

# Residents denounce ordinance

More than 40 people showed up for Thursday's City Council meeting, mostly to denounce the city's blighted property ordinance, which they called "unconstitutional" and oppressive.

Eric Swegle was the first to stand during the public comment portion of the meeting, reading prepared comments. Councilman Rusty Adleman said later he believed Mr. Swegle had organized people to come to the meeting, and though he disagreed with him, said his speech should be included in press coverage. City Administrator Karen Larson said later that she believes opponents of the ordinance will also come to the next meeting, at 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 6, at The Gateway.

"It's all good and well to want to beautify the town," said Mr. Swegle. "Everyone understands

that an attractive town makes a positive impression on visitors. However, the use of fear and intimidation — threats of fines or incarceration — is a tactic that is uncalled for in our small community. No one is going to challenge a complaint about a truly dangerous situation. But many of the current complaints are purely aesthetic in nature; they are non-issues."

Mr. Swegle was followed by others, some emotional and hurt, others angry and outraged. The council listened with grim faces, and only a few people stood to defend the ordinance.

Councilman Josh Williby defended the ordinance, saying the city has to draw the line somewhere, and the town couldn't expect to attract more residents, especially medical personnel, if the code

wasn't enforced. Councilwoman Fonda Farr said that she agreed with the protestors, and personally thought that the city's code enforcement officer, Jan Ackerman of Hoxie, could be "abrasive."

By the time people had stated their various cases against the ordinance, and the council (with the exception of Mrs. Farr) had defended it, Mayor Rob McFee had to bang his gavel three times for order. But by the time the public comments segment of the meeting was closed, the only thing anyone promised was to review the ordinance further.

See next week's paper for more coverage of the issue. Anyone with information or comments about the ordinance should contact Stephanie DeCamp at *The Oberlin Herald* at 475-2206 or [sdecamp@nwkans.com](mailto:sdecamp@nwkans.com).

# Ball again rolling 123 years later

**By STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
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The first Firemen's Ball in Oberlin was in 1889, and it was an event to behold.

"It happened on the Fourth of July," said Teresa Diederich, who is one of the Decatur County Firefighter Wives, who are planning this year's ball. "They did a maypole dance and crowned a queen at 12:05 a.m., so those guys were partying all night long."

The ball is being resurrected after years of being relegated to the memories of time. In fact, no one is even sure how long it has been since the Firemen's Ball has happened.

"They've done appreciation (events), but as far as the big ball, I couldn't guess how long it's been," said Mrs. Diederich. "We're trying to figure it out."

The revival will kick off at 5 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 22. Tickets are on sale now, and you can contact any fireman's wife to buy one.

"We're really hoping that the ball will be an annual event," Mrs. Diederich said, "and that we'll get people from other communities to show their support for all those guys who came out to help us with the fires. There's definitely strength in unity, and we want to celebrate that, and make it bigger each year."

The event will begin at 5 p.m. with a social hour, featuring music by Cheryl Metcalf on the piano in the foyer of The Gateway. This will be followed by a prime rib dinner prepared by firemen led by Aaron Ploussard, and after that, a dessert table covered in cakes, from cupcakes to cheesecake.

The tickets are \$30 apiece, and sponsors can inquire with any one of the women regarding various packages to purchase in exchange for advertising in the program. Though you can buy tickets at the door, everyone is encouraged to make reservations, Mrs. Diederich said, as it is difficult to know how many seats and meals need to be set up.

And drinks? They've sorted that out, too.

"There will be commemorative drink cups for \$20," Mrs. Diederich said. "We can't be selling drinks, but if you want to drink, you just have to buy the cup and be 21 or older."

At 7 p.m., casino fun will start. The women have hired an event company from Denver to set up the regulation tables and deal blackjack, Texas Hold'em, roulette and craps. Gamblers will get \$2,000 in fake money to play with. Right now, the women are thinking that the top three winners will receive prizes, Mrs. Diederich said, though they don't know what they'll be yet.

The ladies are looking for additional dealers, as well. If you would like to volunteer to be a dealer, Mrs.

Diederich said, you can contact any one of the wives. Tim Bowen, who was recently appointed to the city council, will be training those who'd like to volunteer. Mrs. Diederich said they need a total of 12 more dealers.

During and after the casino setup, which will be from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m., there will be a silent auction and dance deejayed by Stan McEvoy. Dress for the event is semi-formal, she said, and firemen will be in their dress blues and badges.

"There's been a lot of talk on Facebook about what 'semi-formal' means," Mrs. Diederich said. She said there's no need for tuxedos and ball gowns, but people are encouraged to "bling and sparkle" all they want for the affair.

Outside of the \$30 individual tickets, sponsor packages are available. For \$100, you get two tickets, your name or your business' printed in materials for the ball, and your name displayed in the foyer of The Gateway on a banner. For \$200 you also get two commemorative drink cups, your logo displayed in printed materials and a business-card-sized ad in the program. For \$300, you get all that and a quarter-page ad in the program. For \$400, you get four tickets, four drink cups, the logo, quarter-page ad and your name on the banner. For \$500, you get all of that, the name on a game table of your choice, and a half-page ad in the program. For \$1,000, you get eight tickets, eight drink cups, a round table of your own choice that you sponsor, a full-page ad in the program, your logo on all printed materials and your name displayed on the banner.

All checks should be made payable to Firefighter Wives of Decatur County.

Mrs. Diederich said that this is a benefit for firemen and emergency medical personnel as well.

"We'd like to do a parade of the fire departments before the meal, too," she added.

A photographer will take pictures throughout the evening, and the group is tracking down some memorabilia from that first event.

"People can donate to the ball anytime, but if you want to be on the posters, your donation needs to be sent in by Sept. 1. Anything after that will be on the program at the ball. And the wives of the firefighters are the ones getting it going, so any wife of a firemen is welcome to come to the meetings and help. We're still in the planning stages, so we need all the help that people want to offer."

For information, call Mrs. Diederich, (785) 470-7097; Jolene Dempewolf, (785) 470-7475; Kelsey Peters, (308) 737-7893; Andrea Burmaster, (785) 470-1119; or Ashley Ploussard, (785) 470-7095

# Man seeks new policy

**By STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
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Jay Anderson is worried about Oberlin.

"This year," he said, "there were only 18 kids that enrolled in kindergarten. And I graduated in a class of 50."

A long-time mover and shaker in town, Dr. Anderson, a retired veterinarian, may have slowed down, but he certainly hasn't given up. And now, to get his town growing, he wants to bring in a corporate dairy — and change county policy to do it.

Mr. Anderson is working with the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp. to secure 60 signatures on a petition to change a local option vote the county passed under a state law. The law says that each county may decide for itself if it will allow corporations (like the dairies Mr. Anderson has his eye on) to set up an agricultural operation. Decatur County voted in 1995 not to allow them.

The option bans corporate-owned swine and dairy facilities, said Decatur County clerk Colleen Geihlsler.

Once Mr. Anderson and the development agency have the signatures, County Attorney Steve Hirsch said, they'll turn them in to Mrs. Geihlsler and, if enough are valid, a proposition to change the option will be put on the November ballot for voters to decide.

Mr. Anderson said that he talked with Rep. Ward Cassidy about the idea, and Mr. Cassidy told him that there are, in fact, four dairies in California looking to move to northwest Kansas. When Mr. Anderson heard that, he said, he knew what had to change.

"If we're going to be competing with all of northwest Kansas for this," he said, "then we have to make it as simple as possible for these industries to set up here."

There are 18 counties in the region, he noted.

"We've had many more failures here than other counties have had tries," he said, "but back when things were good, we put in the carnival — and now look at it. It's the oldest one going."

"Back then (when the option was passed), there were some politics that were so bad, I'm still mad. If the people want it to stay that way, then there will be no more people coming in, no more taxpayers and no industry."

"Everyone running for office says that we need more businesses, people and taxpayers," Mr. Anderson said, "and this is a way to do that."

"We have the most chance we've ever had, and most of us don't understand it."



**EVERYONE WAS HAPPY** to sample the enormous buffet at this year's Back-to-School Picnic at City Park on Wednesday. Rosella Meitl surveyed a bundt cake at the dessert table, while behind her neighbors dug in to the main dishes before the speeches began. — Herald staff photo by Stephanie DeCamp

# School year kicks off with picnic

**By STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
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The skies grumbled and darkened, but rain stayed away from this year's Back-to-School picnic, where parents and students got to meet their new basketball coach and one lucky man won a \$1,000 shopping spree with Oberlin merchants.

The shopping spree is an annual contest *The Oberlin Herald* puts on for the businesses. Whoever's name is drawn out of the bucket at the picnic gets \$1,000 in scrip that can only be spent at Oberlin businesses.

This year, Lyle Hilker won, though Margaret Steadman's name was drawn first. Ms. Steadman wasn't present to claim the

prize, so they had to draw again for Mr. Hilker's lucky ticket.

Mr. Hilker was followed by one of *The Herald's* photographers for this issue as he spent his money, and is featured in a story on him and the businesses he chose. His wife, Leona, won the drawing last year, and they said that they plan to spend at least some of the money on food for their church's food pantry.

Throughout the ominous evening, people ate to their heart's content from a huge mess of pork burgers, grilled by the Oberlin Jaycees and provided by the school, along with sides and desserts brought by picnickers.

With the threatening clouds overhead, Superintendent and

Principal Duane Dorshorst made his welcome-back speech short and sweet to ensure that everyone could leave quickly if they had to. He was followed by Athletic Director Joe Dreher, who introduced new basketball coach Daniel Conrad to the assembled crowd.

"New" teacher April Farr was also introduced. She has lived and worked in Oberlin for 13 years, and has been a "para" — a teacher's aide who works at the school — for the last three years.

Sue May, a representative of the city pool committee, stood up and thanked people for coming out. She and Shayla Williby had a pool billboard and information set up to answer questions about the project before the wind kicked up.

# Short fuels building fire

A fire that may have started with an electrical short took down a farm building on Wednesday, doing an estimated \$2,000 in damage.

The 40-foot-square livestock shed belonged to Britton Scott, who lives 2 miles west and 2 1/2 miles north from town.

"I'm guessing it was an electrical short that caused the fire," said Fire Chief Bill Cathcart. "It was pretty much burned to the ground by the time we got there. It was just a tin roof laying on top of coals."

Nothing could have been done to save the shed, the chief said, and it was just bad luck that the building caught fire at all.

"We don't positively know the cause of it," Mr. Cathcart added, saying that electricity was the only cause he could think of. "There wasn't anything in the building, and there was electricity going to it."

Mr. Cathcart estimated the damage to be around \$2,000 due to the "antique" tin covering the outside of the building, which he said was likely the most expensive part of it.

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