

Volunteers promote tourism

By Kimberly Davis

The Oberlin Herald
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The Decatur County Chamber of Commerce and the Oberlin Convention and Visitors Bureau both are made up of volunteers willing to promote tourism and help people hold events in town.

The Chamber, a private group, is run by a seven-member board elected at the annual meeting at the beginning of each year. Members have staggered three-year terms.

The board hires a manager, who runs the office from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The board meets once a month and holds events and fund raisers regularly.

Board Chairperson Marilyn Horn said the Chamber raises money but also gets money to run the office from the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp., the Oberlin Business Alliance and the Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The organization has around 100 members, businesses and individuals.

The chamber is for the whole county, said Mrs. Horn, and represents all the towns. The board and manager coordinate events to help pull organizations and individuals together. The Chamber acts as a liaison, she said, for the groups and governments in the county.

Some of the group's events include an annual spring Home and Garden Show, the August Back-to-School picnic, the Farmers and Ranchers Appreciation Dinner in February, an annual banquet, a "Professional Assistants Day" lunch and the weekly farmers market in downtown Oberlin in the summer.

Mrs. Horn said the Chamber also holds fund raisers, not just to have events, but to help out towns in the county.

The Chamber board has hired a new manager, Jo Henderson from Hays, who will start in September.

Gary Anderson, chairman of the Convention and Visitors Bureau, said it is run by a six-member board appointed by the Oberlin City Council, with one member from the council. The bureau meets once a month and operates off the city's bed tax. The bed tax, said Mr. Anderson, predominately comes from people from out of town, because it is charged when someone stays in a hotel or motel room. The tax is 3 percent of the cost of a room, which the state collects.

The operating budget in 2006 was around \$15,000.

That money, said Mr. Anderson, is used to get tourists and visitors to come to town. The group advertises with road signs and in print media. It sends people to the Kansas Sampler Festival, Denver sports shows and other events to promote the area.

Mr. Anderson said the bureau is in charge of getting Oberlin brochures made.

The group put up signs promoting Oberlin on U.S. 36 and U.S. 83, he said.

Recently, it paid for a metal silhouette sculpture west of town on the Texas Cattle Trail, said Mr. Anderson. The group plans to put up a silhouette of an illustration from the Ralph Moody book "The Dry Divide," of a horse-pulled hay rack, north of town on a hill overlooking Cedar Bluffs. That is near where the author once lived and later wrote the book.

In the future, he said, the bureau would like to help promote Sappa Park at the old state lake east of Oberlin with maps of the walking trails and promotional guides.

Decatur County

- **Money spent** for economic development in Decatur County in 2006 — \$59,421.
- **Population** today 3,082, in 2000 3,630, in 1990 4,217, in 1980, 4,822.
- **People working** today 1,702, in 2000 2,259, in 1990 2,357 in 1980 2,716.
- **Economic Development Director** — Connie Grafel, 10 years service.
- **EDC office** at 104 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin. Phone (785) 475-2901.
- **Median family income** in 2000 — \$34,982.

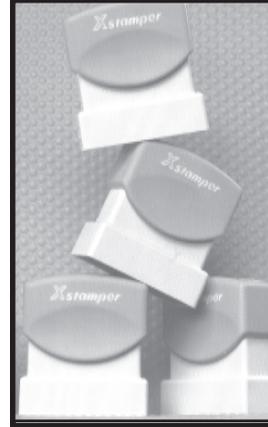
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