

County changes leader

The Decatur County commissioners started the new year with a change in their chairman during the first meeting of 2011 last Tuesday.

The commissioners chose Commissioner Gene Gallentine to serve as chairman for the year, with Commissioner Stan McEvoy as the vice-chairman and Commissioner Ralph Unger just finishing his year as chairman.

During the meeting, the commissioners passed resolutions needed for the beginning of the year:

- Approved the holiday schedule, with the courthouse to be closed:
 - Friday, Dec. 31, for New Year's Eve.
 - Monday, Feb. 21, for President's Day.
 - Monday, May 30, for Memorial Day.
 - Monday, July 4, for Independence Day.
 - Monday, Sept. 5, for Labor Day.
 - Friday, Nov. 11, for Veterans Day.
 - Thursday, Nov. 24, and Friday, Nov. 25, for Thanksgiving.
 - Monday, Dec. 26, for Christmas.
 - Monday, Jan. 2, for New Year's Day.
- Named The Oberlin Herald as the official county newspaper.
- Designated The Bank, Farmers Bank and Trust and First National Bank as depositories for county money.
- Set the 911 tax at 75 cents per land line.
- Set mileage reimbursement for the county business at 51 cents a mile.
- Approved meal reimbursement for county employees away from home on business at \$32 a day with \$8 for breakfast, \$9 for lunch and \$15 for the evening meal. Commissioners said original receipts will be needed for an employee to get a meal reimbursement.
- Approved the standard Generally Accepted Accounting Practices for the county books.
- Approved a contract with the Good Samaritan Center and one with the Decatur County Hospital for \$1 which says the county will provide a water truck to haul nonpotable water in case of an emergency.
- Approved wages for election workers and rent for polling places. Election workers get paid \$7.50 an hour and rent for polling places costs \$50.
- Approved the agreement with the Kansas Workers Risk Cooperative for Counties for workers' compensation coverage.



KAREN LARSON worked at her desk. She accepted the Oberlin city administrator job at the end of December. — Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

Woman accepts the city job

After working as the interim Oberlin city administrator for more than half of the year, Karen Larson accepted the full-time position at the end of December.

Mrs. Larson, who moved to Oberlin in 1996 with her husband Craig, started working for the city in 2004 as the treasurer. She then moved into the clerk's position and now is the administrator and clerk.

This isn't just a job, said Mrs. Larson, or just a career. She said she cares about the town, and she wants it to continue to be a special place, a place where people want to live.

Mrs. Larson said it's hard to do both the administrator and clerk job. Without the good city staff she wouldn't have been able to do it all. Both jobs are full-time by themselves, but now Jan Elliott, as deputy clerk, is going to do the clerk job. Mrs. Larson said she will keep some of the clerk duties but the majority will go to Mrs. Elliott.

Mrs. Larson said she has taken college classes, but doesn't have a degree in public administration. She has held administrative jobs in her lifetime and continues to learn.

She said the council asked her six months ago to take the job until an administrator could be hired.

Of the people who came in to interview for the job, she said, some didn't even like the town. This would have been a stepping stone for them.

Mrs. Larson said that's not what she wants.

Since accepting the job at the end of the year, she's had literally hundreds of phone calls from people who live here now, or have lived here, who are happy she has taken the job.

"It has been overwhelming," she said. "I feel blessed and grateful for the support."

Besides the clerk and administrator jobs, she is also responsible for operation of The Gateway, the city's money-losing civic center. Mrs. Larson said she is looking forward to increasing the use of the building.

Originally from Laramie, Wyo., she said she met her husband at Cheyenne Frontier Days, the big annual rodeo. They decided to move back to his home, where he farms and has a feed lot.

She said they have six children and six grandkids.

Mrs. Larson said she's very much into agriculture, and enjoys gardening, horseback riding, reading and getting together with friends.

City audit report is later than normal

While it's normal to have the city audit report by June of the following year, the Oberlin City Council hasn't yet received the report from 2009.

At the meeting Thursday, Jan. 6, the council spent half an hour behind closed doors with auditor Brian Thompson of Mapes and Miller, then another half hour on its own. There was no discussion after the sessions, called to discuss personnel, and no action taken afterward.

The audit is normally back by June, said City Administrator Karen Larson, before the council and staff prepare the budget for the next year.

That didn't happen this year. Mrs. Larson said last week that the auditors hope to have it done by the beginning of February. The city treasurer's computer system crashed in 2009 and the city's billing system failed in 2010, which is part of the reason it's taken the auditors longer than expected to process the numbers, she said.

Last week, the city printed an ordinance allowing it to increase

taxes for the 2011 budget year. Mrs. Larson said the city has to print the ordinance, passed in August, and then send the proof of publication to the state.

It should have been published in August when the budget was printed, she said, but it was overlooked, so the city published it this month.

The ordinance covers a tax increase planned in the budget, she said, not an additional increase.

The city's audit isn't the only one that is behind schedule. Decatur County Clerk Colleen Geihlsler said the county hasn't received its 2009 audit yet either. Normally, she said, the county would have received it in June or July of the following year.

Ms. Geihlsler said the county called the auditors in November and they said the county would have the audit soon.

The Oberlin School Board, which also goes through Mapes and Miller, has received its 2009 audit. The district normally gets the audit report in the winter, said Clerk Vickie Lippelmann.

Commissioners keep same districts

While the Decatur County commissioners have discussed changing commissioner districts to even out the population, at the meeting last Tuesday they decided to keep them as they are.

Without the changes, Commissioner Stan McEvoy has 943 people in District 1, Commissioner Ralph Unger 1,032 in District 2 and Commissioner Gene Gallentine 946 in District 3.

The commissioners received new figures from the appraiser's office including people who have died or moved. They decided that there wasn't a big enough difference this year to make any changes.

The commissioners talked with Rick Pauls with Pheasants Forever, who asked the county to give \$2,000 a year to help pay a wildlife biologist based here. Ryan Diener has been

hired and is living at Sappa Park.

The commissioners said they can only commit and give money a year at a time. They approved the \$2,000 for this year.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Heard from Noxious Weed Control Director Gaylen Huntley, who said he talked with Dick Carman about the office computer. He said he could fix it for between \$60 and \$200. The commissioners approved the work.

- Watched as Judge John Bremer swore in Mr. McEvoy, who was re-elected in November, for another term ending in January 2015.

- Approved transferring \$17,779 from the special equipment fund to the county general fund to finish out 2010, because the general fund was short.

Arizona congresswoman has ties to Colby

By **VERASLOAN**
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Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, the victim of a shooting in Tucson, has roots in Colby.

Her mother, Gloria Fraser Giffords, graduated in 1956 from Colby High School. The family owns farmland near Colby and the elder Giffords return to attend the high school reunion from time to time.

Delores Depe, wife of Alvin Depe, who rents some of the family's land, said on Tuesday that their family and the Giffords family have been friends for years.

"They had just returned from the swearing in ceremony in Washington," Mrs. Depe said. "I haven't heard from Gloria yet, but I know her time is taken up with the events

of last week, and she doesn't have time right now to sit down and reply to e-mails from friends while Gabby is in her present condition.

"The family is being remembered through prayer chains and we're keeping our fingers crossed for the best."

Gloria Giffords has enjoyed a career in Mexican folk art research, collecting and restoration. Her book, "Mexican Folk Retablos; Masterpieces on Tin," can be checked out from the Colby library.

The family's Thomas County roots go back to the John Ackard family, early-day residents of Colby. Ackard was the great-uncle of Gloria Fraser Giffords, and great-great uncle of the congresswoman.

He will be remembered as the father of the late McCleta Fryback, and

the owner of Ackard Oil Co. in the 1930s. John Schroeder of Brewster

is a cousin to Gloria Giffords.

Meeting Thursday on airport

An open meeting to discuss questions about Oberlin's municipal airport and the upgrade to the current runway will start at 4 p.m. Thursday at The Gateway.

Don Klappmeyer, the engineer with BWR who is in charge of plans to rebuild and relocate the main runway, will be at the meeting along with members of the Oberlin Airport Committee.

City Administrator Karen Larson said the committee wants public involvement, including people's ideas and questions.

The current plan, required to move the north-south runway away from the highway and fairgrounds for safety reasons, is not linked to a long-range plan for a 5,500-foot runway to handle larger planes.

While the questions from the committee are about the current project, said Councilman Bill Riedel, that's not to say that the future runway won't come up.

City to discuss water plant

The Oberlin City Council plans to talk about financing for the planned water treatment plant at its meeting at 7 p.m. Thursday at The Gateway.

City Administrator Karen Larson said John Haas with Ranson Financial should be at the meeting to talk about how to borrow money

for the project.

Jan Ackerman, the city's contract code enforcement officer, is on the agenda to discuss several properties.

The meeting, which is open to the public, will be held in the main upstairs meeting room.

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