

## Year ends with lots of headlines

### Oberlin ends up in dark

By KIMBERLY DAVIS  
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As 2011 comes to an end and 2012 starts up, it's time to take a look back at the news of the past year.

Over the past 52 weeks and 365 days, thousands of headlines were printed in *The Oberlin Herald*. Looking back through the year's 52 issues, several stories stood out. Many were continued from 2010.

**In January:**

- Karen Larson, who had served as the interim city administrator and city clerk since May, accepted a full-time job as city administrator.
- Jeff Fortin, owner of Beaver Creek Kennels in Cedar Bluffs, surrendered a U.S. Department of Agriculture license which allowed him to ship dogs in interstate commerce. That basically means Mr. Fortin can't sell dogs to distributors or brokers elsewhere. In December 2010, Mr. Fortin signed over 1,200 dogs to the state to be euthanized. They were put down by a state team and buried on land he owns in the north part of the county.

**In February:**



ADULTS AND KIDS tried their hand at the new bowling alley during a sneak preview in March. The alley has six lanes and three flat-screen televisions.

• Both Dr. Elizabeth Sliter and Dr. Stelian Andrecu of the Oberlin Medical Arts Clinic resigned from the medical staff at the Decatur County Hospital.

• The rival Family Practice Clinic at the hospital continued to see more patients.

**In March:**

• The new bowling alley on Main Street held its grand opening. The project started in 2008 as part of a new senior/recreation center and theater sponsored by the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp.

• A state fire inspector cited the Oberlin School District and several

area districts for fire code violations. The district was told it would have to replace doors and windows in classrooms to meet standards for a "one-hour fire corridor." Later in the year, the school district got a reprieve.

**In April:**

• The Oberlin City Council told

the owner of a seven-foot boa constrictor that she wasn't allowed to keep the pet snake in town.

• The Oberlin School Board hired Ben Jimenez of Derby as principal of Decatur Community Junior-Senior High School.

**In May:**

• Students and staff in the Oberlin

School District were evacuated after a bomb threat came out of a printer at the grade school.

The buildings were cleared, but no bomb was found, and everyone returned to school.

• Three of the men arrested in De-

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## Substation fire could cost city over half million

By CYNTHIA HAYNES  
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It's going to cost the City of Oberlin more than half a million dollars to deal with the damage caused by a fire after a raccoon wandered into the main electrical substation last month, including rental of a substation transformer expected here by Monday.

City Administrator Karen Larson told the City Council at its end-of-the-year meeting Friday the latest estimates show it will cost \$320,000 to repair a transformer badly damaged in the fire and another \$85,000 to rent a three-phase substation transformer until the old one can be fixed. The city also faces a \$142,000 estimate for repairs to the substation for other stuff destroyed by the fire, she said, for a total of \$547,000.

The repair is being overseen by Mid-State Energy Works out of Salina, while the rental transformer will come from Solomon Corp. of Solomon. The rental bill, she said, will run from Monday until the city's transformer is ready to go

back on line.

It will probably take four to six months to get the old transformer repaired, Mrs. Larson told the council, but it should come back as good as new. A new transformer would cost the city \$640,000, she said.

The city still has no idea how much its insurance carrier, EMC, will pay, but Mrs. Larson said she feels the company is a good one.

"I'm looking very positively at it," she said. "We have a very professional insurance company."

It's good that the cause of the blaze was easily identified, she added. The body of the raccoon, so badly burned it was originally thought to be a opossum, was found at the scene.

"Thank goodness he was there," Mrs. Larson said. "If he hadn't been there, they would have had to go looking for other causes."

What the company pays will be based on many things, including the average life span of a transformer, Mayor Bill Riedel noted. The city

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## Autumn weather has been wonderful for new wheat crop

The fall season has treated the area's wheat crop well this year. Where usually it's dry and difficult to plant, this fall it rained and rained, and that helped the wheat a lot.

In some places, in fact, the wheat was washed out fall storms, and many farmers either went back and overseeded it or waited for it to come up.

"Spots did have trouble, but on average, (green plants) sprouted and emerged well," said Keith Vanskike of Norton, agriculture agent for the Twin Creeks Extension District. "For the most part, wheat is in good shape coming into the late winter."

The district covers the Norton, Decatur, and Sheridan counties.

The crop is now in winter dormancy, he said, which means the growth slows down. In February, it should come out of dormancy and start to grow. Mr. Vanskike said there is enough moisture now to promote early growth.

"Wheat looks very good this time of year in comparison to other years," he said, "but a lot can happen before harvest."

Brad Marcuson, a wheat farmer in Decatur County, said that we have great subsoil moisture for the crops. More snow could lead to another successful year for wheat farmers.

Mr. Marcuson is pleased with his crop and thinks the fields are in good condition going into the winter season.

Janice O'Hare of Hansen Muller said there has been no complaints or issues with the crop so far, but it is still too early to tell how the wheat is going to turn out. She said as of right now, everything seems to be good.

"You name it, it could happen to the wheat crop," said Fred Brubaker, grain manager at the Decatur Cooperative Association.

He said the farmers' first battle was getting the crop to come up in good shape, but the plants still could face a freeze, drought, bugs, hail and whatever else comes their way.

He said he is thankful for the snow, but the fields could always use more moisture. So far, he said, the crop looks typical for winter wheat in northwest Kansas.

### Dancing the night away



AT THE BOHEMIAN HALL on Saturday, Doug and Pat Brown danced with their grandson, Landon Wolf, during the Tripple Creek Riders' alcohol- and tobacco-free New

Year's Eve party. Families danced, played cards and ate during the all-evening get-together.

— Herald staff photo by Cynthia Haynes

## Pantry needs after-holiday donations

By BRANDI DIEDERICH  
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Although the Decatur County Food Pantry received bountiful donations last year, workers hope people won't forget the hungry after the holidays.

"The food pantry has been very blessed this year," said Jan Matheny of the United Church in Oberlin, which houses the pantry.

She said Teens for Christ mem-

bers brought food donations from their Porch Light Drive to the pantry just before Christmas and Stanley Hardware will be bringing more than 2,000 items in this week.

The agency is doing OK now, she said, but donations will still be needed. She added that they especially need cleaning supplies and personal hygiene items.

Melanie Anderson, who organizes the pantry in the basement

of the United Church, agreed. She said donations have kept up with the need so far, adding that it was the best year for donations she can remember.

"Our community is outstanding," she said, adding that people should not forget about the pantry after the holidays. The need still continues, she said, and the pantry is open year around.

Miss Anderson said they haven't

done the figures yet for this year, but she knows the donations have increased from last year and over the past five years, both in money and food. She said the money donations have been great, because if they don't have certain things, workers can buy them as needed.

Because of the economic downturn, she said, the number of people they serve has also increased. She

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## Postal prices will increase again this month

By BRANDI DIEDERICH  
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The price of stamps will be going up again this month as the U.S. Postal Service struggles with a financial crisis.

The rate for first-class letters will go up a penny, from 44 to 45 cents on the first ounce on Sunday, Jan. 22. The charge for postcards will

go up 3 cents to 32 cents, for letters to Canada or Mexico, 5 cents to 85 cents and to other international destinations, 7 cents to \$1.05, the service says.

Prices will also increase for other mailing services, the service said, including standard mail (mostly advertising), periodicals such as newspapers and magazines, pack-

age services and extra services such as registered mail and return receipts.

For information, go to about.usps.com/news/national-releases/2011/pr11\_factsht\_pricechg\_1018.pdf. This will create a pdf file on your desktop. Click on the file icon to see the new prices.

Brian Sperry, Postal Service

spokesman in Denver, said customers can continue to mail letters at today's price by buying "Forever" stamps before Jan. 22. He said these stamps were created to help consumers get through price changes.

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