

Candidate Forum

County should back airport

Of the many big issues facing Decatur County today, Oberlin's airport has to be one of the longest-running. One question asked at the forum Sunday night was how each candidate would feel about imposing a tax for building a new, longer runway, a city project.

Shayla Williby, the only woman running for office this year, said that she believes it was important that the city and county work together on the airport.

"Our family was affected when a helicopter and a plane couldn't get in to the county because of a storm," she said. "The timeliest manner to get people to health care should be at the top of the list."

Bob Jones said while he favors the project, "I also have to remind myself that if elected, I have to be responsible to those people who put me in office. They're the ones I have to answer to, and if they don't like it, then my personal feelings are out the window."

"Not knowing all of the specifics," said Mick Barth, who owns the Re-Load on Main Street, "I would have

to look into the issues and do my best to promote growth. I would prioritize those issues, take them one at a time, and keep the quality of life here in mind."

Ralph Unger, who wasn't there but had his answer read aloud, said that the county has supported the airport for years, giving it high priority snow removal at no cost to the city. This year the commissioners helped match the federal funds with \$50,000, he said.

Brad Marcuson, who wasn't present but had his answers read for him, said that his "family has had to use an air ambulance in the past, and having the longer runway would be great if the economy would turn around. But with the current situation, it would be hard to do."

Sid Metcalf said he has been a pilot for 50 years, and thinks the community needs an airport more than it wants one.

"So yes, I am fully in favor of a lengthier runway," he said.

People biggest plus, minus

What do you think the county's greatest strengths and weaknesses are?

Every candidate at Sunday's forum said that Decatur County's greatest strength is our people. And then, in their own way, every candidate said that was also our biggest weakness.

"I think the major strength is our people," Sid Metcalf said. "Case in point - this facility (The Sunflower Cinema and Recreation Center). When we first started, people came out of woodwork donating money. And our weaknesses? The people of Decatur County."

"There is so much negativity in a lot of these projects, sometimes you just wanna beat your head against a tree. We have to all push one direction to survive out here."

Brad Marcuson said via his provided answers that Decatur's people are its strength, especially those already working for the county.

"I know there are people thinking of things to make the community a better place, such as the dairy, feedlot and other ideas. People pull together in times of need."

Shayla Williby said that the county's "strengths are the employees, volunteers and citizens that work every day to make it a better home. Our weakness is our medical institution. It needs work to get back up to standard so that nursing homes can get back on it, but Decatur County, overall, is the pearl of the prairie."

Mr. Unger's previously provided answers, which were read in his absence, said that the citizen's attitude

of volunteerism in assisting the county was an obvious strength, but also, "We have a low general obligation bonded debt level which keeps us from having a high levy to retire bonds. We basically have operated on a cash basis, except for very large projects."

"We have an excellent infrastructure on our main roads as compared to the counties that surround us, and our road and bridge department is doing this with half the employees it needed 20 years ago."

The county's weaknesses, he said, are that we continue to export our youth after high school and that more of our smaller bridges need to be replaced.

"I think our strengths are our people," chimed in Bob Jones, "we're the ones that pull together to make it what it is. But the weaknesses are our people too. We listen to the rumors and try not to believe what's going on, and rumors destroy what we're trying to do. ... If we stand together, then our county will prosper and move forward ... and if we don't, it will fall."

"I actually agree with Bob," said Mick Barth. "The people are why I've stayed as long as I have, but three things you have to know are location, location, location. We're on 36 highway and it's well traveled; we need to exploit this location. It will help draw people into town, which will help the school system and hospital system."

"Our weakness is that we've become too content. Our ancestors, they sacrificed and brought us all into this. They invested in the country and made what we have now, and a lot of times we're just too content."

Health care a top priority for all

It seems that lately, it's not just young people that Decatur is missing. It's everyone - there are even empty beds in our nursing homes. In light of that, the Decatur Professional Women wanted to know, what do the candidates see as the future of senior care?

Bob Jones said that he had the opportunity to care for both of his parents. He also has friends that are in nursing homes and the hospital - and they're getting the most outstanding care he's ever seen.

"I think if anything, we need to put out more information on what we provide (already). Lynn (Doeden, the hospital administrator, does a good job and that hospital offers so much to those doctors."

"I've read ... more people are taken care of at home," Shayla Williby said, "but when there's a strong medical community, then people are more apt to stay in it rather than leave for another town. We need to work to rebuild our medical community, because it goes hand in hand with seniors. We have to give them that in our

community to retain them in their homes."

Mr. Unger's prepared questions, read for him in his absence, did not mention the subject of seniors.

Mick Barth said he didn't know the answer to the future care of seniors, but if we wanted our population to grow, then our health care community would have to grow with it.

"It used to be that 45 was old," he said, "and now the average age is raised every year. I don't know what the answers are, but I'd like to see it change."

"You'd think with our aging population," Sid Metcalf said, "there would be more people going there. But with our health care progress, people are living in their own homes longer, so I don't have a good answer for that."

"I think at some point in time, the nursing homes may have to be combined. I don't know, but it may be a possibility. You can't just go dragging people off the street and say you're going to the homes."

Lawyer, deputy square off

Allen Shelton, a lawyer, has served in local government and has studied and argued the law for many years. Jay Tate, a sheriff's deputy, has an extensive background in child welfare and has enforced and upheld the law for many years.

The question is, which would make a better judge?

When Mr. Tate and Mr. Shelton, both running for district magistrate judge of the 17th Judicial District for Decatur County, went up on stage to speak at Sunday's candidate forum, two of the best questions asked were, "Do you consider the courts too harsh or too lenient?" and, "What is the biggest problem currently facing judges?"

Mr. Shelton, who says as an experienced lawyer, he is the best candidate for judge, said that from what he understood, Legislator and judicial leaders in Topeka are discussing cutting down the number of judges and limiting the number of magistrates in the district.

"With all due deference to Jay," he said, "you need to have some training. Who is the Legislature going to pull out? The lawyers or the non-lawyers? The law is more complex now than ever, and a big part of the Legislature wants to cut the numbers. I think it will happen in the next one or two years."

Mr. Tate, who says he would bring common sense to the job, emphasizes his real-world experience. He said that he didn't see any "red flag" problems himself. Mr. Tate said the courts have waged the same debate for the last 85 years, and that the people of Kansas have

maintained that they want people other than lawyers to be able to run as well.

When the question was asked about the courts being too harsh or lenient, Mr. Shelton said that judges' hands often are tied by sentencing guidelines that were intended to solve that problem, but now limit the ways that judges may apply the law in any given case.

"I wish it were different," he said, "but it's not." Mr. Tate said that regardless of the situation, chances are that half of the courtroom would be pleased with a given judgement and half wouldn't - it is the nature of the job.

"As far as the guidelines, (Mr. Shelton) is correct, but those are typically used in felony cases, and those aren't usually brought before magistrate judges. Typically we'll hear misdemeanor crimes, punished with up to a year in jail. There's a trend now with minimum sentences ... I could say it's too easy or too soft, but the reality is you make the best decision you can with what you have."

Ball program not front burner

When asked what changes the candidates would make to address recent issues with the summer ball program, none of them appeared to know exactly what Judy Scott of the Decatur Professional Women was asking about.

"I think our youth programs are very important to keep kids occupied," said Sid Metcalf. "I really don't know how it's run now. I've heard some stories that it's not good, but I don't know the details, so I guess I won't say anything."

Mr. Unger was not present, and his answers that he had provided for the forum did not include any comments regarding the program.

Bob Jones said he couldn't answer the question because he wasn't familiar with the topic, either.

"But I think it's very important that we have stuff for the kids to do. It's a way for them to build character, and we don't want them losing that."

Mick Barth said that if there were problems, they

certainly needed to be addressed.

"We're all here for a reason," he said. "We know each other and look after each others' kids. If we don't give them something to do, then the young generation won't come back and have their kids. We have to teach them morals and ethics and have some fun."

Shayla Williby, though, said she had been involved with the county recreation program for eight years.

"It incorporated Norcat and Jennings youth coming together to play ball and spend time with family while exercising and having fun," she said. "In an ideal world, the county and the city would work together, because we need to have it available for all ages. The recreation program was one of the best times of my life."

Candidates all back new pool

Among the intentions of the Oberlin swimming pool project, installing handicapped-accessible facilities and drawing more money into the area are big, but so is the issue of raising the city's sales tax to pay for the pool. Here's what the candidates had to say:

"One thing (needed) to help attract people here is to have young people have fun things for kids," said Brad Marcuson, who was not at the session but had his answers read for him. "I would support them even though it's a city (project and not a county one)."

Sid Metcalf said that it all comes back to attracting small industry.

"To get our alumni to come back, if you don't have the facilities for their families, it's pretty tough. We want to keep it going and viable so that people will want to come here."

Ralph Unger's written response, that was read for him in his absence, did not mention the pool specifically, but did say that city projects like it and the airport

cannot really be affected by a county commissioner.

"I don't know the details," said Mick Barth. "I do think there is a need for something like that, but without having background on the financial end of it ... but I'd look into it for the betterment of all."

Shayla Williby, who is on the city's pool committee, said she knew she is biased, but drawing people to Oberlin means having something to offer their families. "We want what we want, but don't want to embrace taxes," she said, "but the pool provides avenues to give kids a place to go. ... To me the pros outweigh the cons of it. When we're facing water restrictions ... our current one is using 2 million gallons a year, and that goes into the storm gutter. The new one would only use 750,000."

Bob Jones said he believed it is important to have a new pool.

"It attracts more businesses and families that are used to having these amenities," he said.

Sheriff gets OK to replace stun guns with newer model after 20 years

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
sddecamp@nwkansas.com

The sheriff's office is replacing its old Tasers with new, more technologically advanced models, after Decatur County commissioners approved the \$3,933 purchase Tuesday.

The old Tasers, Sheriff Ken Badsky said, "are outdated ... they're not worth anything except maybe a trade-in, but the technology of them is 20-odd years old."

They're so outdated, Mr. Badsky said,

that without a cartridge, an officer has to have direct contact with a person's skin to bring them down. This is completely against the point of using a Taser, he said, as they are built to administer a debilitating shock from a distance.

Having a working, dependable taser gives an officer the option of using something other than a gun when trying to bring a potentially violent suspect down, he said.

"The new ones are smaller and lighter and get two shots," the sheriff said. "They

shoot up to 25 feet, whereas the old ones got 15. These can actually go up to 35 feet, but that's not recommended, because it can hit people in the face due to the force."

They are made to give a 50,000-volt shock in 5-second deployments, he added.

He said the new tasers come as a package deal that includes a chip within the gun that records data every time the trigger is pulled, Mr. Badsky said. That data can then be brought to court as evidence.

The total cost includes a \$210 credit the

sheriff's office will get by sending in the old models. They are trading in three old tasers for three new ones, he said, which will have the data chip and come with battery packs, a four-year warranty, holsters and the option to replace them by mail if needed.

Commissioner Gene Gallentine asked Mr. Badsky how many times he had to use a taser within the last year, and he said he hadn't. Officer Allen Marcum, however, said other officers have.

"The city (police department) deployed

a taser in the Chris Kelley deal," he said, referring to the incident on June 6, in which Mr. Kelley allegedly kidnapped his wife and children, and assaulted Officer Troy Haas. "I know of three instances in the five years I've been here that I would have (used a taser), if I could have relied on it."

The motion was approved unanimously.

Certified Digital Mammograms
With Sherri Kyte, RT
10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday, Aug. 4.
Call Radiology at 475-2208 to schedule an appointment.
Decatur Health Systems
810 W. Columbia, Oberlin, KS
Safe • Fast • Accurate

D&R PUMP SERVICE, LLC
Domestic, Stock, Windmill,
Solar, Submersible, Irrigation,
Repair and Sales.
With over 30 years of experience!
Ron Shipley - (785) 675-1422
Devan Castle (785) 657-7217
state licensed
Kansas and Nebraska
member of the Kansas
Groundwater Association

Vote Shayla Williby
to be
"Your Active Voice"
Honest, life-long resident,
educated in business and
politics, good listener,
promises an open door
policy, no agenda. She is
a mother of three and a
grandma to five.
Vote
August 7
Committed to
serving all areas of
District 3
Decatur County
Commissioner
Paid for by Shayla Williby

Appreciation Cookout and Benefit
Hosted by
Decatur County Firefighters
Your local firefighters invite everyone to **Sappa Park on Saturday, July 28** to show appreciation and raise money to purchase new Firetrucks!

Burgers, beans, and salads are ~~served~~ from 5-8 p.m. with Games and entertainment throughout the evening!

So, come out, relax with our local firefighter families and enjoy games, conversation, and entertainment until dark! Thanks for your overwhelming support, especially during the recent fires!
For detail contact - Fire Chief, Bill Cathcart (785) 475-3618
Donations may be sent to Decatur County Fire Department c/o Decatur County Clerk PO Box 28, Oberlin, KS 67749
