

## Mail to be sorted in North Platte

By STEVE HAYNES  
s.haynes@nwkans.com

Postal Service officials announced Friday that a plan to close the mail processing operation in Colby has been approved, but with a twist: rather than the area's mail being hauled to Denver for sorting, it'll go to North Platte, Neb.

The closing is part of a nationwide plan to save the struggling agency up to \$2.1 billion a year as it fights to avoid insolvency in the face of \$8 billion to \$10 billion in annual losses.

With Congress considering bills to help the service and a request for an advisory opinion on first-class service standards

pending with the Postal Regulatory Commission, no date has been set for the changes.

In Colby, acting postmaster Joe Welshon said he had not seen anything about the decision, which was announced by regional officials in Denver.

"I haven't got anything official," he said. "We'll just have to wait and see what happens here."

At a public meeting on the proposal here in December, officials said the change would have little effect on operations that customers see, since most of the area's mail now is being taken to Salina to be sorted overnight. Savings from the new plan are

estimated at only about \$14,000 per year.

The service emphasized that mail delivery, counter operations and business mail service would continue as usual, no matter what happens with the mail-sorting "plant."

Colby is one of seven plants in Kansas on the "hit list" for closure. Others are in Hays, Salina, Dodge City, Hutchinson, Liberal and Topeka. Mail sorting for most would be moved to Wichita, but Topeka's would go to Kansas City, Mo., Liberal's to Amarillo, Texas, and Colby's to Nebraska.

As part of the overall plan, the Postal Service hopes to change the standard for delivery of First Class mail from overnight

to three days, depending on distance, to two to three days regardless of distance.

The current system is designed to get mail moved overnight within about 200 miles, said Brian Sperry, a spokesman for the service in Denver. After realignment of the network, he said, the service would plan to deliver mail within three days anywhere in the country. That means a letter to the person next door would go to North Platte for sorting the day after mailing and be delivered by the second or third day.

Mr. Sperry said all the changes are contingent on completion of the Rate Commission case, filed Dec. 5. While the commission's opinion will be advisory only, he said, the

service is required by law to seek it.

"The Postal Service will make the final decision," Mr. Sperry added.

The service had promised Congress it would hold off on any changes until May 15 to give legislators time to consider several bills to ease the agency's financial crisis. Mr. Sperry said the service went ahead with its internal decision-making process because it needed time to get proper notice out to workers under their union contracts.

Why North Platte rather than Denver?

At the meeting here in December, citizens pointed out that the service couldn't depend on trucks getting through to Denver day (See LOCAL on Page 8A)



### Students play games

AT THE GRADE SCHOOL on Thursday, students played games in the gym after and before lunch with their "extended learning families," made of of kids from different classes. Jean Soderlund (above) tried to put a paper hat on a paper snowman while blindfolded. Grady Lohofener (left) picked up wads of paper that had been thrown into buckets.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

## City may not have the money for new runway

By CYNTHIA HAYNES  
c.haynes@nwkans.com

While the Oberlin airport will get a major renovation this summer, removing a hump in the runway and new pavement on the runway, taxiway and apron, it might be a problem for the city to come up with money to pay for the second phase of a proposed modernization project.

During a meeting Thursday, Oberlin Mayor Bill Riedel told the City Council that the city's cost for building a proposed 5,000-foot runway has gone up substantially.

The original proposal, he said, would have cost the city less than \$50,000, but due to increased costs and less money offered by the federal government, the price has shot up.

The federal government has gone from offering a 95 percent match of funds, he said, to a 90 percent match. That makes the city's price tag for the second phase of the airport upgrades way higher.

"We somehow need to figure out how we're going to pay for this," he said.

The plans for the second phase call for the city to start land acquisition for the longer runway, he said, but if the city doesn't have the money, it wouldn't be good to start trying to get the land.

"The city does not generate enough money to pay for this," he said, adding that perhaps the city could borrow the rest using general obligation bonds. However, he noted, airport bonds would require a vote of the people.

Mr. Riedel said that he is worried

that the city won't be able to cover all its cost for the project, noting that the new sewer plant cost about about \$1.2 million, the water projects may cost more than \$5 million and there is talk of a sales tax increase to pay for a new swimming pool.

"And revenues are dropping," he said. "We'll have to make some tough decisions, set priorities and tighten our belts. I'd hate to take a reasonably healthy city and make it not so much."

Mr. Riedel said that the federal government is still willing to pay for most of the airport project, but the city's share has doubled.

"That has doubled our cost on the airport," he said.

Other things that have driven the cost up include increased construction costs and requirements that the airport be brought up to current federal standards, including safety zones near the ends of the runway which require more land.

He noted that the airport has been downgraded by the Federal Aviation Administration from a class C to a class B. That means that it used to be able to accept planes weighing 60,000 pounds and now it can only take those of 30,000 pounds or less. This eliminates most freight deliveries, he said.

Most air ambulances can land on a 2,800-foot runway, Mr. Riedel said. Oberlin is fine on that with its 3,500-foot runway.

Decatur County Hospital Administrator Lynn Doeden said that while the airport is closed, the hospital will just use helicopters, which can land on the parking lot across from the hospital, for most transports.

## Health assessment set for Monday

Everyone is invited to a Community Healthcare Needs Assessment from 7 to 8:30 a.m. Monday at the Golden Age Center, sponsored by the Decatur County Hospital and the county Health Department.

Hospital Administrator Lynn Doeden said the "town-hall" group discussion will cover the health care needs of the county. Mrs. Doeden said it's been at least 12 years since an assessment like this has been held here.

A new assessment is required,

she said, for the hospital to retain its nonprofit status with the Internal Revenue Service.

According to a letter the hospital sent out, "This event is being held to identify and prioritize health needs of Decatur County residents, in order to maintain regulatory compliance for both organizations."

Mrs. Doeden said a facilitator from VVV Research and Development Inc. of Olathe will lead the meeting. Coffee and rolls will be served.

## Race promoter asks to sell beer at track

An Oberlin racer and promoter asked the Decatur County commissioners for permission to have a beer garden and to allow beer in part of the grandstand for races at the Decatur County Speedway, located at the county fairground.

Rick Salem said he would like to make a go of the track. It's a great asset to the town and produces great revenue, he told the commissioners last Tuesday.

Mr. Salem said to make it work,

he's asking if he could have a beer garden behind the grandstand where they could sell beer and then have part of the grandstand where people could drink beer.

There would be money in the sponsorships and revenue from beer sales, he said.

Mr. Salem asked for the commissioner's support on the idea, adding that he knows there are some zoning issues to work out.

He said he checked into an insurance policy and there is an alcohol liability clause which covers \$2 million for anything related to the races. Mr. Salem said he did have

a call from another insurance company, which offered a \$5 million liability clause.

Commissioner Stan McEvoy said someone had asked him who was going to police or monitor the alcohol.

Mr. Salem said he could have security people and use colored arm bands to show whose ID had been checked. He added if they could have people monitoring in the stands so customers aren't buying for minors. He said he could also talk to the police department.

Do you think this is the difference to make the track viable? asked

Commissioner Gene Gallentine.

Mr. Salem said he thought it will help make the difference. So far, he said, he has three races on the schedule.

If he can work it out with the fair board, he said, he would like to have a memorial race for his father, Bob Salem, on Saturday and Sunday during the fair. Mr. Salem said he would like to get sponsors for that, adding that he thought it would be a good deal for the community.

He said he has already talked with the fair board about the idea. The board, said Mr. Salem, wanted (See REQUEST on Page 8A)

## Rural Health tab inside today's paper

Inside today's newspaper, readers will find the Nor'West Newspapers Rural Health special section. This 40-page section features hospitals, health facilities and other information about health care across northwest Kansas. The staffs of *The Oberlin Herald*, *The Saint Francis Herald*, *The Norton Telegram*, the *Colby Free Press*, the *Bird City Times* and *The Goodland Star-News* took part in gathering and presenting information about health care in this part of the state.



# \*Local mail to be sorted in Nebraska

(Continued from Page 1A)  
and night, since the freeway can be closed for one to three days at a time by winter storms, often several times a year between October and May.

Asked if any of the plans have been turned down, or if all were just "rubber-stamped, Roy Reynolds, processing plant manager for the Omaha district, said the service had planned on closing the plant in North Platte, moving the work to Cheyenne, Wyo. That was nixed when officials found out the building in Cheyenne would have to be expanded.

The North Platte facility kept its 50 jobs. *The North Platte Telegraph* reported Thursday that the plant would not need to add any workers to cover Colby's mail volume, but it would add a position to take on mail from Alliance, Neb. Elsewhere in Nebraska, the plants in Grand Island and Norfolk will close, costing 101 jobs.

Distance could also be a factor in the decision. North Platte is only 145 miles from Colby, while Denver is 235. U.S. 83, which connects the two towns, is seldom closed in the winter, unlike I-70. And the consolidation would preserve north-south mail connections in the area.

"As we conducted the study," Mr. Sperry said, "we decided that North Platte made more sense."

Mr. Sperry added that he wasn't sure how much people's thoughts about weather had influenced the decision.

"The comments were all read; I know that," he said.  
Many people objected to the idea of taking mail destined for across town to Denver and back for sorting. The service says it needs to slim down and use its automated equipment more efficiently. Now, with overnight sorting, this equipment runs only six to eight hours a day. With two-day delivery, however, it can be run all day and be maintained at night.

While final decisions have not been made, the service is inclined to say that no mail will be sorted in towns like Colby, even that destined for local delivery, because "there's simply no one there to sort it."

In Washington, Tonda Rush, chief executive officer of the National Newspaper Association, and a national authority on postal operations and regulatory cases, said while the service has asked for a decision by April on its opinion, it's unlikely the commission will hear testimony before then.

She said Congress is debating several bills, but seems unlikely to act before the elections. Members of both parties are split on many

# \* Request made for beer

(Continued from Page 1A)  
to see the insurance coverage. He also talked with the Amusement Authority president, but not the whole board.

Mr. Salem said he thought a memorial race would bring 40 to 50 cars.

Mr. Gallentine said he would like to know how the Amusement Authority members and Fair Board feel about the idea. He said he could see how having a beer garden during the race the last night of the fair could raise some opposition.

Commissioner Ralph Unger said he knows some families and volunteers who come here because there is no alcohol at the fair.

Commissioner Stan McEvoy said he doesn't see a problem with the beer if it's only a race deal. He said he's not so sure about beer sales during the fair.

Mr. Salem said he could move his dad's memorial race back to the end of the month.

The race track, said Mr. Gallentine, is a wonderful facility. He said he would hate to see it remain unused. He said he needs some more information about the idea and to hear how the members of the Amusement Authority and fair boards feel.

There was some mention of needing to change the city zoning on the track or get an exemption from the zoning board.

issues, she said, and there's been no push to compromise and get a bill out. And even if the Senate moves its bill, she said, it may not get much support in the Republican-dominated House.

"I think this (announcement) may hasten getting the Senate bill to the floor," she said. "I'm not sure we're going to see anything (pass) this year."

She said newspapers have pushed for a plan to allow entry of presorted mail at "hubs" where trucks will exchange mail, even if the regional plants are closed. Otherwise, she said, newspapers will have to leave the mails and find some other way of delivering their product.

"We have been told at the headquarters level that they will do that," she said. "The hub operation would help save the quality of mail service for everyone, not just newspapers."

The service is going to have money problems until it gets control of its labor costs, she said.

"Labor is 80 percent of their costs," she said. "It's a person-heavy operation."

Nationally, the service hopes to get down to about 250 plants. Of 264 operations studies for closure, it says, six are on hold, 35 will remain open like North Platte, and 223 will close or be scaled down.

## Serving others



AT THE Oberlin Arts and Humanities dinner theater on Saturday, Pam May poured a glass of sparkling cider.

— Herald staff photo by Crista Sauvage

# Water test wells show good results

By CYNTHIA HAYNES  
c.haynes@nwkansas.com

With any luck, Oberlin should be able to get some good drinking water out of one or more of the test wells the city drilled in the Ogallala Aquifer.

Engineer Chris Miller with Miller and Associates told the Oberlin City Council on Feb. 16 that he estimates the project will cost \$5 million.

The price, he said, includes a \$100,000 power line and \$400,000 for contingencies.

He said he took the current price of pipe and added 25 percent, then put together the cost to get four wells and bring the water to town, including generators at two of the wells. There would be about 80,000 foot

of pipe with a tank and a pressure-reducing valve, he said.

The city also faces the cost of acquiring water rights, he noted.

He said he thinks the city can use the money it is to receive for a water plant on the well system, but the government will have to have a new engineering study.

"They funded a water treatment plan," he said. "We've submitted plans for all the equipment. They're saying, 'Hey, why aren't you bidding this?'"

"The goal is to get rid of arsenic in the city water supply. The most feasible way should be OK."

He said that they still need to test the wells done for quality and quantity of the water.

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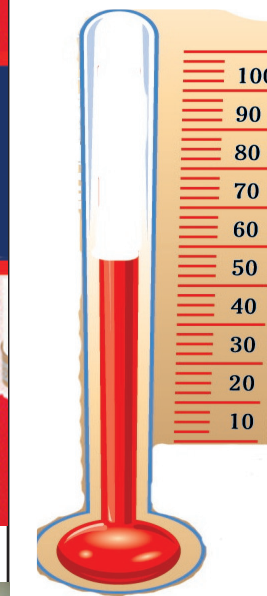
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