

## Storm slams area, leaving lots of work

By CYNTHIA HAYNES

City and county crews worked long hours over the weekend to dig out stranded residents, open main streets and roads and make sure emergency workers could get to their jobs after the area got blasted by rain and snow — and more snow.

County Road and Bridge Supervisor Tim Stallman said his crew started on Saturday, the second day of the storm, with four to five guys, but they were not able to get much done due to the wind and snow.

On Sunday, about eight road workers

were able to get out from under the drifts and they got started at 4:30 or 5 a.m., he said. The crew worked in Oberlin until about 11 a.m. getting emergency personnel plowed out. In the afternoon, the crew turned its attention to the county roads.

By Monday, all 10 crew members were on the job and by midday, all county roads were open to some degree. Only about a third of the township roads were worked, Mr. Stallman said.

"We're getting here at 5:30 to 6 (a.m.) on the average, repairing blades and getting on

the roads, and then we're shutting down at 6:30 or 7 each evening," he said.

By the end of the day on Tuesday, Mr. Stallman said, he hoped to have everyone in the county dug out and then the crews will start back through the system to widen and improve the snow-filled roads and hope for warm weather.

"Then the phone will start ringing because of the mud," he added.

The road crew had no serious breakdowns, he said, and there wasn't much trouble on the roads except for a few

stranded cars in snowdrifts Saturday and Sunday.

"On the first day, there were cars stranded everywhere and semis stuck up by the feedlot," he said.

The weekend was long, he said. "It seems like one long day," Mr. Stallman admitted.

Up in dispatch Bert Cool admitted to working 16 hours on Sunday although Commissioner Ralph Unger guessed it was more like 20 hours. It doesn't make any difference, Mr. Cool, the county's emergency preparedness manager, said; he's on salary.

The city crew, which is short-handed with the retirement of Bob Shuler, had about four men out on Saturday, Sunday and Monday, said City Administrator Gary Shike, mostly trying to clear the downtown area and city streets.

"It's been kind of a mess," he said.

"There's just a lot of snow." Mr. Cool said there hadn't been many problems despite the weather. There were only a few ambulance or emergency calls, he said, and stranded motorist found rooms (See STORM on Page 5)

## Power crews working

By KIMBERLY DAVIS

Dozens, maybe hundreds, of people in rural Decatur County were without power days after the storm hit on Friday.

Marilyn Noone, who lives 10 miles south of Jennings, said she and her family have been without power since Friday. She said as far as she knows, although people in the city of Jennings have power, those to the south of town and to the far north don't.

The area is served by Prairie Land Electric out of Norton. Bert Cool, Decatur County emergency preparedness director, said he talked with Barry Madden, director of member services with the cooperative, who said they have over 1,000 power poles down. Although the crews are working, the poles won't be replaced in just a few days. According to Mr. Cool, Mr. Madden said it is going to take some time.

At one point in time, said Mr. Madden, the service had around 3,000 customers without power. There was a lot of snow and ice on lines as big as a person's forearm in places. He said the snow really isn't a big deal; the damage is caused by the ice, which puts a lot of weight on the lines.

Mr. Madden said the co-op had around 1,000 to 1,200 poles down, although dozens have either been fixed or put back up temporarily.

Currently there are about 500 customers still without power. He said it could take seven-plus days to get everyone back on.

The crews started working when the storm hit Friday night, he said, and have continued since. The guys are working hard, said Mr. Madden, putting in 14 to 16 hours a day.

The cooperative, he said, has over 100 people, not counting its own employees, out helping get the power back on to customers in the area. Mr. Madden said they had contractors in the area from Missouri and Louisiana who were fixing line from last year's blizzard. They are now helping with this storm. There are crews from unaffected parts of Kansas also helping out.

Mr. Madden said this is the worst storm he has seen in the 30 years he has been with the company, even worse than the blizzard last year which left customers without power for days.

Sunflower Electric Power Company, a Hays-based co-op that supplies power to cities and rural electrics in the area, sent out a statement saying that the ice, snow and winds left more than 20,000 customers in western Kansas without (See POWER on Page 5)



**CITY LINEMAN** Ron Beneda (above) got a break from fixing icy power lines Tuesday, as he joined the street crew to help clear snow. In the afternoon, he was using a loader to widen out Commercial at Cass in front of the Methodist

church. Leann Taylor of Goodland (below) was shoveling the walk so her mother, L'Marie Robertson, could get into her home on Cass Avenue. Mrs. Robertson had spent the holidays in Goodland. — Herald staff photos by Steve Haynes

## Winter weather blocks highways, closes schools

The weather wreaked havoc with highways and travel plans over the holiday weekend, leaving dozens of people stranded in town.

Oberlin schools missed a day of class today and officials weren't sure whether they would be able to start up Thursday.

Even those who were able to stay on the road and not end up in a drift found they were out of luck over the weekend as road after road closed.

By 7 p.m. Friday, the Kansas Department of Transportation closed U.S. 36 west of Oberlin. An hour later, U.S. 83 was closed to northbound traffic. I-70 to the south was closed first at Oakley, then WaKeeney and finally as far east as Salina as motel rooms filled up. Both U.S. 36 and U.S. 83 reopened by Sunday, but lanes were snowpacked and travel slow.

In Decatur County, the Oberlin Inn reported 10 to 12 rooms rented, many to people heading north into Nebraska who got stuck and had to be dug out.

The Frontier Motel had Colorado people trying to get to Colorado Springs to have a late Christmas with a brother just back from Iraq on Monday. Another group was trying to get to Kiowa.

At the LandMark, owner Gary Anderson said he had six rooms of stranded people, and some just tired of driving on New Year's Eve.

In Oberlin those who could rode out the storm at home, then spent the rest of the weekend digging out. Despite the Monday holiday, lots of things didn't go as planned.

• Decatur Community High and Oberlin Elementary schools, which (See SCHOOLS on Page 5)

## Two feet of snow hits area

Snow shovels, plows, snow blowers, heavy coats, boots and gloves may have been the norm the last few weeks in Decatur County, but the recent storms aren't normal weather for this time of year.

Jeremy Martin, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service office in Goodland, said the kind of storms that have dropped over two feet of snow in Decatur County are more typical of fall or spring. Mr. Martin said the storm that hit the area last week left 17.7 inches of snow in Goodland, making it the second-snowiest December on record. The snowiest was in 1924 when 29 inches fell in December, while only 25 inches fell last month.

Mr. Martin said the only reason for getting this kind of wet, spring-type snow was because there was a lot of moisture in the atmosphere and the storm moved slowly.

Oberlin reported 24 inches of snow during the storm last week, which isn't normal December weather, Mr. Martin said. The week before Christmas, the area received just over an inch of snow.

Even though the storm last week followed a coat of ice and snow before Christmas, he said, it doesn't necessarily mean the rest of the winter is going to be the same. Indicators do show a favorable weather pattern for storms in the near future, he said, and a smaller storm is expected this weekend.

Mr. Martin said it is too early to tell if the area will really get any moisture out of the storm this weekend, because conditions could change.

The storm last week, with snow starting on Friday and ending early Saturday, was a slow-moving low pressure system that drifted across the area from the southern Four Corners area. There was plenty of moisture available, and since the storm took two days to move across the plains, he said, it left a lot of snow.

In Goodland on Friday, he said, it was thundering and snowing lightly. Normally if it thunders during a storm like the one that hit the area, he said, it means heavy snow.

The heaviest snow accumulation in the area was on Friday, said Mr. Martin. Some areas got freezing rain first. Hill City got over an inch of ice first and then just two inches of snow on top of it.

The Weather Service, said Mr. Martin, received pictures from Sharon Springs showing snow drifts that covered houses. That area reported 32 inches of snow.

West of Oberlin, he said, the storm brought blizzard conditions with wind gusts of 40 miles an hour.



## City questions couple's acre

By CYNTHIA HAYNES

How big is a lot? How many lots to an acre?

When those questions get answered, Richard and Clara Russ will know if they have enough land to keep six chickens in the City of Oberlin.

The Russes applied for a zoning variance after their daughter, Julie Cunningham, who originally had the poultry, had been turned down on a request to keep chicken by the city Board of Zoning Appeals on the grounds that she did not have enough land. City ordinances say a homeowner must have an acre of land before a variance can be considered.

The current application might face a similar fate. City Administrator Gary Shike said that City Attorney Steve Hirsch had checked and did not believe the Russes had an acre.

However, on Friday, the couple appeared at the last City Council meeting of the year with a map show-

ing their land and figures to back up their assertion that they have a contiguous acre of land.

Mrs. Russ said that they couple owns eight lots and has property rights on a ninth lot. If each lot is 41 feet, 7 inches by 145 feet, she said, plus the extra lot, that should come out to more than the 43,560 feet in an acre.

Mr. Russ said that someone at the Decatur County register of deeds office told him that lots are measured from the middle of the street to the alley, which is where he got his figures.

City officials didn't feel that this was the correct measurement. "You don't own the street," Mr. Shike said. "Her arithmetic is right," said City Councilwoman Rhonda May. "It depends on whether you measure the street or not."

(See COUPLE on Page 5)

## Food drive ends over the goal

Counting 1,014 items over the goal of 2,000, the food drive at Stanley Hardware is over for the year.

This is the sixth year owner Joe Stanley has held a food drive starting after Thanksgiving and lasting until the new year.

This year, said Mr. Stanley, the drive started slow, which surprised him. Then in one week before Christmas, over 1,000 items came in, putting the drive over the goal.

The total on Tuesday was 3,014 boxed and canned items.

Several groups brought in donations, said Mr. Stanley, including the employees of Decatur County Hospital, churches and civic organizations.

Some time this week, he said, they would like to get the pile to the food pantry in the basement of the United Church. In the past, students from Decatur Community Junior High helped take the food to the church.

## Gifts wait for first baby of the year

The New Year has been rung in and the gifts are ready for the first baby born in Decatur County, but as of Tuesday there hadn't been any.

Each year, Oberlin merchants get together to welcome the first baby

of the year and congratulate the parents, offering gifts and presents. Some years, the baby comes close to the first and other years a little later.

The first baby to be born at

Decatur County Hospital and family will receive gifts from 12 businesses, including:

• \$10 gift certificate from Ward Drug Store. (See BABY on Page 5)