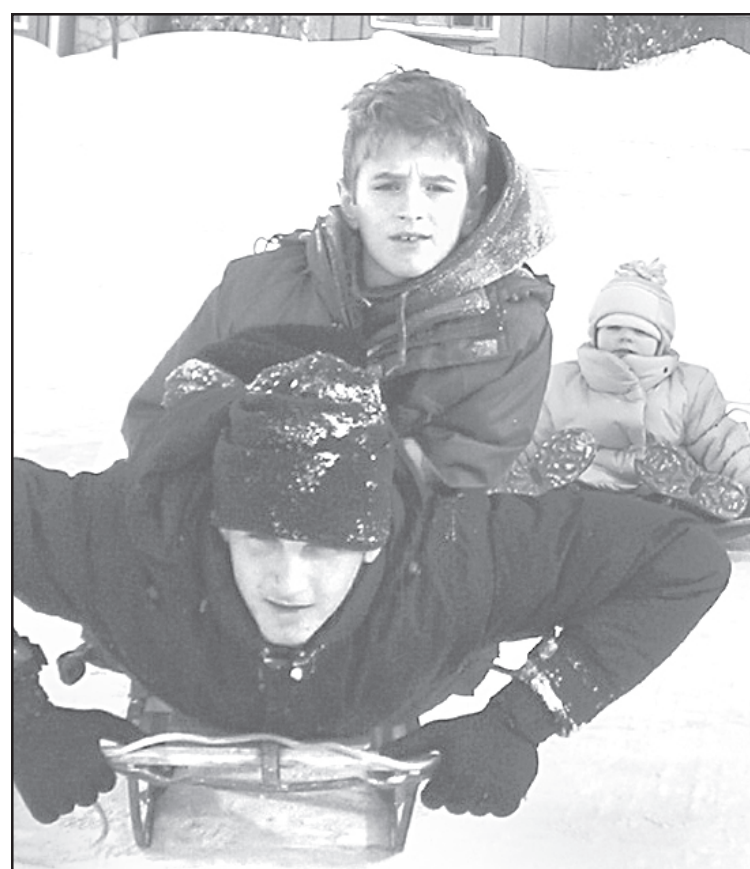
However, the feedlot brought in a hot supper for the crew, she said.

Out near Herndon, Keith and Mary Lou Olson were also snowed in due to a long snow-packed driveway. Even when U.S. 36 was reopened, the couple could not get there.

"We can see and hear the traffic," Mrs. Olson said on Monday, "but we can't get to it."

Despite the problems, no one was complaining about the moisture and some people were looking at the bright side.

"Isn't it pretty?" Mrs. Horn asked. "Though at our house, it's right up over the roof."



* Power outages all over

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power at one point. The company reported more than 5,000 poles down and 21 steel towers damaged or destroyed in its territory.

"In all my years, I have never seen such devastation to our utility systems," said Earl Watkins, Sunflower president and chief executive officer. "I am humbled by the heroic efforts of the people working to restore service to our member's customers and to the Sunflower system. They are all doing everything humanly possible."

The company has estimated the total loss from the storm damage will exceed \$10 million and it could take seven to 10 days before service is restored to all customers.

* Baby to receive presents

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- \$25 gift certificate from Addleman Drug Store.
- \$25 savings bond from First National Bank.
- \$10 gift certificate from the Dresser.
- Special gift from Ray Jewelry.
- \$20 gift certificate from Mary Kay.
- Case of baby food from Raye's Grocery.
- \$10 gift card from Stanley Hardware.
- Gift from Fredrickson Insurance Agency.
- Pizza for two from Pizza Hut.
- \$25 gift certificate from Rocking R.
- Year's subscription to *The Oberlin Herald*.

* Schools and more closed for weather

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closed early for winter break because of the first storm, were closed on Tuesday for a teacher in-service training day.

The district planned to be closed today because the roads were too bad to run the buses, said Superintendent Kelly Glodt. The district had not decided whether to have classes on Thursday, waiting to see what the roads are like today.

• High school basketball games in Norton and a wrestling meet in Oberlin against McCook and Phillipsburg on Tuesday were canceled due to weather and the buses being snowed under. The schools

were working to reschedule both.

• The trash truck couldn't run on Tuesday because it was snowed in behind R&M Service Center, in the alley between Penn Avenue and Griffith Avenue.

• There was no mail delivery on Saturday because the truck from Colby couldn't get to town. Even local mail was not delivered. On Tuesday, when delivery should have resumed, the post office was closed for the funeral of former President Gerald Ford.

• The country transit bus did not run on Tuesday after getting high-centered over the weekend on snow-packed streets.

• Most Oberlin churches canceled weekend services, including United Methodist, Grace Lutheran and St. John's Lutheran. Sacred Heart Catholic Church canceled Sunday Mass but had church at 9 a.m. New Year's Day for the Feast of the Holy Family.

• Teens for Christ members were supposed to attend a New Year's Eve party in Colby, but it was canceled, so the group had an impromptu party of their own at the TFC building in Oberlin.

• *The McCook Gazette* couldn't get to Oberlin on Friday. The paper is mailed on Saturday and had no paper on Monday due to the New

Years holiday. Papers were back on schedule by Tuesday.

• *The Salina Journal* wasn't able to make it on Saturday, Sunday or Monday.

The papers showed up late Monday and the local carrier, Mark Corcoran, started delivery of those three days at about 2 a.m. Tuesday morning. Some of Tuesday's papers were late, he said, because his vehicle got stuck partway through the run.

• *The Omaha World Herald* did not show up from Saturday to Monday due to the weather and road closings, and on Tuesday because of former President Ford's funeral.

* Couple asks OK from city for chickens

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Mayor Ken Shobe agreed with Mr. Shike.

"You don't own that part of the street," he said.

Councilman Rob McFee said that when he had some lots measured, the surveyor put the pin behind the sidewalk because he didn't own either the street or the area known as "the parking" past the curb.

Mr. Russ said that ever since the couple has lived on East Maple Street and bought the property, everyone has told them that they have an acre of ground.

"We pay taxes on it," he pointed out.

The mayor noted that it didn't matter how much land they have, the City Council doesn't have the power to do anything. The matter has to go back to the Board of Zoning Appeals, he said. If the Russes do have an acre, the couple might be able to get variance, but that is up to the appeals board.

Councilman McFee summed up the problem:

"There's some discontent in the figuring on where we measure the acre," he said.

Mr. Shike made copies of the Russes' map for Mr. Hirsch, who was out of town, saying that the attorney would have to make a decision on how big the lots are.



CHECKING A MAP of city lots, Oberlin City Administrator Gary Shike (standing) talked with Clara and Richard Russ at Thursday's City Council meeting, tried to figure out how much land the couple actually owns. — Herald staff photo by Steve Haynes

Councilman Jay Anderson asked what the Russes' neighbors felt about having chickens, and Mrs. Russ said that wasn't a problem.

"We used to have a rooster," Mr. Russ said. "The neighbors said, 'keep him.' They enjoyed him."

In other business, the council:

• Authorized an amended agreement with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, putting off

the date for completion of the new sewer treatment lagoons to May 31. The city had agreed to finish the new wastewater treatment system by Dec. 31, but the contractor had to quit work after fall rains made it difficult to install the plastic liner for the lagoons.

The city has until Sept. 1 to be in compliance with its permit.

• Unanimously authorized beer license renewals for Raye's Grocery, Ampride, Crossroads Express and the Re-Load without any comment.

• Agreed to continue a \$100 utility allowance for the Sunflower Cinema for another year.

• Paid end-of-the year bills totaling \$17,563.

• Set the next meeting for 6:30 p.m. Thursday at The Gateway.

Official dislikes wording

By CYNTHIA HAYNES

Decatur County has a contract with emergency shelters in Oberlin and Jennings but Emergency Preparedness Officer Bert Cool isn't happy with the wording.

He told county commissioners Tuesday that the contracts are required for the county to get reimbursed for housing and feeding storm-stranded travelers and those without power and water by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

When the county didn't get paid last time shelter was needed, Mr. Cool said, he got contracts for both The Gateway and the Jennings Community Building. However, the wording is off, he told the commissioners on Tuesday, and the federal reimbursement will go directly to the shelters instead of to the county.

County Attorney Steve Hirsch suggested he contact the state Division of Emergency Management.

"We can't be the only county with this problem," he said.

Mr. Cool said last time the county had an emergency situation, the Road and Bridge Department got paid directly instead of the check going through the county.

Although the storms over the weekend were bad, Mr. Cool said, the emergency shelters weren't needed. Stranded travelers were directed to motels and three rooms remained after everyone was taken care of. The county doesn't have or need contracts with the motels, he said, because they get paid in the regular course of business.

However, he said, he assumed the federal government would help like it did last time.

The county has no shelter contract in Norcatour, he said. Last time there was a problem, the church there opened its doors, but normally people just take travelers into their homes.

The emergency agency requires shelters to have bathrooms, water and food, he said, and there is no public building in Norcatour with all of those that is suitable for use as a shelter.

Mr. Cool said the county still has not gotten the generator it ordered six or eight months ago for the water well in Jennings.

The generator the county ordered has been on back order, he said, and occasionally he'll get a message saying it's still on order.

The Jennings School District gave the community building a generator, Commissioner Doyle Brown said, but the water well still doesn't have backup power.

County says yes to copier

Decatur County commissioners approved a new copier for the clerk of courts in a quick meeting Tuesday, Dec. 26.

With Commissioners Patricia Glenn and Doyle Brown not at the meeting, Commissioner Ralph Unger made some phone calls to get the action approved.

Clerk of Courts Janet Meitl said her copier, which the office has had for 10 years, isn't working properly. She said the court has \$13,000 in the regular fund, with \$6,500 coming out for special attorney fees.

Mr. Unger asked Mrs. Meitl to get some price quotes for a new copier. The clerk made some calls and came back with two quotes, \$4,200 for a Sharp copier and \$7,700 for a Ricoh. With a phone call to Mr. Brown, the commissioners approved the purchase of the Ricoh from Office Works in Colby.

Ambulance Director Linda Manning brought in the paperwork for a new ambulance, with half being paid for by a state-federal Community Block Development Grant. The paperwork needed to be finished so the money for the other half could come out of the 2006 budget.

The total price for the new truck is \$119,670. The grant is for \$64,000, with the county paying the other \$55,670. The paperwork and final price were approved by commissioners Unger and Brown.

The commissioners approved end-of-the-year transfers of \$13,000 to the special equipment reserve fund for the road and bridge department, \$40,000 for the ambulance equipment fund and \$8,000 for the noxious weed fund.