



AT THE CANDIDATE FORUM last Wednesday, those running for Oberlin mayor (from left above), Rhonda May, Judy Scott, Bobbi Jo Johnson and Bill Riedel, got to answer

questions about city government and the town. Janice Shobe (below left) served as the moderator, while Carol Morford timed the answers. — Herald staff photos by Steve Haynes

Forum draws crowd

Candidates answer questions

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
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Around 40 people got to know the candidates for Oberlin mayor a little better last Wednesday during the Decatur Professional Women's candidate forum at The Gateway.

A subcommittee of the organization met before the forum to arrange 16 questions for the candidates. While time didn't allow for all of the questions to be asked, candidates responded to nine of them, as well as three from the audience.

Each of the four candidates — Bill Riedel, Bobbi Jo Johnson, Judy Scott and Rhonda May — had two minutes to answer each question and four minutes to wrap things up at the end of the evening.

Janice Shobe, administrator at the Good Samaritan Center, moderated the forum for the group.

Ms. May said she grew up in Oberlin, left, got a Bachelor of Science from the University of Kansas in petroleum engineering and didn't think she would ever come back, but her husband, Dan Nedland, wanted to raise their kids here. The couple has graduated two sons from the high school, and daughter Elizabeth attends Decatur Community Junior/Senior High School.

Ms. Scott also grew up here. She said she moved to Denver and then came back to her roots to raise her daughter. When she returned, Ms. Scott said she got involved in civic boards and in politics. Years ago, she never thought Oberlin would only have one grocery store, one drug store and no new car dealers.

Mrs. Johnson said she grew up in Minnesota and has lived in towns of every size. In all of those, she said, she's wanted to help out, wanted to make a difference. Mrs. Johnson said in high school she was part of the Reserve Officer Training Corps and did community service with that.

Mr. Riedel said he and his wife bought a house here 15 years ago. He retired from Coors Brewing Co. in Colorado after 34 years and they moved here. While at Coors, he said, he worked his way up the ranks to process manager and earned a business degree from Regis University



while on the job. The following are the questions and answers from each of the candidates:

"If you are elected to mayoral post, what does that allow you to accomplish that remaining on the council does not?"

• Mr. Riedel said he will be giving up his vote on the council, but will be able to represent the entire city. As the mayor, he said, he will be able to work with the civic organizations in town and be able to get out and try to sell Oberlin.

• As a former council member, said Ms. Scott, she thought about running for council because of the ability to vote. She said she's been on lots of boards where she's ended up in charge. Ms. Scott said she's good at keeping meetings running and moving along. She wants to help lead, help give direction and positive ideas.

• Mrs. Johnson said she chose to run for mayor instead of first seeking a council position because it seems people tend to respect what the mayor says more. As mayor, she said, she would talk to other organizations and help things move along.

• Running for mayor, said Ms. May, seems like the natural progression. She said she joined the council because someone asked her to. There is a lot more to serving than someone might think, she said, and there's a learning curve. Ms. May said she would like to try and be the next mayor for the city.

"What do you see as a successful working relationship between the mayor and city administrator? How would you help achieve a good working relationship?"

• Both, said Ms. Scott, have to put the city needs and taxpayers needs up front and have a good work ethic. Every vote she's ever made has been for the betterment of the community. She said she will still think that way whether she has a vote or not.

• Any situation, said Mrs. Johnson, involves communication. It's important to work with each other instead of against each other. When everyone works towards the same goal, she said, things work better.

• A good congenial interpersonal relationship, said Ms. May. Dealing with other people in a sensible manner, but with a good dose of humor as well. There are some things that

people get excited about, she said, but some need to be taken with a grain of salt. There also needs to be defined roles.

• The position of the city administrator needs to be respected, said Mr. Riedel. The mayor needs to be there to support the administrator and be there when needed. He added that he and Administrator Karen Larson chat once a week now on city business and to give moral support. The mayor's role isn't to micromanage, he said.

"As you reflect back on your council term, are there any decisions made in the last two to four years which you would not want to reconsider? What do you see as your best decision?"

• One thing, said Ms. May, that she would have done differently is when the people came to town with the wind energy idea, she wouldn't have spent so much time talking to them. If the council could have figured out earlier that those guys didn't really have the money for the project, it would have saved a lot of time.

One thing, she said, that worked out pretty well is the water treatment (See MAYORAL on Page 10)

Some city voters cast their ballots early

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
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Nearly 60 voters cast their ballots early in the primary election for Oberlin mayor.

While the election wasn't until Tuesday, for the past few weeks, registered voters have had the chance to bot in advance. County Clerk Colleen Geihlsler, who serves as the county's election officer, said 57 people had voted as of Monday.

The candidates include Bobbi Jo Johnson, Bill Riedel, Judy Scott and Rhonda May. The primary will determine which three candidates will be on the ballot for the general

election on Tuesday, April 5. The candidate with the lowest votes will be knocked out of the race.

Since the primary is only for the mayor's race, the city will pay for it. Ms. Geihlsler said she isn't sure how much it will cost.

There will only be one polling place, at The Gateway. There will be eight election workers during the day, six counters starting at 4 p.m. and three people to count the advance ballots at the courthouse, Mrs. Geihlsler said.

City residents who have yet to register to vote won't be allowed to

cast a ballot in the primary, the clerk said. However, they can register to vote in the general election until Monday, March 21. The office will stay open until 6 p.m. that evening to accommodate latecomers.

Those running for the general election, besides the mayor's race, are:

• Jim Miesner, Janice Guthrie, Nolan Johnson, Tim Bowen and Rusty Addleman, for two seats on the Oberlin City Council.

• Dan Nedland, Dan Grafel, Monte Moore and Jerry Chambers for the four at-large seats on the Oberlin School Board. All are incumbents.

• Peggy Pratt and Cathy Anthony for the two seats open on the Twin Creeks Extension District.

• Wava Reames, Jerry Hill and Jim Plotts for the three open seats on the Norcat City Council. All are incumbents.

• Scott Taylor for mayor and Erma Jean Spresser and Margaret Rhodes for Dresden City Council. All three are incumbents.

• No one filed for the three spots open on the Jennings City Council. Those are currently held by Rick Foster, Pat Hall and Stann Hartzog.

Inspector cites school on fire code

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
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School districts across the state may have to replace doors and windows in classrooms to meet standards for a one-hour fire corridor — just in case.

Superintendent Duane Dorshorst told the Oberlin School Board at its February meeting that a state fire inspector had checked the school buildings and said at both the grade and high school, that the windows next to doors and doors with windows would need to be replaced.

Another option, instead of getting rid of the windows, he said, is putting smoke alarms in the hallways. These aren't the smoke alarms you buy at the store, Mr. Dorshorst said. The commercial-grade alarms would have to be wired to a central box.

The Oberlin School District, said Mr. Dorshorst, has had the same inspector for the past nine years and he's never said anything about the doors or windows. No one could say why the rule is being enforced now.

He said he'd been told the old fire code allowed windows in or next to doors. These were banned after 1987, he said, and the code apparently was re-written in 2007. The way he understands what the inspector said is that the 1987 code contained language that "grandfathered" older buildings, but that was left out of the 2007 code.

When the inspector came to the district at the beginning of February, this is what the district was told, said Mr. Dorshorst, although now nobody seems to know about the code change. The state fire marshal's of-

fice, he said, claims it doesn't know anything about a change.

Nothing has been said about any of these changes until now, he added.

"This could cost the district tens of thousands of dollars," said board member Dan Grafel.

Doug Jorgensen, acting state fire marshal, said Monday the requirements have been in the code for a while. Recently, he said, the state legislators asked that the fire marshal's office do some more training for the inspectors so they could be more familiar with the codes.

Most of the complaints the office has received have been about the school corridors and smoke separation, said Mr. Jorgensen. While the one-hour fire corridor isn't new to the code, he said, this is probably an issue about lack of knowledge with the inspectors. With the increase in training that the legislators wanted, he said, building owners are being cited.

The older buildings, said Mr. Jorgensen, weren't grandfathered in on this, adding that there may have been some misinformation from the inspectors to the school districts.

The doors and windows aren't the only problem the inspector saw, said Mr. Dorshorst. There has to be a two-hour "fire box" for each of the science rooms and the wood shop at the high school.

The wood shop, said Mr. Dorshorst, will have the same issue as the classrooms with the one-hour fire corridor. The wood shop has a classroom in front of it that has a wall of windows. Those windows, he said, will most likely have to all

(See SCHOOLS on Page 10)

Area artists invited to exhibit works

Area artists will get a chance to display and sell their work again this year at the seventh annual High Plains ArtFest on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, April 15 to 17.

An opening gala from 7 to 9 p.m. Friday at The Gateway will kick off the event. Tickets, \$100 a couple, can be purchased at the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp. office in the Business Entrepreneurial Enhancement Center.

The gala will feature live music, hors d'oeuvres, adult and student art, time to meet and visit with the artists and voting for the People's Choice Award. Those attending get the first chance at buying artwork.

Connie Grafel, marketing director for the corporation, said she recently sent out 400 sheets inviting artists to enter. She said she also sent the information to 35 high schools, adding that she expanded the effort to the Hays area.

Artists need to have their forms in by Friday, April 1. Ms. Grafel said they will be accepting artwork from 4 to 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, April 8 and 9.

During the event, The Gateway will be open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday and from noon to 3 p.m. on Sunday for public viewing. Artists can pick up their work after 3 p.m. on Sunday.

State legislators plan to be in town Saturday

The area's state legislators plan to be in Oberlin on Saturday to talk with voters and taxpayers at a "town hall" meeting.

Rep. Ward Cassidy, St. Francis, and Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, Grinnell, plan to be at the Decatur County courthouse from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the district courtroom. The Decatur County Farm Bureau will provide pizza for lunch and the clerk's office something to drink.

The meeting, which everyone is encouraged to attend, will give the two Republicans a chance to talk about what's going on in Topeka and for people to ask questions.

Rep. Cassidy is serving his first term in the House of Representatives, serving the 120th District. He serves on the Education, Education Budget and Corrections and Juvenile Justice committees.

Sen. Ostmeyer, who has served since 2005, is the chair of the Ag-



W. Cassidy



R. Ostmeyer

riculture and Natural Resources Committee and a member of Federal and State Affairs, Agriculture, Local Government, Energy and Environmental Policy and Reapportionment committees, and the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules and Regulations.



*Schools cited by inspectors

(Continued from Page 1A)
 be replaced with a solid wall.
 With the science rooms, the wall goes just slightly above the suspended ceilings. The district will need to extend the wall up to the roof, so that each room is like a box, he said. Without the addition to the wall, said Mr. Dorshorst, the inspector said fire and smoke can move from the science rooms to the hallways in case of a fire.
 The trusses that support the roof, he said, are between the dropped ceiling and the roof, making changes more difficult.
 Mr. Dorshorst said the district was given 10 days to reply and 90 days to get the repairs done, but can ask for more time on the big things. He said his question is why this hasn't been an issue until now.
 Mr. Dorshorst said he has no idea what the cost of the work will be and won't know until they get an architect in and get plans, but he's guessing it could be over \$100,000.
 The Oberlin district wasn't the only one with the issues about the doors and door jams. The Norton School District, which has also had the same inspector for years, had the same report.
 Superintendent Greg Mann said Norton was given basically four options: replace the doors that aren't rated for an hour, put in the hard-wired smoke detectors, file for a hardship waiver or have an architect write a letter stating there is no practical way to apply the new code.
 There is a certain number of square inches that can be in the glass on the door to get a one-hour rating. Mr. Mann said he thought it was 100 or less.
 The big thing on the doors is that each one has to have a tag on it, and some of the older doors would meet the code but the doors are not marked.
 The door jams have to be fire rated, too, said Mr. Mann, adding that a lot of the jams are cemented into place and would need to be cut out.
 Also, he said, a lot of the older buildings have windows up high in the walls. Those are a no-no and have to be taken out. Mr. Mann said the district hasn't ever been told

about any of these issues before.
 It could cost roughly \$20,000 to comply, Mr. Mann said. It's not that the district doesn't have the money, but this wasn't something it had planned on.
 Mr. Mann said he was told by the inspector that the buildings built prior to 1987 had been grandfathered in, but the codes that are now being used are from 1991. Mr. Mann said the fire marshal's office claims to know nothing about the allowance for older buildings.
 He said he asked why the districts now are getting notices on the same thing, but the inspectors don't really know.
 Mr. Mann said he was told that the Norton School District could get additional time to comply if needed.
 He said that state Rep. Ward Cassidy has been working on the problem. He has drafted a bill to help districts in this situation not have to do the repairs until the state education budget goes back up.
 Neither superintendent was sure if any other districts have received similar inspection reports.
 The fire marshal's office just adopted a new standard the first of February, said Mr. Jorgensen, but the door thing was part of the old code. When a code is changed, he said, they hold public meetings. The proposed changes are run through the state Department of Administration, attorney general's and the secretary of state's offices. All of this was done with the new code, he said.
 Last week, he said, several school superintendents were in Topeka for a meeting. Mr. Jorgensen said he talked to them about these rules.
 While the waiver would put off the project for a while, he said, it would still have to be done unless the codes are changed. Mr. Jorgensen said he didn't know how long the waivers could delay the project.
 "We understand that schools don't have any money," he added.
 Regulatory agencies like his, said Mr. Jorgensen, normally don't have a big fan club, but they are charged under state law with enforcing the fire safety codes. It's important for the protection of the people in the buildings, he said.

Voting early



AT THE DECATUR COUNTY COURTHOUSE last Friday, Steve Horn signed the voter book, held by County Clerk Colleen Geihlsler, before he filled out his advance ballot in the city primary election for mayor.
 — Herald staff photo by Timothy Davis

*Mayoral candidates answer questions

(Continued from Page 1A)
 plant. Ms. May said she was one of the ones who said it was a lousy idea, but actually the way it turned out the city is getting low-cost interim financing and improving the quality of its water. And no one is being sent to jail, because the city is conforming with the Environmental Protection Agency's requirements.
 • Mr. Riedel said he agrees with Ms. May. The council exhausted all the options on the water treatment plant. It turned out to be a great learning experience about the financing. What was a real win was the airport. The people had the chance to vote on it. Although it tended to divide the community a little, he said, the petition and vote gave people the opportunity to speak out.
 • Mrs. Johnson said she would have studied more on small-town government in the last few years, being more involved in checking what was going on with the council.
 • Ms. Scott said she doesn't have any "would of, could of, should of," but like Mr. Riedel said, she thought the airport had divided the town, but people weren't informed. Then the controversy with the petition, which she said wasn't worded right, came and split the town. It's important to move forward and support the project since the vote, she said.

paying.
 • Obviously infrastructure is important, said Ms. Scott. When she served on the council in the 1990s, she said, she fought to get some kind of money or program for the streets. The council is already working on the water and the power plant.
 With health care, the town is in a precarious situation. In the long run, she said, she thinks it will turn out for the best.
 Oberlin has to get the young people with children back to town, she said.
 "Deterioration of our brick streets and overly thick asphalt streets may soon be an issue as far as the city's infrastructure is concerned. What kind of planning for repair or replacement would you recommend at this early stage?"
 • The council and city crew have talked to Wayne Hackney of Oberlin Concrete and also worked with Miller and Associates to build a priority list on what streets need to be done first, Mr. Riddle said. There is money in the street fund, but there needs to be a plan in place.
 Foreman Dan Castle is working on a plan for the streets. The city also is working on a plan for the brick streets. The bricks at Hall and Penn, said Mr. Riddle, where there is heavy truck traffic going to the co-op during harvest, have taken a lot of wear. The city might have to look at re-routing some truck traffic to save the streets.
 • The city needs to look at the situation, get the bids and get to work on the streets, instead of just talking about it, said Mrs. Johnson.
 • Ms. Scott said she would recommend driving through town, earmarking the worst streets and then fixing them as money allows. The streets, she said, are never going to get any better if the city just keeps sealing them every other year.
 • The asphalt streets aren't in very good shape, said Ms. May, because the streets never had a good base to them. So when the streets are coated with another half inch of asphalt every other year, the city ends up with streets that are humpy. It will take a huge amount of money to fix all of them. The city could never do all the streets at the same time. There has been an account started for street repairs since she's been on the council, she said.
 She added that she agrees with Mr. Riedel on the brick streets. The semi trucks might need to be rerouted.
 "Do you consider the maintenance and upkeep of the city's power plant for either emergency generation or support of a stable power source a significant issue? Why or why not?"
 • Yes, said Ms. Scott, because there have been times that the plant has kept the power going in town. Mr. Castle has done a great job keeping the power plant going.
 • It's a good idea so the city isn't having to buy power off another town, said Mrs. Johnson. The more self sufficient the city can be, the better.
 • It's important to keep the plant operational, said Ms. May, if the city is already saying it has an operational plant. Since she's moved home, she said the area had a big

storm. People in the county were out of power for several days. At her house, she said, she was out for 20 minutes maybe.
 If the city is going to promise it will have a power plant, she said, then the city needs to have one that works pretty well.
 • The city has to keep the plant in good running order under its agreement with Sunflower Electric Power Co., a cooperative which delivers the city's power, and the Western Area Power Administration, said Mr. Riedel. A lot of the generating units at the plant are fairly old, but in good shape. Mr. Castle has done a great job keeping them up. At current status, the plant is one of the few money-making entities that the city has. Power provides a great deal of revenue, he said.
 "If elected, would you be in favor of changing ordinances that will allow for beer gardens at local events, similar to what is allowed in neighboring towns? Why or why not?"
 • After getting an explanation of what a beer garden is, Ms. May said she wasn't sure how to answer the questions. She said she's not sure about having a beer garden at the county fair, but the council talked about having beer at the barbecue contest at Sappa Park, which seemed to work fine. It would have to be considered case by case.
 • Generally yes, said Mr. Riedel. He would be in favor of it to keep Oberlin more competitive. There would have to be rules and regulations, especially with the fair or when kids are around. Racing events normally have beer gardens outside the pits, because it's a way for the promoter to make money. When someone can pour a 50 cent beer and sell it for \$3.50 a cup, that's good. It worked out well at the Sappa Park event.
 • It would need to be considered case by case, said Ms. Scott. She said she's not sure if she would want one at the fair because of the kids, but at the races, a barbecue or other events she might be in favor of it. In the past several years, she said she's been lots of places where there were beer gardens and people weren't out of hand.
 • Mrs. Johnson said since she had done a short stint as a "carney," or carnival worker, she has a unique perspective. The first thing they did, when setting up in a town, was check how big the beer garden was, because it determined how much money would be made and possibly how much trouble. It would be im-

portant to have police available, she said. It would also be good to look at each event and see how much of that event is aimed at kids.
 The candidates fielded three questions from the audience, about Next-Tech installing fiber, the airport, televised meetings and the Gove Rural Enterprise Plan, which none of the four knew a lot about it.
 Each candidate was given a chance to wrap things up before the forum ended an hour and half after it started.
 Three of the candidates will move on to the general election Tuesday, April 5, while the one with the lowest vote this week will be eliminated. Results of Tuesday's primary voting will be in next week's paper.

**Legislative Town Hall Meeting with
 Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer and Rep. Ward Cassidy
 SATURDAY, MARCH 5, 2011**

8:00-9:00 a.m. Phillipsburg, 3rd Street Bakery
 9:45-10:45 a.m. Norton, Town and Country Kitchen
 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Oberlin, Decatur County Courthouse, Courtroom 3rd Fl
 1:45-2:45 p.m. Atwood, Williams Brothers Grocery Store Deli
 3:30-4:30 p.m. St. Francis, Main Street Cafe

Pd by Ostmeyer for Senate, Lori Edwards, Treasurer
 Rep. Ward Cassidy, Michael Day, Treasurer

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What are the top three concerns you have as you look at the city's future, starting in May 2011?

• Mrs. Johnson said she wants to see the elderly and youths be able to get more involved in the town. She suggested asking those groups what they want. She noted that she's watched more and more teenagers leave as they graduate from high school and never come back.
 It's important to make sure the city's water quality is as good as it can be, she said. It's also important to try to get some new businesses here and help provide some first-time jobs for young people.
 • Health care is her top concern, said Ms. May. She said she's not sure how the health care situation will wind up, with the old clinic about to close. While it's maybe not the job of city government, health care is a concern.
 There's a new center for senior citizens, she said, and activities in it. She said she thinks they are doing a decent job of serving the needs of the senior citizens, but doesn't see anything attracting young people. Ms. May said she doesn't think there are enough day cares in town. Other towns that have had similar situations have formed a nonprofit daycare. That is something that Oberlin could do and it would be a draw for the town.
 • Some of the challenges, said Mr. Riedel, included finances, having a failing infrastructure, including a \$250,000 upgrade needed at the power plant, the power poles being too short for Next-Tech to install fiber optic and the streets. The city has to start spending some money on its facilities, he said.
 The tax rates are in the top 10 highest in the state. There's a dwindling population, but the city has the same services it had 10 to 15 years ago with one-third of the population

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