

Catholic priest to visit home and start project

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The Catholic priest who has been serving Oberlin, Selden and Leoville parishes since July 2006 is going home for a visit and hopes to do a little mission work while he is there.

Father Henry Saw Lone headed for Denver International Airport on Monday to catch a flight to San Francisco. After a three-hour layover at San Francisco International, he planned to head for Seoul, South Korea. He had a five-hour layover at the Incheon Airport there, then it was on to Bangkok, Thailand, where he was to spend eight hours in the Suvarnabhumi Airport, also called New Bangkok International. Finally, he planned to board his plane for Yangon, Myanmar, or Burma as most Americans still know it.

Once he arrives at Mingaladon Airport in the southeast Asian nation, after 28 hours in the air and at least 16 waiting to fly, he still has to get to his "final destination," which is another 250 miles on the road to his home diocese.

It's a long trip and one he hasn't made since he arrived in the U.S. a little over five years ago.

Father Saw Lone is from Karen, one of four states hardest hit in the early morning hours of May 3 by Cyclone Nargis, a category 4 hurricane packing winds of 120 mph.

Because of poor communications and the reluctance of the military rulers to admit foreign help, it was several weeks before the priest knew the fate of his family.

As it turned out, his two sisters, brother and 15 nieces and nephews suffered only minimal damage to their homes and businesses.

His sister Bernedetta is a teacher

and her husband is a rice farmer, he said. His other sister Angela is a housewife and her husband was unemployed at the time of the hurricane. His brother Johnny runs an oriental version of a convenience store out of his home.

While in Myanmar, the priest said, he will stay mostly at the diocese headquarters and visit his family and friends. Although he will be gone a month, the trip won't be nearly long enough to see everyone.

"You just go, go, go," he said in an interview Sunday.

In addition to the visiting, Father Saw Lone said he would like to get started on a water project in Bernedetta's village of Lorodo. The community of 60 families has about 650 people, but has no wells or cisterns. Villages, usually the children, have to walk three miles to a stream with containers made of bamboo or plastic and carry water home each day.

The priest has a vision of a system of a small reservoir and four storage tanks — one near the stream and three inside the village. Water would be pumped from the stream and stored in the tanks for the villagers' use. He estimated the cost at \$5,000 to \$6,000.

He asked for donations from his parishes last week, stressing that this was not a church project but a personal mission. On Sunday, he said that he had raised about \$5,000 for the water system. The money, he said, would go through channels available through the Catholic Church for the project since it would not be wise or safe to trust it to either Myanmar's banking system or to try to take it into the country.

"People have been very supportive and generous," he said.

First responders to get questionnaire

The Oberlin City Council heard that a questionnaire will be sent out to first responders in the region asking about a proposed training center at the former youth ranch at Sappa Park.

"Supporters of the plan want to hold a meeting to "debrief" those who met with Kansas National Guard officials at the ranch earlier this month," said City Administrator Austin Gilley.

Connie Grafel, marketing director for the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp., and former Undersheriff Randy McHugh, who works for the Nebraska National Guard, have put together a questionnaire for first responders — including emergency medical crews, fire fighters and police officers — about a possible training center.

"It was made pretty clear at the meeting with the National Guard," said Mr. Gilley, "that the buildings at

the former ranch are unlivable. That could be a challenge for the city.

"Maintenance costs at the ranch have been low in the past year, but will probably get higher with no one in the buildings.

"On the zoning matter, the council voted to rescind its decision to have the Board of Zoning Appeals look at the motel ordinance again. The proposal would allow motels by permit in several zones. The council will look at the ordinance again at the meeting on Thursday," he said.

Mr. Gilley said the council talked about the roof replacement project at The Gateway. He said they talked about hiring an architectural firm to write a spec sheet to send out to bidders or just letting roofing companies send in bids and picking the best one.

The council decided to run a public notice in the newspaper asking for bids.

Council to re-visit wind power, zoning

The Oberlin City Council will re-visit a discussion on motel zoning and proposed wind power ordinances when it meets Thursday night.

City Administrator Austin Gilley said the council voted at the meeting on Thursday, Jan. 22, to rescind a motion to send the motel zoning ordinance to the Board of Zoning and Appeals, but didn't take any further action as it wasn't on the

agenda.

"The council asked for an update on the wind power ordinance. There's a bill in the Legislature which, if passed, would basically negate any action taken by cities on wind power," he said. "The council will also talk about amendments to the city's purchasing policy.

The meeting will be upstairs in The Gateway and will be open to the public.



PUNCHING OUT 3-D GLASSES. Stan McEvoy (above) was busy working on prep work while Connie Riedel (below) brought a pot of chili for the cookoff.
—Herald staff photos by Cynthia Haynes

Cookoff draws dozens

The warm smells of chili mingled with those of popcorn and beer on Sunday night at the Oberlin American Legion as the pot prepared for a Super Bowl party.

A chili cookoff drew dozens of pots of the popular football-watching food. Winners of the best chili awards were Deb Klima, first; Dave Bergling, second; and Gary Walter, third.

Winners for the hottest chili were Tracy Lincoln and Sherry Brown, first; Tami (no last name given), second; and Dave Bose, third. Winners of the open class were Bill and Connie Riedel, first; Diane Barrett, second; and Jodi Votapka, third.





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Airport getting grant

The City of Oberlin received word that it will be getting a \$196,174 grant to help rehabilitate the apron and runway at the city's airport.

City Administrator Austin Gilley said the grant is actually a reimbursement for money already spent for part of Phase I of the project to build a new, longer runway.

"The money," he said, "has already been spent paying Bucher, Willis and Ratliff, the city's engineering firm for the project."

Congressman Jerry Moran sent a press release on Monday saying that the city would get the money for the project through the Airport Improvement Program, administered through the Federal Aviation Administration.

The city had to apply for the money, which comes from revenue collected from air travelers and the aviation industry.

"We need to do everything we can to keep air travelers safe," said Congressman Moran. "This funding will increase the safety of airfield operations at Oberlin Municipal Airport."

County continues insurance

The Decatur County commissioners agreed to keep paying for errors and omissions insurance to cover the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp.

Marketing Director Connie Grafel asked if the county would continue the insurance through the Kansas Worker's Risk Cooperative Commission at the county meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 20.

Ms. Grafel said the group had a good meeting with officials of the Kansas National Guard. Command Chief Warrant Officer Mark Jensen said he would come back and talk to them about doing some kind of Homeland Security training, she said, adding that he wouldn't want to house people at the facility, but could use the buildings for training. Ms. Grafel said Chief Jensen said the area needs more motels because they normally send 30 to 40 people to training and they would all need a place to stay.

The commissioners approved signing a contract with Sappa Valley Construction for a new recreation and senior center and theater, contingent on getting the deed to the land south of the existing building.

The prices from Sappa Valley Construction, she said, were only good until the end of the month.

Later in the week, Greg Lohoefer, with the corporation, said an original deed that can be filed had been received in the mail.

Ms. Grafel said the corporation has also received another bill from the architect.

They are working on an updated appraisal of the property south of the center.

Ms. Grafel handed out the corporation's annual report, but the commissioners had no questions.

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