

City street project starts this week

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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Work on Oberlin's street project will start Thursday on Griffith Avenue from U.S. 36 down to the intersection at Washington Street, by the Catholic church, Administrative Assistant Steve Zodrow told the City Council at its meeting last Thursday.

After a pre-construction conference two weeks ago, the city and contractors had agreed to start this week on Columbia Street. City Administrator Karen Larson said that plan was changed by Bryant and Bryant due to scheduling reasons.

Construction crews will be active Mondays through Thursdays, sun-up to sun-down, until the project is finished, said Joe

Bryant of Bryant and Bryant Construction out of Halstead, the general contractor for the project. The firm has a \$498,500 contract for the job, using city money and a state Community Development Block Grant.

After Griffith Avenue, the crew will do Elk Avenue between Elm and Oak streets. Then it will move to Commercial Street from the intersection of U.S. 83 west to Elk. Finally, the crew will do Columbia Street from Antelope Avenue, to just past Broadway Avenue, which runs by the the hospital emergency entrance. That work will require rerouting traffic going to and from the clinic and hospital, said Mr. Zodrow. People can use Cedar Street and circle around the hospital's parking lot, take Frasier Avenue and

come in from the west, or use Victoria Street to get to the hospital from the north.

"I think it's going to make our town a lot better," said Mrs. Larson, "and it's something we can be proud of. I hope it's just the beginning of getting the street work done."

In other business, the council:

- Scheduled a special meeting on the water and wells project for 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 30, at The Gateway. At the meeting, the council will discuss plans for how to get the water into town, whether water from new and old wells will be blended, and other issues that will need to be settled by the time the city's water rights are approved. Engineer Lance Harter of Miller

and Associates, the McCook firm handling the project, said getting the water rights could take up to six months.

- Received test results from one of the three wells the city had drilled. The results haven't come in for arsenic and uranium yet, said Mrs. Larson, but the manganese was seven times higher than the standard, so at the very least, it is very hard water.
- Heard that the city will receive \$5,000 from a class-action lawsuit settlement over contamination of well number 5, said Mrs. Larson which was found to contain atrazine, a pesticide that has been used for the last 50 or so years. The lawsuit was against the weed killer's maker, Syngenta.
- Heard an update on the city's airport

project. Mrs. Larson said that asphalt paving on the runway would be done by Saturday, and painting the taxiway would take a few more weeks, but as a whole the project is on schedule.

- Agreed to fix the city's maintainer, using the equipment fund. The machine, used to plow snow and grade roads, is very old, Mrs. Larson said. It will cost \$10,742 to fix both the transmission and hydraulic brakes, she said.
- Hired a consulting firm, Power System Engineering, out of Madison, Wis., to review how the city bills for electricity. The cost of electric power has risen, said Mrs. Larson, so the firm will be reviewing (See POWER on Page 8A)

Oberlin bank receives approval to buy branches

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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The Bank has received approval from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. on its application to buy three branches of First National Bank of Goodland in northwest Kansas, in Bird City, Colby and Quinter.

Gary Walter of Oberlin, president of The Bank, said that there should be no changes to staff at the three locations. The Bank sent the agency its application in the latter part of April, he said, and they've been in negotiations since then.

Mr. Walter said that when reviewing an application, the corporation looks at the buying business's ability to manage, both businesses' past performance, and the reasons behind the sale or offer to purchase.

"It's a good fit," he said, "because both of our areas of interest lie in agriculture."

Mr. Walter went on to say that customers shouldn't notice any changes to their services aside from the name on their checks and a new logo on the website. He said he hopes to have the transition complete within 60 days but no later than November.

Mr. Walter said that the acquisition will create some economic benefits to Oberlin, though residents shouldn't expect more than the usual boost that comes from a business being able to spend a little more in town. No new jobs are expected to materialize from the purchase.

"As far as local benefit," he said, "that will be that the ownership of (these branches) is now in this area of Kansas, and people are using the profits to buy locally ... It won't be a real sales-tax boom for anyone, but as long as we can be profitable, we will be beneficial to the communities we're in."

First National, based out of Goodland, will still have the branch there,

Banker gets award from club

Bob Gaskill of Oberlin, chairman of the board of The Bank, received the "50-Year Club Award" during a breakfast at the Kansas Bankers Association annual convention at the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs.

Making the presentation on Aug. 11 was Chuck Stones, president and membership chairman of the association. In the audience were Mr. Gaskill's wife Kay, their daughter Jody and her husband, Shad Metcalf, of Colby.

"We started very small in the banking business, with less than \$2.8 million in total deposits, and by the end of this year, our deposits will be close to \$250 million," said Mr. Gaskill.

He started banking in 1962 as an agriculture and livestock representative for City National Bank, now UMB Bank in Kansas City. In 1963, he bought the Farmers State Bank at Winona with his father and grew that single bank into (See LOCAL on Page 8A)

plus ones in Oberlin and St. Francis, and two in Colorado, in Kirk and Bennett, just off of Interstate 70. They will simply have three less branches within their organization as a whole, Mr. Walter said.

Council approves newest member

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The Oberlin City Council approved appointment of Tim Bowen as the city's new council member Thursday, filling the vacancy left by council President Rob McFee, who took Mayor Bill Riedel's place when he resigned at the last meeting.

Mayor McFee nominated Mr. Bowen, a Navy veteran and handyman, and the council approved him unanimously. The council then elected Rusty Addleman to take over as its new president.

After he was nominated, but before the vote, a man from the crowd asked how long Mr. Bowen has lived in Oberlin. The crowd, of about 40 strong, most of them there to discuss the blighted property ordinance, was fired up from the public comments segment that had opened the meeting.

Mr. Bowen replied that he had lived here for four years. The man then asked how long Mr. McFee had lived in Oberlin, to which he

responded 27.

"It makes a lot of difference what someone's going to do," said the man. "You don't know a lot about this town."

Mr. Bowen didn't respond, but he didn't have to — another man from the audience spoke up.

"It also means he's not going to kiss anyone's butt because he knows them," the man said.

And with that, the matter appeared to be settled. As Mr. Bowen took his place, the crowd clapped. They also gave a round of applause for Mr. Addleman being elected council president.

Speaking later, Mr. Bowen said the nomination didn't surprise him, as he had run for the council before, and has regularly attended meetings.

"I don't really have any previous experience," he said, noting that he has only attended meetings. "I ran in the last election, and got a pretty decent amount of votes. I was recommended by Bill Riedel." (See NEWCOMER on Page 8A)



Students return to school

ABEAUTIFULSUMMER afternoon greeted Mackenzie Urban (above) on Friday after her first day of fourth grade at Oberlin Elementary School. On the bus, Reegon Witt smiled for the camera, unaware of Gavon Uehlin's (right) attempt at bunny ears. — Herald staff photos by Stephanie DeCamp



Man uses shopping spree to help others

This year's winner in the Oberlin Merchants Big \$1,000 Shopping Spree was Lyle Hilker, who says he's set on spreading the wealth around a bit.

His wife, Leona, won the \$1,000 prize from *The Oberlin Herald* at last year's school picnic, and this year, he said, he decided to give some of it back.

"I was raised hard up in the 1930s," he said, looking through the shelves of Raye's Grocery. "Everything was dirty, cold and miserable."

The Hilkers say they are setting

aside a chunk of the scrip money, which can only be spent at sponsoring businesses, to buy supplies for the Food Pantry at the United Church of Oberlin.

"When I was a kid, we didn't have lights in the schoolhouse," he said, recalling how a tough economy made for lean times. "We didn't have electricity at all. They had to send us home from school when the dust storms would kick up."

The stock market crash of 1929 turned the 1930s into what we now call the Great Depression. That was

compounded by the Dust Bowl, the result of severe drought in the plains region, especially Kansas. With no water and no plants to hold the soil, wind erosion skyrocketed, producing the wild dust storms of Mr. Hilker's youth.

Today's economy is nowhere near that bad — unemployment in the 30s, according to Thayer Watkins of San Jose State University, hovered around 15 percent, as compared to 8 percent today. It's not 15 today, but it's still pretty bad — which is why economists often refer to our

current economic situation as the Great Recession.

And that's also why the Hilkers are giving some of their prize back.

"We donate twice a year when our own church is called on," said Mrs. Hilker, referring to the Oberlin United Methodist Church, which participates with other area con-

(See WINNER on Page 8A)

