

Airport project wins 2-1 majority

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**

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Voters turned down an ordinance blocking any spending to build a new, longer runway at the Oberlin city airport with a resounding 2-1 margin in a mail ballot counted Tuesday.

The Decatur County clerk's office mailed 1,187 ballots to registered voters on Dec. 1. Of those, 485 ballots were cast for a no vote, while 282 voted yes.

The proposed ordinance said the city would have been prohibited

Newspaper held for election

The *Oberlin Herald* is late today so we could include results of special city elections in Oberlin and Norcatour in this week's edition.

This includes Oberlin's special election on an airport ordinance and Norcatour's on whether the city clerk and treasurer may live outside the city limits.

from spending "any federal, state, city or private funds for the purpose of studying, planning or building a new runway or acquiring addi-

tional land at the Oberlin Airport. Nothing herein shall prohibit the maintenance and improvements required by the Federal Aviation

Administration to maintain the existing runway."

The ordinance was placed on the ballot after a petition circulated in the fall. That petition was turned into the clerk's office on Friday, Sept. 11, with 189 certified signatures. The petition put the issue before the City Council, which after a community meeting on the issue, voted unanimously Oct. 1 to reject the ordinance and send it to a vote.

Clerk Colleen Geihlsler, who serves as the county election officer, said 913 of the 1,187 mailed

ballots mailed came back. That's a 77 percent voter turn out, which she said is high.

Of those, 126 of them couldn't be counted because they came in late, the voter hadn't signed the envelope or the ballots were returned because of a wrong address.

That made the actual vote about 66 percent, said Ms. Geihlsler.

That's a really good turnout, said City Administrator Austin Gilley. The vote, he said, doesn't really change anything from the city's standpoint. The airport project will

just keep moving forward. But, he said, it's time for the city to get serious about how it is going to manage the airport and also have a really good business plan in place.

Mr. Gilley said he would probably give a brief update during the council meeting Thursday.

It's a positive thing, he said, that the council has a good clear direction from the voters.

Supporters of the runway plan were a little surprised Tuesday by their margin of victory. Many had (See VOTERS on Page 10A)



ON MAIN STREET last Wednesday, a city crew member (above) moved snow from the sides to the center for removal. Kelly Brown (below) carried his sled back up

the hill on a "snow day," when Oberlin schools canceled classes after a storm left eight inches last week.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis



Storm blankets the area

A snow storm that left eight inches on the ground and drifts up to three feet closed the Oberlin Schools for two days last week and left state, city and county crews busy cleaning up.

At the elementary concert last Monday night, Superintendent Duane Dorshorst announced that classes would be canceled for Tuesday with the storm forecast.

On Tuesday, the town looked like a snow globe as the wind blew and the snow fell. That night, the district announced that school would again be closed last Wednesday.

Around eight inches of snow fell in the storm last Tuesday, piling on top of five inches from a storm the weekend before.

Tim Stallman, Decatur County road and bridge supervisor, said some of the crew went out around 3:30 a.m. Tuesday to start cleaning the route to the hospital. By 5:30 a.m., they headed to the airport, the courthouse and the Decatur Good Samaritan Center.

With those jobs done by 7 a.m., the crew started on the county roads. The crew finished with the roads by 6 p.m. last Wednesday, Mr. Stallman said.

On Friday, he added, the men went out two or three times and cleaned up some spots in the roads, allowing farmers to get to fields with crops still standing and to cattle in need of feed and water.

Mr. Stallman said the wind probably blew 80 percent of the roads clean, but about 20 percent had drifts up to three feet deep.

The crew had to check all of them, he said.

While the county worked on the gravel and dirt roads, the city

crew was in town, cleaning out the emergency snow routes first and then heading to the other streets. On Monday, they were still moving some of the piles of snow from the middle of the streets downtown.

Tom Weishapl, crew leader

in Oberlin for the Kansas Department of Transportation, said the state crew started about 5 a.m. cleaning the highways. He said they had crews out until last Wednesday morning. There was some drifting and ice on the roads, he added.

Norcatour OKs outside homes for workers

Norcatour voters decided Tuesday that the city clerk and treasurer shouldn't have to live inside the city limits.

Voters decided, 50 yes to 31 no, to allow the two city workers to live outside of town. Neither the current clerk nor the treasurer lives inside the city limits today, a fact which had generated some complaints.

A petition started in Norcatour in the fall asked the City Council to put the question of whether the clerk and treasurer had to live inside city limits on the ballot. That petition was signed by seven registered voters and turned into the clerk on Sept. 14. It was certified and a special election, by mail ballot, was set.

That voting ended at noon on Tuesday. Election workers started

counting the ballots by 12:30 p.m. and were done 45 minutes later.

There are 112 registered voters in Norcatour, said Decatur County Clerk Colleen Geihlsler, who serves as the county election officer. Ballots were mailed out to the registered voters on Tuesday, Dec. 1.

Of the ballots mailed, said Ms. Geihlsler, 93 were sent back, meaning 19 didn't vote. That is 83 percent of the registered voters.

Twelve of the ballots couldn't be counted because the person voting either didn't sign the ballot, the ballot didn't arrive in the office in time or it had a wrong address.

Mayor Carl Lyon couldn't be reached for comment. Clerk Chris Dempewolf said she didn't want to say anything.

U.S. program cut hits area farmers' reserve plan acres

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
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Many Decatur County landowners may not be able to get all of their acres re-enrolled into the federal Conservation Reserve Program since Congress cut the program last year.

Congress lowered the cap on the total amount of acres the government can keep under contract, said Diane Barrett, county executive director for the U.S. Farm Service Agency. The cap was set at 32 million acres nationwide in the 2008 Farm Bill, a cut of about 10 percent. About 3.4 million acres will be taken out of the program.

Kansas had 3.1 million acres in the program with 339,527 acres expiring this year, 617,687 in 2010 and 532,555 in 2011, Mrs. Barrett said.

In Decatur County, she said, farmers have 220 contracts with 5,723.5 acres in the program. Decatur County, said Mrs. Barrett, is not a big Conservation Reserve county. More acres are enrolled in nearby counties, especially Cheyenne and Sherman.

In far western counties, nearly all land is considered highly erodible because of the threat of wind erosion. That's not as much of an issue here, Mrs. Barrett said.

Each piece of land is looked at when contracts are up for renewal,

she said. In some cases, where contracts have expired covering 30 to 40 acres, she said, they have been able to re-enroll only five to 10 acres. Without a general sign up, most of those contracts will fall under the continuous sign up, she said, and the continuous program tends to include fewer acres.

No general sign up for the program was offered in Kansas this year, said Mrs. Barrett. Contracts last anywhere from 10 to 15 years.

The program, said Mrs. Barrett, lets landowners put land with poorer soil that's less productive and more susceptible to erosion into grass and wildlife habitat. The owner or operator of that land, one or both of them, then receives an annual rental payment from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In many cases, she said, with cost-share programs, which help pay the cost of planting the grass, and other incentives, it costs the owners very little and maybe nothing to plant Conservation Reserve acres.

Annual payments are based on the total acres enrolled multiplied by the established rental rate by soil type. The rate is based on the productivity of the various types of soil, Mrs. Barrett said, and the government lists 12 soil types in the county.

The average payment in Decatur County, she said, is \$38 an acre a

(See FARM on Page 10A)

Christmas drawing planned for Saturday

It's time to gather up your little red tickets for the chance to win up to \$1,000 in the Oberlin merchants' annual "Christmas on Us" drawing on Saturday.

If you need more tickets, you've got only until 4 p.m. Friday to do your shopping.

The drawing starts at 11 a.m. Saturday at the gazebo in Centennial Park. If the weather is bad, the drawing will be moved inside to the

Golden Age Center.

Since November, Oberlin shoppers have had the chance to collect the numbered tickets at participating sponsors, receiving one ticket for every \$10 they spent. They could also go to the Chamber officer or newspaper office weekly and get one ticket, with no purchase necessary to win any prize.

In the past weeks, shoppers have (See GRAND on Page 10A)

City looks at possible changes at Gateway

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
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The Oberlin City Council is looking for comments on possible changes that could be made at The Gateway, making it more of an event center than a facility people can rent.

Some of the changes discussed at a special meeting Thursday would include an increase in the price of food and rental for the property. Other changes discussed were a ban on outside catering and on use of the kitchen by other than the city staff.

This was more of an information meeting, said Mr. Gilley, than a decision-making meeting.

The Gateway, he said, seems to have been born from a controversial donation, money from the estates of Robert and Madonna Morgan which could have gone to a civic center here or out of state.

For the past five to six years, at least, said Mr. Gilley, the center has been losing money. He added that he didn't look back any farther in the records.

Lately, a donation from the estates of Fred and Henrietta Bremer has given the center a boost, he said.

The city will need to balance its civic responsibility with its financial responsibility, he said. Looking at the number of people who use the center and where they are from, said Mr. Gilley, The Gateway isn't actually drawing much money from out of town.

The No. 1 problem, he said, is The Gateway isn't living up to the name of the "premier event" (See RATES on Page 10A)

*Rates, policies could change at Gateway

(Continued from Page 1A)
center in northwest Kansas."

The second problem, he said, is that the center isn't being used enough as a recreational center, although that was how it was sold to the community when it was built.

Another problem, he said, is that the facility is losing a bunch of money every year.

Event centers can make money, said Mr. Gilley, but they need to be marketed regionally. Another part of this, he said, is that for The Gateway to make it as a regional event center, the town needs another motel or hotel. The hotel needs to be big enough to house the people who will travel here to use the center. A new hotel would supplement what is already here, he said, not replace it.

Right now, he said, the city doesn't have a clear priority on whether The Gateway is going to be an event center or a civic facility. With a facility, said Mr. Gilley, the staff would be responsible for keeping a calendar of events and checking out the key. People would set up their room and leave it clean. This would be similar to what happens at the shelter house at Sappa Lake, he said.

With an event center, he said, the staff would run the building, get it ready, prepare the meals and do the clean up.

There are lots of options, he said, including doing nothing and spending the Bremer donation, then hoping for another large gift. Or the city could cut operations, change its focus or raise prices.

The staff, he said, is proposing to change operations and raise prices for the building.

If the building is marketing as a regional event center, he said, the focus will change. Some of the groups now using The Gateway may go to the new Golden Age and recreation center downtown. The two actually compliment each other, he said.

Making The Gateway an event center, he said, actually aligns nicely with the Economic Development Corp.'s strategic plan.

If the center doesn't work as an event center, said Mr. Gilley, then the city would need to change course and make it more of a facility.

Running it as a regional event center would include trying to recruit activities, conferences and meetings for groups and people in the region, not just here, he said.

This is a tremendous facility, said Mr. Gilley, adding that he didn't think that Norton, McCook or other communities in the area have anything like it. The city could bring in more concerts and entertainment. The Arts and Humanities Commission does a great job getting events, he said, but if the council wants this to be an event center, there could be more of these events.

When the city first got the Bremer money, said Councilwoman Marcia Lohoefer, a group of people got together and kind of came up with a plan like this, instead of the money just being spent on electricity and things like that.

It sounds like everything hinges on a new hotel, said Councilman Bill Riedel. For example if there was a concert at The Gateway, people aren't going to want to drive 50 to 60 miles home afterwards.

It will also be important to keep community support, said Mrs. Lohoefer, to not make it too expensive for Oberlin people to use

the building for their daughter's wedding.

After a tour of the building given by manager Kathy Brainard, Mr. Gilley talked about a few possible changes and solutions.

Since the Bremer donation the city has put a new roof on The Gateway, plus new heating, ventilating and air conditioning equipment, an oven and ice machine, and painted and cleaned up the storage areas. Remaining repairs to the building include fixing some leaking windows in the arena, the intake for the heating and air conditioning in the lobby, a few plumbing issues and light ballasts.

The big capital project in the works is a circle drive in front of the building, which the council talked about briefly.

Mr. Gilley said he and the staff have talked about putting in a play area where the concert slab is outside the building and a walking path. Other possible changes would include switching the office areas, with the city office staff moving where Ms. Brainard's office is now right inside the west door and the Gateway staff in the present city office.

Another idea would be to hire a recreational coordinator to help Oberlin people use the building, he said. This might be a part-time job, he said, and the person also could help coordinate use of other city recreation areas.

Mayor Joe Stanley suggested possibly coordinating with the county recreation director.

Another idea was to redo the policies, procedures and pricing for events. Policy changes, Mr. Gilley said, might include no outside catering, no use of the kitchen by other than staff, and eliminating a rule that the events serving alcohol stop at midnight and everyone has to be out by 1 a.m. Others might be offering a deal that with 10 catered events, the 11th is free and discounts for multiple-day events.

The alcohol change doesn't mean that people can't drink at The Gateway, he said; it would just take the center's staff out of the job of policing every event.

With catering, he said, they came up with four possibilities of food service, with the first tier costing \$7.50 per person, the second \$9, the third \$11.50 and the fourth \$14.50.

By having several options in each tier, said Mr. Gilley, it would cut back on emergency shopping for food, which gets expensive. The catering would include the food and buffet service only.

Those renting The Gateway would then pay for the room, the dinner service used, table cloth rental and other items.

Mr. Gilley said the city would like some feedback on the ideas. People can call 475-2400 or e-mail Ms. Brainard at kbrainard@oberlinkansas.gov, Mr. Gilley at agilley@oberlinkansas.gov or the city at cityofoberlin@oberlinkansas.gov.

There are lots of reasons to make the changes, he said, but lots not to.

Depending on what people want to eat for their event, he said, these changes could mean an increase of anywhere from 25 to 50 percent in food costs. Mr. Gilley added that the council probably needs to make a decision by sometime in January.

Waiting for the show



BEFORE THE CONCERT on Monday at Oberlin Elementary School, Kindergartners Ryan Ketterl and Corbin Wessel colored in the library.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

*Farm land might not be re-enrolled

(Continued from Page 1A)
year over the life of the contract.

The annual payments are guaranteed. Some are higher and some lower than the average, said Mrs. Barrett, depending on the soil types.

If land isn't re-enrolled in the program, said Mrs. Barrett, the landowner doesn't have to tear up the grass. It could be left for wildlife

or used for grazing.

The decision on land applications isn't made here, Mrs. Barrett said. In a general enrollment period, the application is sent to the national office. Each application receives points for different reasons. A cut off is determined and the applications that score above that are awarded a contract.

In a continuous program, if the

farmer or landowner applies and the ground meets the qualifications, it is accepted for a contract which lasts 10 to 15 years.

The Conservation Reserve Program creates more wildlife habitat, said Mrs. Barrett. The grass also helps the environment by protecting the soil from erosion.

As land comes out of the program, she said, some owners will choose

to keep the acres in grass for grazing while others might put the land back into the crop rotation.

Although she wasn't sure what prompted Congress to cut the program, Mrs. Barrett said the need to balance the federal budget might be part of the reason for allowing fewer acres.

*Grand prize winner to be picked Saturday

(Continued from Page 1A)

also had the chance to win one of the 15 \$50 instant prizes by matching their ticket numbers to one in the ads in *The Oberlin Herald*.

This week two people claimed their instant prizes.

• Peggy Ream had ticket No. 883028 that she got from Dale's Fish 'N' Fun. She plans to spend the money on Christmas gifts.

• Denise Abbey had ticket No. 881344 that she got from Ampride. She also plans to spend the money

on Christmas gifts.

In past weeks, Bill Flynn, Jeanette Miller, Sandy Zeigler, Carolyn Hackney, Sharon Ream and Joyce Juenemann all claimed \$50 instant prizes.

With seven instant winners left unclaimed, those will be drawn for first, before the \$1,000 grand prize money, on Saturday.

All of the prizes are given in scrip, which can only be spent at the sponsoring businesses: Ward Drug Store, Stellar Sales, the Carpet Center, the

Bank, Dale's Fish 'n' Fun, the Land-Mark Inn, Raye's Grocery, Stanley Hardware, Home Planning Center, the Dresser, Ultimate Fertilizer, Ampride and *The Herald*.

All of the tickets will be picked up by the close of business Friday. Tickets are limited to 250 in any single purchase. Tickets are collected each week from the sponsoring businesses.

All prize winners agree to be photographed and interviewed by *The Herald* staff. Winners have to

have the matching ticket present at the drawing in order to claim their prize.

Following the drawing, the Oberlin Business Alliance plans to hold a soup lunch in the west half of the new Golden Age Center from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. The meal will be served for a donation, with proceeds going to the alliance.

A free movie, "Ice Age 3," will be shown at 2 p.m. at Sunflower Cinema, sponsored by Eagle Communications.

*Voters say no to ordinance stopping airport

(Continued from Page 1A)

heard, erroneously, that the ordinance had passed 282-45, ending the project.

Called at home with the results, Councilwoman Marcia Lohoefer said, "It makes me feel so good that people care about Oberlin's future."

Petition carriers Steve and Marilyn Horn, also reached at home, said they felt like they had succeeded in getting the pros and cons of the runway project out to the public. That's what they were trying to do in the first place, Mrs. Horn said.

By doing the petition, she said, it sent the issue to a vote, letting everyone decide what would happen instead of three or four people. This was about giving people a choice, Mr. Horn said.

After hearing the election results, Jay Anderson, a former council member who has led efforts of an informal airport committee on the project, said he thought the vote was "about the standard for Oberlin,

always pushing the envelope." "We have some hope now," said Dr. Anderson. "Now we need to go to work and get together like we always do."

Connie Grafel, marketing direc-

tor of the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp., who has helped manage the project, couldn't be reached for comment.

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