

Couple invests in oil

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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 A couple from Jennings has been able to start an oil-rig maintenance business, thanks to the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp. and the Network Kansas program.

The development agency gave Eric and Chris Green a \$30,000 loan from the county's revolving loan fund, said Marketing Director Connie Grafel, and Network Kansas, which operates under the state Department of Commerce, loaned them \$15,000. The couple themselves had to come up with 20 percent of the startup cost, Ms. Grafel said.

The Greens know oil, and more than that, they know oil-industry maintenance, Mrs. Green said. Their new company, Green Oil Field Services, LLC, will operate in north and southeast Kansas, eastern Colorado and Nebraska. It opened its doors for business the first of the month.

"We're excited to have our own business, make our own money and provide for ourselves by ourselves — not to have to work for someone else," Mrs. Green said. "It was very scary at first. We were very nervous to get things started, to take off work and hope that everything goes well ... but you jump in with both feet or you don't."

"We got involved (with the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp. and Network Kansas Program) just for extra startup money. We heard about them through the Kansas Small Business Development Center."

"It's very hard for a lot of people (to come up with the 20 percent)," said Ms. Grafel. "If you don't have equity, then you can't do it."

The Greens, she said, also received help from the state-sponsored center, which has an office in Hays and helps people starting out with a business plan, financing and revenue projections.

"It's very hard to start a business without knowledge of these programs," said Ms. Grafel, "and the center actually comes out here, to us, for this. We used to have to go to Hays."

In order to qualify for these loans, Ms. Grafel said, you must have a good business plan and credit score, as well as a kind of letter of intent that explains how you plan to pull it off, that shows that you understand what it takes to run the business.

"I thought these guys did a great job with their business plan," Ms. Grafel said. "They know it takes a lot of work, and they're ready. They're a young couple, and that's a good thing. People always say that we need young, enterprising people here. Well, we've got 'em."

Network Kansas describes itself as a "central portal that connects entrepreneurs and small business owners with the right resources — expertise, education and economic resources — when they are needed most." And Ms. Grafel said she thinks that description is just right.

"I think it's one of the best programs the state has come up with," she said.



LOOKING OVER THEIR inventory, Steven Edmiston (left) and his wife, Christine, talked about the amount of furniture they've collected for their store, New to You. Most of it, the couple said, couldn't fit in the space they have. — Herald photo by Stephanie DeCamp

Thrift store offers lots of stuff besides clothing

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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There's a new thrift store in town, but it's not selling clothes. This Oberlin couple thinks they're found a better market.

"It's your basic thrift store with a little bit of everything, but not too many clothes," said owner Christine Edmiston of her store, New to You. "We have everything from household items to kids' stuff, furniture, couches, pictures, desks, tables ... basically everything you need when you're just moving into a place here."

The store will open Saturday in Suite 6 of the Business and Entrepreneurial Enhancement Building — better known as the BEE building — in the back part of the main lobby. Hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday.

Mrs. Edmiston said she will be serving cookies and refreshments to celebrate the opening this weekend.

Inside are three rooms packed with stuff, most of it found by Mrs. Edmiston and her husband, Steven. He said that they gathered all of it within the last three months, and have a whole bunch more that just won't fit into the store.

"We've had a few donations," said Mrs. Edmiston said, "though not too many. I'd say 5 percent of what we have was a donation. Hopefully, after we get

started, we'll get more.

"We're going to take a percentage of all of our profits and donate it to charity, though we're not sure which ones we're going to give to just yet. I know Teens for Christ will get something, and my daughter and I were talking about making bracelets to raise funds for the (construction of an) indoor pool for the new swimming pool project."

Mrs. Edmiston said that the couple has been talking about doing something like this for a long time, and although they are in the same building as the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp. and the Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce, they pulled together all of their start-up cash on their own.

"We thought, the town really needs a thrift store that has furniture," she said, "so we thought, 'Well, you know, we have some stuff and we've been to a few auctions.' So we started getting a lot of stuff, and said OK, let's start this."

"I couldn't have done it without him," she said, putting a hand on her husband's knee.

Mrs. Edmiston said that her store will take requests for items. If you're looking for something in particular, they'll keep an eye out for it when they go to auctions and other sales. The store will have a book of photos of the larger items that are for sale, but can't fit into the location, she said.

Shopping night draws crowd

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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Oberlin's annual Ladies's Shopping Night last Wednesday drew a big crowd, said business owners, with people out shopping up until the stores closed.

The promotion was a joint effort between the Oberlin Business Alliance and the Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce, said Kurt Vollertsen, owner of Ward Drug Store, who helps run the alliance.

The night was supposed to run from 8 to 10 p.m., but some stores stayed open as long as they had customers.

"At the Dresser, we were there until 11:15, and the last (customer) left at five after 11," said Sharleen Wurm, director of the Last Indian Raid Museum.

"We were glad there was two of us; we couldn't have done it with just one ... We even had people from Atwood and Bird City, and the woman from Bird City was the one who found our Christmas Tree. It

was a fantastic evening."

"I loved it," said shopper Sue May. "I bought some gifts, and my daughter bought a special surprise for me."

"It's such a great event," agreed Gary Anderson, who runs the Land-Mark Inn and Teller Room Restaurant. "People just have such a good time."

Most businesses were open until 11 p.m., and many of them served refreshments while shoppers browsed. Many stores also had discounts and special sales to promote the evening.

Mrs. Wurm told the Oberlin Convention and Visitors Bureau board at its Thursday meeting that the Dresser had an additional promotion for those who bought things there.

"They had these little boxes," she said, "that everyone got after they made their purchase. You opened it up, and it would give you either 25, 35 or 45 percent off your next purchase. It was a wonderful

promotion."

Member Carolyn Hackney said that the Oberlin Business Alliance had spent \$200 on radio advertising, and suggested that might account for the number of people from other towns who came for the event.

"We had radio ads for Ward Drug and Oberlin Business Alliance has a package deal with the radio as well," Mr. Vollertsen said, "and of course there was the newspaper; a lot of participating stores advertised there too."

"I thought it went very well myself. The weather was gorgeous. I don't know if there were as many people as last year, but sales were brisk and everyone was real pleased with the turnout."

"I was pleased with the participation downtown, too."

"There wasn't even anywhere to park," said City Administrator Karen Larson. "It was packed downtown. I couldn't believe how well it went."

Chamber, retail group lower dues

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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Memberships in the Oberlin Business Alliance and the Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce for 2012 is \$125, down \$75 from the \$200 fee to join both organizations this year.

The discount was made official with a letter sent out Dec. 5 to business owners which highlighted the fee change and the partnership between the two organizations "to bring in more consumers and business to our community."

The move to combine membership fees and begin working together was spearheaded by chamber President David Swank. The organizations agreed to split the fees 50/50 at their monthly meetings on Dec. 5, and Mr. Swank said that he expects membership numbers to go up as a result of the lower price.

Individual membership is \$50, said Mr. Swank. Any business or person that joins will also get a framed or laminated certificate of membership to display.

At a Chamber board meeting, board member Galen Olson said that 198 of the letters had been printed, and that the group already had two members lined up for the coming year. The Chamber had 48 members this year, said Mr. Swank, and if the same holds true for next year, the chamber stands to bring in about \$3,000.

Last year, the Chamber budget (combined with support from the Oberlin Business Alliance) was about \$9,200, but that included paying a part-time manager \$12,000 a year, said Mr. Swank, with the difference being made up by fundraisers. The Chamber is without a manager this year, and volunteers

are answering the phone.

In other business, the board:

- Heard that 20 welcome bags have been assembled by the Welcome Wagon committee. The bags that the members chose to hold all of the promotional information were provided by Peggy Pratt, who said she gets them from an orphanage in the Philippines.

- Chamber treasurer Ruth Miesner said that the children weave the bags using old plastic bags, and they're quite colorful. All the money from the bags goes directly back to the children, she said.

- Decided that the annual Farmers and Ranchers Appreciation Banquet will be Saturday, March 9. The Chamber still needs sponsors for the banquet, Mr. Swank said, and plans to stay away from offering prizes other than money this year.

- "We gave away way too many prizes," said Mrs. Miesner. "There must have been 50 of them, and it was boring. We need to solicit for cash donations this year."

- Heard that they will need to nominate people for one, and possibly two, board positions at the banquet.

- Voted to take over the "Want to Come Home?" project from Decatur Tomorrow.

- Decided that next year, the Chamber will hold contests for the best Christmas decorations and the best planters on Main Street.

- "What we're doing now is uplifting, fun and a distraction from the drought," said Mrs. Miesner. "I feel we're really taking that direction, and it's a wonderful thing. We should think about doing a quarterly event that's just for fun."

Broken water main causes pipes to run dry

Residents on East Commercial Street may have been surprised Tuesday evening when they turned their taps, only to find them dry.

The water had to be shut off due to a water main breaking, said City Water Manager Willard Perrin. The outage lasted about four hours.

"We had a water main break on Grand Avenue, and had to shut it off," he said. "It was because they're just really old pipes. Probably 80 percent of the water mains in the city are like that."

That's a pretty big number, considering that when the city put in nine blocks of new water main, it cost around \$600,000, Mr. Perrin said.

"It would take a few million to do the whole town," he added.

Mr. Perrin said that the department dug up the broken main, then patched it with a repair sleeve. The sleeve is a stainless steel band, he said, with a rubber lining and a set of bolts that tighten down on the main to repair it from the outside.

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