

*No charges in park fire

(Continued from Page 1A) An unfortunate fire, that was totally unrelated.

"We acquired the program in May, and since that time, we've struggled to find adequate staff to meet the needs of a 24-hour facility. The beginning of November we had some intense staff turnover, and we lost the live-in house parents. And with that, we weren't able to recruit the level of staff we needed to maintain the program."

Mr. Abbey and a family friend, Phil Kirk, were in the area. They said they came across the boys and the fire while walking Mr. Abbey's property. Initially, the fire was thought to be set intentionally.

"If we'd been here five minutes later, it would have been a whole

different ball game," Mr. Kirk said that afternoon while helping Mr. Abbey and Fire Chief Bill Cathcart with a fire hose.

The blaze got into downed timber along the creek. While fire fighters stopped the flames within minutes, Mr. Cathcart said volunteers from the Decatur County Rural Fire Department worked to put out hot spots until 11 p.m. that night.

"It wasn't a very big fire; it burned less than an acre," he said Monday. "There were quite a few trees burnt up in it, though."

Mr. Cathcart said that the fire department hasn't responded to any other calls since the county lifted its burn ban four weeks ago, other than to check on a few controlled burns.

*Stores change holiday hours

(Continued from Page 1A) The Teller Room at the LandMark Inn will serve a soup-and-pie lunch, closing at 1:30 p.m. Pizza Hut will close at 3 p.m., the Re-Load at 6 p.m. and Subway at 2 p.m.

Sunflower Recreation will be closed all day Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. The center will reopen at 8 a.m. Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Oberlin Livestock Auction will have no sales the next two Mondays. The next sale will be Monday, Jan. 7.

Decatur Co-op Association will be closed Monday and Tuesday. Hansen Mueller will close at noon on Christmas eve and be closed all

day Tuesday.

Trash pick up will operate Monday as usual. However, the rest of the week, the truck will run one day late.

So readers will have their *Oberlin Herald* before Christmas, the staff will put next week's paper together on Friday. It should be in the mail Saturday and in mail boxes by Monday. Deadline is noon Friday. The office will close at noon Monday and be closed Christmas Day.

The *Herald* will follow the same schedule New Year's week. The deadline will be noon Friday and papers will be back by Saturday afternoon. The office will be closed New Year's Day, but open New Year's Eve.



THERE WERE LOTS of good toys to look over at Stanley's Hardware, and Jessica Owens (left) wanted to get just the right ones for her Angel Tree girl. All she knew was that the girl was artistic, so Deb Macfee (right) helped her look over the selection.

— Herald staff photo by Stephanie DeCamp

*Angels go above and beyond this year

(Continued from Page 1A) grandma's presents came in the mail. No matter how hard times were, she was my angel-tree giver for me."

Amber Scott has run the program, where parents of underprivileged kids can sign them up for a little Christmas help, the last three

years. Each child is given a number, and then those numbers, along with their wish list, are hung on the tree for people to select and buy gifts for.

"Everyone needs their gifts returned as of Tuesday," Mrs. Scott said, "because we'll need to organize them and make sure the kids

got everything they need. Like if they really needed a coat, we have to be sure they get that as well as their toys."

Parents who signed up for the program can come pick up the gifts between 4 and 7 p.m. Thursday, Mrs. Scott said.

*New motel may be at Gateway

(Continued from Page 1A) be considered, but that is really up to the investors. Many things, it turned out, would be up to the investors, including that it would be an independent business or part of a franchise chain, something Mr. Lohoefer warned against.

The initial fee just to be part of a franchise, he said, can be \$25,500, and on top of that, all sorts of franchise fees must be built into the price of the rooms. Rex Olson, a Boulder, Colo., architect and an Oberlin native, said the chains have strict specifications for sites, which could make a motel more expensive to build.

"They come in with their standards," he said, "and by the time it's said and done, it drives the cost way up."

The numbers

Mr. Lohoefer said that so far, he had \$100,000 to \$150,000 in verbal commitments to the project. The amount needed to start up, however, is \$1.65 million, \$775,000 of which needs to come from investors.

This is cheaper than most motels being built, he said, because the facility wouldn't have amenities like a pool or meeting rooms, which The Gateway could provide.

"We're thinking it will be a minimum investment of \$25,000 for each investor," Mr. Lohoefer said, "but that's up to the investors, not me."

According to the city study and his own calculations, Mr. Lohoefer said, he expects the motel to make an 8 percent profit in the first year, or \$20,567. He based that on 50 percent occupancy, he said, a more conservative number than the national average of 57 percent.

The motel itself

Mr. Olson, who said he has designed at least 11 motels, brought first-draft designs to the meeting. The crowd gathered around a table

at the front of the room, peering at the large sheets of paper as he pointed and explained the various specifications he had incorporated.

The first design was at right angles to Elm Street and U.S. 83, a two-story affair that would have signs on both highways at the crossroads. The second was similar, all but for its positioning: It was at a diagonal to The Gateway, pointing its front door toward the civic center.

Mr. Olson said designs can change a lot during the evolution of a project, but said he favored a two-story design over a one-story motel.

"Two stories is efficient and stacks nicely," he said. "We need to make sure we're competing with

what's down the road, and what's up the road."

Mr. Lohoefer suggested making room for a manager to live on-site. He talked to a representative of the hospitality program at Johnson County Community College, he said, and found that a graduating student typically expects a salary of \$34,000 a year.

Getting in on the deal

Anyone interested in the project, Mr. Lohoefer said, should get in touch with either himself or Marketing Director Connie Grafel by the end of January.

"If you're interested," he said, "give Connie or myself a call and make a verbal commitment. I'm not

asking you to sign anything yet."

Mr. Lohoefer said a "verbal commitment" basically consists of saying that you pledge so much money, and that you want the agency to get in touch with you for the next, private investors' meeting.

That, he said, will be in February, so those interested should throw their hat in the ring no later than the end of January.

"You can crunch your own numbers. In fact, we encourage you to. There's a lot of water to go under a lot of bridges before the first spadeful of dirt is turned," Mr. Lohoefer said, "but I see this as a 2013 possibility, maybe by pheasant season."

A very important request



SANTA HELD A LITTLE HELPER, Evelyn Spanier, 4, on his lap following the annual Norcatcur Christmas drawing. Evelyn's parents are Adam and Andrea Spanier of Oberlin. Santa arrived on a Norcatcur fire truck and distributed treats to the crowd of about 150 who attended the event.

— Herald staff photo by Carolyn Plotts

Farm bureau offers big benefits

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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Natasha Carman told members of the Decatur Professional Women last Wednesday there's a lot more to Farm Bureau than insurance.

Mrs. Carman, president of the Decatur County Farm Bureau board, said she went to the state Farm Bureau's annual meeting in Manhattan and discovered that the benefits of being a member were beyond even what she knew.

To get Farm Bureau insurance, she said, you need to be a bureau member, and that comes with a lot of perks.

"Most people think Farm Bureau and think insurance," she noted, "but it's a lot more than that."

Mrs. Carman said this coming year, the county board plans to focus on recruiting members, promoting the benefits of joining the bureau and increasing its agricultural education efforts. The bureau is a nonprofit organization that promotes the interests of agriculture, she said.

"We're big within the Legislature and fight for things that farmers believe in," she said, "like being against the new school meal program."

Membership to the Farm Bureau Association is \$50 per family, she said, and \$10 of that goes to the state for legal representation (which is also available to members, should they need it) and promotion of farm

interests in the Legislature.

At a regional meeting, the bureau will have raffles, she said. Prizes will include a plasma cutter for the men and probably a quilt for the ladies. They will involve the 4-H and FFA kids as well.

Mrs. Carman also said that every year, the Decatur County bureau donates the paper products for the Chamber of Commerce's annual meeting, and the group has also donated \$5,000 to the bowling alley. The bureau held a stroke detection seminar recently, which 105 members and 135 nonmembers attended. And every year, she said, they sponsor the kids' peddle pull at the county fair. This year, they had 40 youths participate.

"Any project you have, we can apply for a grant for it," she said. "It just needs to be approved by the board."

The group recognizes its members with Century Farm, Conservation and Farm Family awards, she said. This year, the Doyle and Kay Brown family won both the conservation and farm family awards, she said, and they are going to the state competition.

The bureau sponsors babysitting and defensive driving classes, she said. The latter is for kids ages 16 to 18, and the next one is March 23. The class can get you a discount on your car insurance, she said.



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