



Preston Pratt

## Oberlin man wins judgeship

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**  
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An Oberlin lawyer has been appointed to serve as judge of the Kansas 17th Judicial District, probably starting in the position at the beginning of July.

Preston Pratt of the firm of Hirsch and Pratt said he anticipates that he will start in the job July 1, but he has some cases he needs to wrap up and clients to notify first.

Mr. Pratt was notified last week of the appointment by Gov. Sam Brownback.

The position came open with the retirement of Judge Bill Elliott of Hill City. Judge Elliott,

said Mr. Pratt, retired in the middle of his term. The position was open to any licensed lawyer who was interested.

He said four applied, including both he and his partner, Steve Hirsch of Oberlin, and Mark Whitney and Karen Griffiths of Norton.

Mr. Pratt said they all put their names in April and the first interviews were done in early May. He and Mr. Hirsch had second interviews a few weeks ago. The announcement was made on Thursday, along with an appointment for the 31st Judicial District.

"I am pleased to appoint these two attorneys

to the Kansas District Courts," said Gov. Brownback "They have demonstrated their commitment to their communities over many years of service, both public and private, and I am convinced they will continue to serve the people of the 17th Judicial District and the 31st Judicial District well in the years to come."

Gov. Brownback appointed Daryl D. Ahlquist to serve as the judge for the 31st district.

Mr. Pratt said the term goes until January 2013. He will have to run for the office in November 2012. The 17th District includes

Decatur, Norton, Phillips, Smith, Osborne and Graham counties.

He graduated from the University of Kansas law school in 1993 after earning an undergraduate degree in psychology at KU.

Since 1993, Mr. Pratt has been in private practice in Oberlin and has also served as the Logan County Attorney and assistant Oberlin City Attorney and Decatur County Attorney.

Mr. Pratt said he plans to continue living in Oberlin. Being a judge is a good public service, he said. It's an important position that can affect the lives of a lot of people.

## Few projects needed along easy U.S. 36

By **STEVE HAYNES**  
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Twenty years of highway improvements in Kansas have left U.S. 36 in pretty good shape across the state, a Department of Transportation official told members of the U.S. 36 Association on Friday in Phillipsburg, but the state will be doing some work on the road this summer.

One of those jobs will be an innovative project in Oberlin, where a contractor working south of town will provide asphalt and place it, while state workers haul the material, and take care of traffic control and other details.

Jeff Stewart, district engineer for northwest Kansas in Norton, said improvements to Kansas roads began in 1989 with the Comprehensive Highway Program created by Gov. Mike Hayden. A three-year interim program followed, then the 10-year Comprehensive Trans-

portation Program under Gov. Bill Graves from 2000 to 2009.

Last year, the state launched T-Works, a 10-year, \$8.2 billion plan to maintain and improve Kansas roads, airports, rail lines and other facilities. Stewart said the new program is smaller and more focused on preserving what we have, but includes 27 "improvement" projects in addition to maintenance.

Preservation will get the lion's share of the money, \$4.2 billion, he said, while the modernization and expansion projects will take \$1.7 billion, transit \$100 million, aviation \$46 million and rail \$40 million. Cities and counties will get \$1.6 billion.

On U.S. 36, the largest project this year will be from the K-383 junction east to the Norton-Phillips County line. A contractor will mill off three inches of old pavement and replace it with a three-inch overlay of new

(See ROADS on Page 8A)

## Relay for Life event kicks off on Friday

By **MARY LOU OLSON**  
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Tie up those walking shoes. It's time to pound the floor for the 11th annual Relay for Life on Friday night and Saturday at The Gateway.

This year's theme is "Imagine a World with More Birthdays."

The relay, held each summer, raises money for the American Cancer Society to help with cancer research.

Registration will begin at 5 p.m. Friday, followed by the Survivor/Caregiver barbecue at 5:30 p.m. in the downstairs meeting room. Everyone is invited to join in the barbecue supper at 6 p.m.; donations will be accepted.

The Stick-To-It 4-H Club will assist with setting up and serving the meal. Robert Groneweg will be cooking up the barbecued beef, which will be served with chips.

At 6:45 p.m., the community band will start playing, directed by Neal Russell. Opening activities begin with the presentation of colors and the National Anthem, which will be sung by Nora Urban, accompanied

by the band.

Next will be the Survivors' Walk around the arena. They will be joined on the second round by caregivers and family, then the relay teams will join the walkers on the third round. After balloons are released, participants will resume walking.

Besides the walk and ceremonies, new activities are planned with fun for everyone, organizers said. Activities chair Diane Barrett will be dreaming up new games for the birthday party.

Lynn Johnson will give the survivor's speech at 10 p.m. to kick off the Luminaria Ceremony, followed by the reading of names and lighting of the luminarias. Scheduled activities will continue until 1 a.m.

Teams have been organized by the Decatur Professional Women, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service, Decatur County employees, Decatur Health Systems and friends of Leigh Davis and Jim Buchholz.

Luminaries may be purchased (See RELAY on Page 8A)



## Kids take to fields

**T-BALLERS HIT** the ball, threw the ball and ran the bases last week as the summer season began in Oberlin. Morgan Jones (top) was at bat for Hansen Mueller while Casey Jones (left) was heading around the bases. Lukas Diederich was ready to toss the ball for Oberlin Livestock in the game.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis



## County considers new incentive program

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**  
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The Decatur County commissioners talked last Tuesday about the new state Rural Opportunity Zone program, which could help bring young professionals to the county to live and work and help repay their student loans.

The commissioners learned that Sheridan and Stanton counties have decided not to join the loan-repayment part of the program. The state Department of Commerce, Division of Rural Development, said Lane, Rooks, Russell, Scott, Woodson and Kingman counties had joined the program by last week. Others were undecided.

Commissioner Gene Gallentine said he got an e-mail from Connie Grafel, marketing director for the Oberlin-Decatur County

### County Roundup

At their meeting last Tuesday, the Decatur County commissioners:

- Talked about a new state program which could help bring young professionals to the county to live and work while helping repay their student loans. Story at left.
- Decided to list the old transpor-

tation van on a free site to give the vehicle away. Story on Page 3A.

• Received budget requests from the Area Agency on Aging to help with services for the elderly as well as with the meal site at the Golden Age Center. Story on Page 3A.

Economic Development Corp., saying that she is in contact with a potential dentist for the county who could be a candidate for the program.

County Attorney Steve Hirsch suggested that something could be done through the county Health Foundation.

A lot of counties, said County

Clerk Colleen Geishler, are undecided because they don't know how to budget for the program. Under a law passed this spring at the urging of Gov. Sam Brownback, counties and the state would jointly repay up to 20 percent of a qualifying new resident's student loans, up to \$3,000 per year for five years. Counties have to opt into the loan

repayment part of the program, the division says, but all anyone moving from out of state to one of the 50 counties losing population and covered by the program would be eligible for a five-year income tax exemption. That part of the law does not require an opt in.

The commissioners have until December to make a decision, said Mr. McEvoy. He added that he's almost more inclined to put more money into the Health Foundation.

The commissioners continued a discussion they have been having for weeks about possibly changing the cell phone company the county uses, or at least getting all the departments on the same plan.

Currently, most of the employees have Nex-Tech Wire- (See COUNTY on Page 8A)

## Conversation tonight on county's health care

Decatur Tomorrow plans a community conversation at 6:30 p.m. tonight at The Gateway to discuss the community's role in supporting health care.

Before the meeting, the Oberlin Teens for Christ will serve a dinner at 5:30 p.m. for a donation. The money will be used to help purchase a van for the group.

Deanna Castle, a Decatur Tomorrow committee member, said everyone is encouraged to attend to be involved in the brainstorming process.

"It will be a chance to learn how we, as a community, can help support and promote our health-care system," she said.

## Come paint at Sappa

The Sappa Park Committee plans a "paint night" at 5:30 p.m. Thursday at the shelter house.

The Oberlin Camp of the Modern Woodmen of America gave \$500 for

paint for the building. Anyone who wants to come out and help paint the breezeway is welcome.

