

State Rep. Billinger canvasses Oberlin

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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State Rep. Rick Billinger stopped through Oberlin on Thursday to hand out brochures and talk to people about his campaign for re-election in the Republican primary as a state representative.

"I'm a conservative Republican," he said, "and that means someone that is pro-life, pro-gun, pro-schools, pro-agriculture and pro-business."

Rep. Billinger is currently the representative for the 121st District, including Graham, Sheridan, Thomas and Sherman counties. Because of the recent re-drawing of district lines by a federal court, however, he was thrown into the new 120th District representing Sherman, Wallace, Cheyenne, Rawlins and Decatur counties, as well as the northwest corner of Thomas county and the City of Colby.

Rep. Ward Cassidy of St. Francis represents the district today; the men say they are friends and have worked together the last couple of years.

Mr. Billinger said his biggest goal if re-elected is to introduce a bill that would grant a three-year exemption to the income tax if a person has been unemployed for over a year, lives in a county with more than 5 percent unemployment and moves to a Rural Opportunity Zone county, of which Decatur County is one.

"This is good for both sides," he said. "For rural counties, it adds another family to the community, and someone who is going to fill a job."

"It also benefits the state of Kansas. If you figure that family makes \$50,000 a year, and has no deductions, their tax liability would be about \$1,500 in state income tax. But what the state of Kansas is paying them for unemployment, food assistance and other programs generally is more than the \$1,500 that it would cost the state in income tax. So potentially, the state would save approximately \$20,000 for every family that moved out west."

Redistricting happens once every 10 years and divides election districts according to population,

State Rep. Cassidy works for schools

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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Thanks to the redistricting plan for state legislative seats drawn up by a federal court, Rep. Ward Cassidy of St. Francis is losing some constituents, gaining others, and running in the Republican primary next week against his good friend Rick Billinger.

Rep. Billinger (of Goodland) of course, is in the same position. Both of the men have had nothing but good things to say about the other in interviews. It is, perhaps, the most amiable of election races.

Mr. Cassidy's 120th District lost Norton and Phillip's counties, but gained Sherman and the northwest corner of Thomas, including both the cities of Goodland and Colby, where Rick Billinger represented.

"I'm a western Kansas Republican," Mr. Cassidy said when asked what kind of Republican he considers himself to be. "I try to trick them down there (in Topeka); others are conservative or moderate, and I'm just for whatever's good for western Kansas."

When it comes to working in Topeka, Mr. Cassidy said, his big-

gest passion is schools. He's been involved with schools for 43 years, he said, as a coach, teacher and principal. He also has a specialist degree (between a master's and a doctorate) in education finance.

"That's one of the issues I want to fight for," he said. "I'm one of the few guys who knows how school finance works. If re-elected, I'll likely be the education budget chair. There are 165 representatives (House and Senate), and not one of them lists 'educator' as an occupation."

"Schools are very important for our area. I understand (the way schools work) and fought for it these last two years. I had a pretty good pull last year, getting money for the schools. But it wasn't enough, it's a battle

"Rick is a good guy," he continued, "but he didn't get as many things accomplished as I did."

"I really do think I made a difference in my first two years ... The disappointing thing is how few people vote Only 20 percent of voters turn up for the primaries. And everything our state and federal government does affects us."



JOHN KETTLING OF JENNINGS has worked long and hard to have his store, "Surprise," ready to debut at this year's Firemen's Fun Day in Jennings on Aug. 25. Mr. Kettling

bought the former 'Lil Market in downtown Jennings and has begun restoring the building and deciding on products to stock.

— Herald staff photo by Carolyn Plotts

Transplant to Jennings ready to revamp

By CAROLYN PLOTTS
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John Kettling is a man of vision. He sees the future of Jennings, and he sees it as very bright.

A Boulder, Colo., transplant, Mr. Kettling is also a man of action. After buying a piece of property on eBay, sight unseen, he said, he found Jennings on a map and came to inspect his purchase.

"The first thing I noticed was everyone waved, like they knew me," he said. "That wasn't something I was used to."

On that first visit, he met Mayor Marge Hartzog, and she showed him around. She helped him find his property and explained some of the workings of small-town life to the city slicker. He learned that no building permits are required in Jennings, for instance, and that was not what he was used to in the city.

Mr. Kettling said he had intended to build a home on his new property, but during that trip, he learned of a house that was slated to be demolished and bought it, too. After removing tons of debris from the 130-year-old house and restoring it with salvaged and found objects, he moved in.

"I probably haven't spent over \$80," he said.

The house is rustic, with no electricity or gas. But Mr. Ket-

ting is also resourceful and has devised a method, using a battery and an inverter, to power electrical devices. He uses a propane tank with an attached grate for heating and cooking. His lighting during the day comes from the sun, and solar-powered lamps light his home during the evening.

A physics teacher at an alternative school in Boulder, Mr. Kettling says he has adopted Jennings as his new hometown and plans to retire there.

"This town has been so good to me," he said. "I asked myself, 'How can I repay them?'"

That's when he came up with the idea for a community store, he said. In a press release, he said that "Jennings is a vibrant community that needs a commercial centerpiece. People really wanted to see a store come back to the Kansas Avenue business district. My vision is that Kansas Avenue will eventually be lit up from one end of town to the other. We're not going to lose this town."

After meeting auctioneer Bob Jones, Mr. Kettling took a look at the building that had housed Jennings' last grocery, the Lil' Market. He bought the building and began the cleanup. He said he intends to leave the old sign on the window, but plans to call his innovative store Surprise, "because you'll never know what to expect."

He said his vision is to make the store a nonprofit with any earnings going back into the Jennings community.

"I'm not into this to make money," he said. "It's not about getting rich."

He wants to make the store a special place. His inspiration is a picture of a room at the exclusive Bergdorf Goodman store in New York. He said he wants his store to be a place like none other, with many distinctions, including a lavish chandelier hanging from the ceiling where paint now peels from the walls, products displayed on silver trays and plush carpeting on the floor.

He said he wants to bring items to Jennings that are top quality, but below Walmart prices. He wants to carry the finest chocolates and Wolfgang Puck soups right along with area products and crafts.

He said his idea is to start small, testing the community's reaction to each new product. He will add one item at a time with this rule: "If the public doesn't like what I purchase, then I'll use it myself."

Eventually, he said, he'll carry canned goods, staples, hard goods, housewares and maybe even bolts of cloth. As the store grows, each new section will be specially developed and designed.

With lots of work on the building remaining to be done, Mr.

Kettling said he plans to have a "sneak peek" by Firemen's Fun Day, Aug. 25.

Mr. Kettling said Surprise will be open on special days, some Saturdays and celebration weekends for the time being. He will start adding steady days and hours of operation later. He knows it will be a slow process, but John Kettling is also a patient man.

Still living primarily in Colorado, Mr. Kettling said he doesn't know when he will retire from teaching and move to Jennings permanently. He makes the trip at least once a month and plans to bring new merchandise with him each time. In his absence, though, someone in Jennings will have access to the store.

Born in Endicott, N.Y., Mr. Kettling said he moved to Colorado when his father, who worked for IBM, was transferred to Denver. He graduated from Metropolitan State College of Denver and before teaching, made electro-mechanical instruments.

Now, he is an avid spokesman for the southeast Decatur County town he hopes to call home.

"We have 97 homes in Jennings," Mr. Kettling said, "and we want to keep every one. I love the courtesy and camaraderie of the people of Jennings. I still can't get over how nice everyone is."

City Council meeting to cover budget and wells

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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The Oberlin City Council will meet at 7 p.m. Thursday at The Gateway to discuss next year's city budget and get an update on well sites that have been tested for drinking water.

The council held a workshop Thursday, July 12, in which members reviewed the 2013 budget and debated on how to pay for various projects, city expenses and future concerns. The council will hold a public hearing at this meeting where people can voice any opinions, suggestions or worries they have about the budget.

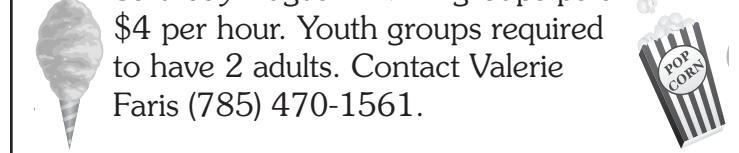
"It's a public hearing," City Administrator Karen Larson said, "and this is the time that people can come and say what they would like to about the budget before we finish it up."

The budget will likely be approved and made official by the end of the meeting, she added.

Also on the schedule is a water update from Miller and Associates, the engineering firm out of McCook that has supervised test-drilling of wells for the city's drinking water supply. At the last meeting, engineer Chris Miller said that final testing on the drinkability of the last well drilled should be ready.

This is particularly important, Mrs. Larson said, as the city needs to make the temporary water permits for the current well sites permanent by Aug. 16.

The **Decatur County Amusement Authority** needs your help for the concession stand at the fair. Three open shifts from 9 p.m. to close Tuesday, August 7, Wednesday, August 8, and Saturday August 11. All groups paid \$4 per hour. Youth groups required to have 2 adults. Contact Valerie Faris (785) 470-1561.



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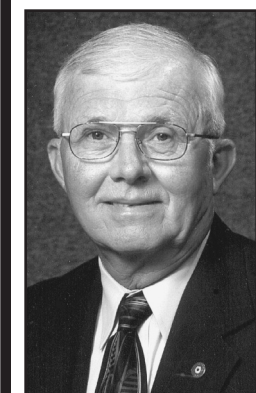


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Family clinic down a doctor

The Family Practice Clinic and Decatur County Hospital are down a provider, at least for the time being.

Administrator Lynn Doeden said Dr. Steven Albert isn't seeing patients until further notice. This arrangement started last Monday, she said, adding that she isn't commenting on the reason.

Mrs. Doeden said Dr. Albert hasn't quit and hasn't been fired, but his privileges have been suspended. Dr. Albert was hired in September.