THE OBERLIN HERALD \$1 (tax included; 73¢ delivered at home) 26 Pages, 3 Sections ★ Wednesday, August 29, 2012 134th Year, Number 35

County expects taxes to go down

over worksheets for two versions of a pro- mill is one-thousandth of a dollar, and 1 mill 75.036, the tax on that \$5,000 home would posed county budget for 2013 at their meeting last Tuesday, and agreed that whatever assessed value on real estate and taxable as low as 63.819, which would make that happens, property taxes probably will go down next year.

money from a \$1.7 million jump in the county's assessed valuation they should spend.

personal property, such as cars and boats.

To put that into perspective, say your Commissioner Ralph Unger said that the \$5 in property tax every year, if the property money for operations at a lower tax rate.

Decatur County commissioners looked current property tax levy is 75.036 mills. A tax were only 1 mill. At the current mill of tax \$319.10.

Both proposed levies are lower than The only question was how much of the home has an appraised value, for tax pur- last year's, Ms. Geihsler said, because the commissioners should have more money. poses, at \$5,000. (This value is much less state's valuation on oil and gas went up. than its sale, or market, value) For every Because the overall valuation for the county \$1,000 of value, you will be charged \$1, or is up, Ms. Geihsler said, it will receive more

of levy means \$1 of tax for every \$1,000 of be \$375.18. But the levy this year could be year, it was \$33,191,651 and the 2013 estimated is \$34,912,652, an increase of \$1,721,001.

Though no decisions have been made, the Whether they decide to spend it, save it or make a compromise remains to be seen.

The last time the county saw a spike in its valuation, it was also due to oil and gas, said

The county's property valuation was Commissioner Stan McEvoy. That year, the \$34,033,544 in 2011, the clerk said. This county spent a lot of the money that resulted from the spike, he said, and ended up having to make it up the next.

We spent a good deal that year," Mr. McEvoy said, "but you can't bank on something like oil and gas. We did end up having to tighten things up by the end of that year."

Mr. McEvoy said the commissioners will (See COUNTY on Page 8A)

Pantry shelves lack food

Contest winner givespartofprize to Oberlin charity

Money from a big donation has run out, and few people have been giving this summer to the Decatur County Food Pantry, but the demand from hungry families hasn't stopped, and the shelves are getting bare.

The pantry has seen a lot of use this summer, said Administrator Melanie Anderson, and they've used up a \$2,500 donation from the Monsanto Corp. that was given over the winter.

Monsanto, a major supplier of farm chemicals, has a drawing in the area every year. The winner gets \$2,500 to give to their charity of choice. Last year, Ritter Brothers won and sent the money to the pantry.

Miss Anderson said that she recently heard from Monsanto that farmers and businesses can start entering their names into the drawing for this year, and that since Decatur County is considered a national disaster area due to the drought, the prize this year will be doubled.

"We're low on everything," Miss Anderson said. "Anything someone would want to donate would be wonderful. We've had a lot of people in the last few weeks, and it doesn't take long to deplete the stores.



Vital moisture soaks some, misses others

County ran the gamut from nothing got only a sprinkle. to over $4 \frac{1}{2}$ inches.

in the afternoon, adding up to .94 of an inch.

West of Oberlin, Herndon reported half an inch, but north of Herndon some farms got from .60 to one inch.

miles at the Dick Kelley farm, .47 said she got a few drops, but not of an inch fell, while less than a mile enough to make her quit mowing.

Last Thursday, rainfall in Decatur north, the Richard Anderson place

Selden got .20 of an inch, while In Oberlin, rain began to fall late Jennings got 1.70 on Thursday and another 1.20 on Friday.

Norcatur won the grand prize, receiving over 4.50 inches in a little over two hours Thursday. Storm drains were hard put to handle the flow. Nine miles north of Norcatur Southwest of Oberlin about 16 at Lyle, however, Margaret Magers

Dairy petition ready for the ballot

November whether Decatur County completed and the issue will be on the ballot.

Connie Grafel, who spearheaded the campaign with longtime civic leader Jay Anderson, said she wasn't sure about the exact number of signatures that were approved in the end, but that it was more than the required 60.

"Most everybody that signed said they thought it was a great way to

A petition to put to a vote this add more jobs to the county," she said Monday. "If there's a dairy. will allow corporate dairies has been there's more feed, alfalfa, more grain and traffic through the community. Things have changed since it was voted down 15 years ago."

At that time, Decatur County decided it would not allow corporate dairies, an option it has under a state law. Mr. Anderson said earlier that he thought the decision was mostly based on "bad politics."

Mr. Anderson said that he had a (See DAIRY on Page 8A)

She said favorites include peanut butter, jelly, tuna, gelatin, cake mixes and staples like flour, sugar, oatmeal, cereals, macaroni and noodles. The pantry can also always use personal hygiene items and laundry soap, too, she said.

Miss Anderson said there's no "season" for the pantry, no single time when demand is heaviest.

"It varies," she said, "because we do have some (people) that are chronically low income, and they use their three times a year, but a

SHOPPING-SPREE WINNER Lyle Hilker donated a portion of his \$1,000 winnings to the Oberlin Community Pantry on Friday. The pantry has gone through most of its stock and is asking for help. - Herald staff photo by Stephanie DeCamp

lot of people only come in once Someone is there from 9:30 a.m. or twice, or only need help when to 2:30 p.m. every weekday to take pecially good at supplying the they're between jobs or have just moved. It's hard to predict."

The pantry is in the basement of everyone who takes the time to are hurting, and it seems like this the United Church, 109 N. Griffith donate," Miss Anderson said, Ave. Hours are 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays for people who respond when we put support the pantry." customers, Miss Anderson said.

donations.

"We've really appreciated "and we've had a lot of wonderful outstanding how the people here out a plea.

"Decatur County has been esfood pantry. I read articles and stories about other counties that county supports it a lot better. It's

Most businesses, offices to close for Labor Day

offices will close their doors for the Labor Day holiday on Monday, including all schools, banks and financial institutions, the Chamber of Commerce and city, county, state and federal government agencies, including the Post Office.

If you want to eat out, the Frontier Restaurant will be open for break-

Most Oberlin businesses and fast from 7 to 10:30 a.m., Pizza Hut from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Subway from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Sunflower Recreation will open at 5 p.m. for food and bowling.

The Re-Load, the Broken Wheel Bar and Grill in Jennings and the Teller Room at the LandMark Inn will be closed all day.

(See OFFICES on Page 8A)

Three patients test positive for hepatitis at Hays hospital

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP

sdecamp@nwkansas.com Three patients who had heart procedures at Hays Medical Center have tested positive so far for hepatitis C after a former employee was allegedly caught taking painkillers, refilling the syringes and returning the dirty needles to stock, infecting patients here and in New Hampshire.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment said that David Kwiatkowski, 32, worked at the hospital as a contract radiology technician between May 24 and Sept. 22, 2010. Patients who received cardiac catheterization

exposed to the blood-borne disease, the agency said.

Mr. Kwiatkowski is accused of stealing fentanyl, a powerful anesthetic, from Exeter Hospital's cardiac catheterization lab and returning dirty syringes to treatment areas filled only with saltwater solution. and I have no idea if anyone in the Then they were used on patients. As many as 30 people later contracted hepatitis C, officials say, and many went without the painkillers they

were expecting. drawn has tested negative," said Jodi Votapka, lab manager for Deca-

between those dates may have been tur County Hospital."I'd say we've done at least 10."

"The only thing that I can say," The Boston Globe reported that said Marilyn Gamblin, of the Decatur County Health Department, "is that the state and Hays Medical are taking care of it. It hasn't involved us at all. The people who might have been affected have been notified, county has been affected, because that's confidential."

> She added that any investigation is being handled by the state.

Because hepatitis C is transferred "As far as I know, everyone we've by blood, and Kwiatkowski was caught using patients' drugs, the (See DISEASE on Page 8A)



Ralph Unger

40-year commissioner ready to bid farewell

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP

sdecamp@nwkansas.com After 40 years, Decatur County is losing one of its most reliable pillars of public service.

Ralph Unger has been a county commissioner for four decades, on top of being a farmer and the chairman of several boards, including the county Hospital Board and the state Emergency Medical Services Board. In fact, if there's one thing you can't say about the man, it's that he's lazy. Which makes this month's election results all the more curious.

In the Republican primary for

commissioner in District 2, Mr. Unger lost to challenger Sid Metcalf by a vote of 77 to 181, a 70 percent majority for the newcomer, a retired farmer who now lives in Oberlin.

"I'm a little disappointed," Mr. Unger said after the commissioners had finished canvassing the votes, "but the voters spoke. I got the results, and that's the way it is.'

One thing that surprised him, he said, was that someone stole about 15 percent of the election signs he posted in fields and yards.

(See MAN on Page 8A)

Citizens confront council about 'blighted' property ordinance

Editor's Note: This is the first of two main stories on the controversy over the City of Oberlin's ordinance on "blighted" property and how it's enforced. The second, along with companion articles, will appear in next week's Oberlin Herald.

Forty to 50 people came to a City Council meeting Aug. 16 to protest the enforcement, some calling the ordinance "unconstitutional." Others point out that it's vital to keep the town looking good so people will



want to live here.

The issue is expected to come up again at the next meeting at 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 6, at The Gateway.

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP

sdecamp@nwkansas.com

Few things can be as upsetting as someone telling you your home's a mess and you need to clean it up.

But that's what's been happening in the City of Oberlin, and if the last City Council meeting is any sign of how people are responding, then the issue of blighted property has come front and center – whether it's on the agenda for the council to discuss or not.

It wasn't on the agenda at the meeting Aug. 16, but at least 40 people – one person there said the number could have been as high as 57 – showed up to voice their opinions about the issue, and how city enforcement officer Jan Ackerman is handling it.

The Letter

The public comment time of the last meeting opened with a prepared speech on the ordinance and its enforcement, followed by many emotional, spontaneous comments.

Eric Swegle stood first to give his two cents on the issue. He said later that he had not organized the group, but had told a few people that he planned to speak, and

word of mouth had taken over. At some point, he said, someone put the topic on Facebook, and from there, it spread.

The code enforcement officer," said Mr. Swegle, "was given free reign to interpret the boilerplate code as she sees fit, and now makes complaints herself, rather than waiting for an actual member of the community to make one.

"It's all good and well to want to beautify the town," Mr. Swegle said at one point in his speech. "Everyone understands that an attractive town makes a positive impression on visitors. However, the use of fear and (See CITIZENS on Page 5A)