

State to help youths

The Decatur County commissioners talked with the regional head of the Juvenile Justice Authority about the service and about a request for \$1,000 to start a "Thinking for a Change" program to help teens work on their attitudes.

Peggy Pratt, regional director for the authority, said Kansas legislators set up an incentive match of \$17,500 for the program. She said the authority is asking all northwest Kansas counties for \$1,000, except Ellis, which would give \$1,500, to start a program.

She said they would contract with the Northwest Kansas Regional Prevention Center out of Hays for a 10-week program. If a teen needs help from the program, she said, a representative will come here to work with him or her.

The authority is also putting some money into the project, she said, because it will take more than \$35,000. If the county gives the money, she added, she will come in next year to give an update.

For \$1,000, she said, if one child's life is changed, it would be worth it. The commissioners said they would need to look at the budget for 2009 before making any decisions.

The authority, said Mrs. Pratt, has offices in Oberlin, Atwood and Hays to cover 17 counties.

Services the authority offers include juvenile intake and assessment, she said. If a child is taken into custody by a law officer, they are supposed to contact the agency. If there is an abuse case, then the officer contacts the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, but if it's on a weekend, the authority is contacted.

First and foremost, said Mrs. Pratt, the authority will find a place for a child to stay.

A first-time offender program for kids 10 to 18 helps some kids, she said, adding that the authority has taken some as young as 8 or 9. Sometimes, she said, the authority has taken kids up to 19 because they are still in high school.

Usually, they do a pre-court agreement between the county attorney, parents and child, and the juvenile has to pay restitution to any victims. They also do community service, she said, and apology letters to themselves, parents and the victim, and the kids have a curfew.

The authority has other programs, too, she said, adding that it seems the more kids are in activities, the less likely they are to get in trouble. A probation officer, said Mrs. Pratt, sees the kids at school.

The commissioners agreed to discuss the \$1,000 request at budget time.



Boxes get ride to Colby

WITH A FLATBED, a representative with the Northwest Kansas Recycling Group picked up 37,800 pounds of recyclables (above) in Oberlin last Tuesday. Sarah Fredrickson held the band holding a bale as it was tightened down. Mrs. Fredrickson started picking up cardboard at the beginning of the year and has made 22 bales of it, totaling 19,800 pounds.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

Lunch prices increase

Prices for lunch and breakfast for students and adults at Oberlin schools will increase 10 cents each next year, though officials don't expect that amount to cover increasing costs.

With the price of fuel going up so much, said Superintendent Pat Cullen, and the price of food as well, the food program will probably operate in the red next year. The money from the government the district gets, said Dr. Cullen, won't cover the price of food.

He said he wasn't sure if the price should go up 10 or 15 cents. Originally, said Dr. Cullen, he was going to suggest a quarter increase on all meals.

It isn't a problem, said Member Dan Grafel, to go up 10 cents. It isn't that much.

Ten cents, said Dr. Cullen, is the minimal increase, but the program will still probably be in the red.

The previous prices were 90 cents for breakfast for students and \$1.25 for adults, \$1.95 for lunches for grade-school students, \$2.25 for junior and high school students and \$2.50 for adults.

The board approved the 10 cent increase for all of the meals to \$1 and \$1.35 for breakfast and \$2.05, \$2.35 and \$2.60 for lunch.

Water high in uranium

Water customers in Oberlin received the fourth notice about the city's water being high in uranium this month, though the minute level of the radioactive metal isn't believed to be dangerous.

City water wells, said Administrator Gary Shike, are tested every three months. The water samples are sent to an independent lab in Kansas and the results go to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, which then contacts the city.

Every time the test results show a violation of federal drinking-water standards, said Mr. Shike, the city has to notify its users.

According to the notice, this sample was collected March 13 and shows levels of uranium at 67 parts per million. The standard is below 30, the notice says.

The numbers on the last four notices, said Mr. Shike, have stayed roughly the same. The notice about the uranium, which comes from native rock layers, isn't an immediate risk.

The City Council has looked into treatment options, including putting in a water treatment plant for \$3 to \$5 million but so far every time the plant is discussed, the council votes not to borrow the money to build it.

County says sirens for tornadoes only

The Decatur County emergency management director and commissioners talked about when the storm sirens should be blown and when they shouldn't at a county meeting last Tuesday, but didn't reach any conclusion.

Director Patti Skubal said under the current emergency plan, either she or Fire Chief Bill Cathcart determine when the sirens are blown. Dispatch doesn't make the call, she said, and they usually blow the sirens only if a tornado has been sighted.

During the storm on Thursday, June 5, she said, she was out of town, and dispatch didn't have a radio to listen to information about a storm,

so she didn't know what was going on until after she came back. The sirens were not sounded, but people complained.

Is there any place in town, said Commissioner Ralph Unger, to get a weather radio. Commissioner Stan McEvoy said Stanley Hardware carries the radios.

The sirens shouldn't be blown every time there's a cloud in the sky, said Mr. Unger. Dangerous storms need to be confirmed by a trained weather spotter or law officer, he said.

Some pretty heavy comments have come into dispatch since the storm, said Mrs. Skubal, from people who wanted to know why

the sirens didn't go off June 5. The storm hit Oberlin with hail up to golf-ball size, but no tornadoes were reported.

In the past, said Mrs. Skubal, it hasn't been policy to set the sirens off for hail.

That's why having a weather radio is smart, said Mr. Unger. People can listen to information on it or their scanners about what's been spotted.

This year, Mrs. Skubal said, people in the county have been good about calling the National Weather Service in Goodland to tell them about the weather.

Dispatch, said Mrs. Skubal, is good about letting people know

when the county is under a tornado watch or warning. The dispatchers call the hospital and other places where there are lots of people.

Mrs. Skubal said she will meet with representatives from Federal Emergency Management Agency about working on a federal declaration for the storm on Thursday, May 22, when the county had several tornadoes. She said the county did get a state declaration.

There were some people in the county who didn't have insurance or were under insured, said Mrs. Skubal. She said she put the word out to be notified about damage and actually has heard from a lot of people.

Conservation District asks for more money

The Decatur County Soil Conservation District asked for \$19,000 from the county for next year at a meeting last Tuesday, and the commissioners agreed to discuss the request during budget sessions this summer.

Toward the end of July, the commissioners will go over the county budget, setting amounts for each program, and set the property tax levy for the next year. The request includes a \$3,000 increase over last year's budget, though the district has to "borrow"

The money will be used to employ a full time district manager and cover office expenses. The

two main things the district does is administer the state's cost share money in the county for the water resource program and non-point source program.

Diana Solko, district secretary, and board members Carl Wahlmeier, Bruce Larue, Elden Huff, Brett Jennings and Vernon Ketterl met with the commissioners.

Last year, the county gave \$16,000, and later the county helped the district out with \$3,832 to finish the year.

Commissioner Stan McEvoy said they would have to wait and see how budget discussions go and how the property valuations come in before

making a decision.

Agricultural land, said Commissioner Ralph Unger, is on an eight-year floating average, based on farm income, which means the drought years are now in the equation. Valuations for ag land could go down, he said, and that could mean the county would need to increase the property-tax levy to bring in the same amount of money as this year.

Mr. McEvoy said the commissioners have heard a prediction the county could lose \$1 million in valuation.

Mrs. Solko asked if the money the Conservation District borrowed from the county at the end of 2007

City to meet

The Oberlin City Council will meet downstairs at The Gateway on Thursday.

The council meeting, which is open to the public, starts at 7 p.m. It will not be on local access cable channel 7.

County Roundup

At their meeting last Tuesday, Decatur County commissioners:

- Approved buying a 2003-model grader for \$175,000 for the road and bridge department. Story on Page 8A.

- Talked with the regional director from the state Juvenile Justice Authority about the service and about a request for \$1,000 to starting a "Thinking for a Change" program. Story on Page 3A.

- Received a request for \$19,000 from the Decatur County Conservation District for 2009. Story on Page 3A.

- Talked with the emergency management director about when the county needs to turn the storm siren on and when it shouldn't be done. Story on Page 3A.

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