

## A flowing flurry of fluffy flakes



**KIDS AND ADULTS** alike were delighted Monday afternoon when a surprise snow pelted Oberlin with big, fluffy flakes. Oberlin Elementary students (from left) Weston Barnes, Jenna Fortin, Bailey Powers and Michaela Wasson tried to catch some on their tongues at recess. Main Street shoppers Sandy Zeigler and Valerie Faris stopped to admire the downfall. It was over in a few minutes, but the flakes were impressive as they floated down.



— Photos by Jeni Henningson (above) and Stephanie DeCamp (below)

## Moisture from snow helps crop

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
sdecamp@nwkans.com

It may have messed up some travel plans, but for the parched fields of Decatur County, the snow was a long-awaited blessing.

“This snow will help to refill the pasture-land profile for the summer growth,” said Keith VanSkike, an agronomy agent with Twin Creeks Extension. “It will help anything that grows, even though the early growth buds (of wheat) form in the fall. And any moisture for the pastures is great.”

“The snow is a big benefit, and hopefully there will be about 1/2 inch to an inch of moisture, depending on the spot and how deep the snow is. Temperatures aren’t so severe that we’re worrying about freeze injury or much winter kill. And the wind didn’t blow too much, so it landed pretty soft and didn’t drift up. Certainly, there will be a lot of wheat saved. It would have been better if it came earlier, but this is a multimillion dollar snow.”

“So this will add some soil moisture and farmers can evaluate if they need to replant anything. Tilling of the wheat will be taking place anyway this spring. With any chance at all, wheat can try to recover. If wheat is alive, it is growing — albeit very slowly.”

Kansas Wheat, an alliance of the Kansas Wheat Commission and Kansas Association of Wheat Growers, said that the whole northwest region got about a foot of

snow.

“Between the two winter storms, snowfall totals ranged from more than 24 inches in south-central Kansas and eastern Kansas, to six inches in southwest Kansas and nearly a foot in northwest and north-central Kansas,” said a report sent out by the group.

All those inches of snow resulted in actual precipitation of anywhere from 1/4 of an inch to two inches throughout the state. And while this is great news for wheat, Kansas Agricultural Statistics reports that topsoil moisture in about 70 percent of the state is short to very short.

Jim Shroyer, an Extension agronomist for Kansas State University, said that from now on, the main concern for wheat will be temperature.

“When the daytime temperatures are greater than 60 or 70 degrees,” he said, “and nighttime temperatures don’t get close to freezing, I get a little worried — especially if it is too early in the year. In the middle of February, that’s not a good thing to have. In this case, the wheat crop begins to lose its winter hardiness.”

“Me prognosticating from this point on is pointless. If it is above normal temperatures from this point on, yields will be hurt. However, if we get average to below-normal temperatures, and we have good wheat stands, we could have a respectable crop. Temperatures are the teller.”

## State assesses storm impact

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
sdecamp@nwkans.com

After a weekend with highs near 60, it’s almost unbelievable that a blizzard plowed over Kansas two weeks past, killing six people. But plow it did, and in assessing the response, the scope of the storm became apparent.

“Sadly, six Kansans lost their lives during the storms,” said Gov. Sam Brownback’s office. “Two siblings died of carbon monoxide poisoning Tuesday from a generator running in the basement of their Kansas City, Kansas, home. Two individuals died in separate one-vehicle accidents on Monday, and a woman in Kansas City, Kansas, was struck by a vehicle that slid into her while she was walking. Lastly, an elderly woman in southwest Kansas died of a heart attack and hypothermia while sweeping snow off her steps.”

The state Emergency Operations Center was activated throughout both of the storms, the first of which hit Tuesday, Feb. 19, and the second on Wednesday, Feb. 20. According to a report from the governor’s office, 28 National Guard members were called in, patrolling Interstate 70 between Hays and Salina in 14 Humvees to help stranded drivers. They helped over 70 people, passing out water and food to those waiting for tow trucks.

The operations center also helped set up shelters and warming centers (where those without power could go during the daytime) to help those in Linn, Franklin, Anderson, Lyon and Leavenworth counties.

The same report said that about 1,000 Kansas Department of Transportation employees worked with 575 trucks to clear the roads, driving a total of 504,000 miles.

About 84,000 people didn’t have power at the height of the storm.

The Kansas Highway Patrol said troopers responded to 141 non-injury accidents and 30 with injuries, on top of 712 assistance calls.

Westar Energy reported power outages in Allen, Anderson, Bourbon, Butler, Coffey, Cowley, Crawford, Douglas, Elk, Greenwood, Harvey, Jefferson, Johnson, Labette, Leavenworth, Linn, Lyon, Montgomery, Osage, Reno, Saline, Sedgwick, Shawnee, Sumner, Wilson, Woodson and Wyandotte counties.

If you’re ever caught in a winter storm, you can use your cell phone to dial 511 (in Kansas) for the latest road conditions. If you are outside of Kansas, you can call (866) 511-KDOT (5368). Also accessible from your cell phone is 511mm.kdot.org, which will let you know about the roads. And, of course, there’s always the regular website at www.kandrive.org.

## Postal Service moves mail operations

By **KEVIN BOTTRELL**  
kbottrell@nwkans.com

The U.S. Postal Service said Tuesday that incoming and outgoing mail processing for the 677 Zip codes has moved to North Platte, Neb., on schedule, but don’t worry about a letter to your neighbor going off on a long trip.

Brian Sperry, regional spokesperson for the service in Denver, said mail addressed within the 677 area will still be delivered overnight. That area includes Sher-

man, Cheyenne, Thomas, Decatur, Rawlins, Logan, Wallace and Gove counties.

Most mail from this area will go to North Platte to be sorted by machines, he said. Mail for the 677 area will go to North Platte and be put on a truck to maintain overnight delivery.

Sperry said the sorting machines at the North Platte facility can handle 35,000 pieces of mail in an hour. Letter mail and periodical bundles sorted for the same five-digit zip

code will stay local.

“Bulk mailing will not change,” Sperry said, “but the time to submit may be different.”

Outgoing processing had been done in Colby until a previous round of consolidation, when most of that work was moved to Salina. That facility is being closed and processing there moved to Wichita. Colby was still processing incoming mail until Tuesday.

Sperry said the change will result in a loss of the equivalent of two full-

time positions in Colby, but those will be shifted to North Platte. Colby will still serve as a transportation hub and a retail post office.

Most newspapers mailed to customers in the 677 area will stay in the area and be delivered the next day. Those going out of the area, including those for the Hays area, that have Zip codes starting with 676, will be sent out.

The changes are part of an effort to stem billions of dollars in losses. (See POSTAL on Page 8A)

## Council to discuss projects’ financing

This week’s City Council meeting, at 7 p.m. on Thursday at The Gateway, is going to be all about the money.

The city’s legal advisor from the Wichita office of the bond-law firm Gilmore and Bell, Sarah Steele, will be at the meeting to talk about creating a public building commission to finance the new swimming pool. She also may answer questions about the pool and airport projects, City Administrator Karen Larson said.

Also attending will be the city’s Airport Advisory Board, which will be reporting to the council about the need for Phase II of the city’s airport project — a longer runway to accommodate business jets and air ambulances. The board presented a revised master plan for the project at the council meeting Feb. 7. Members may ask permission to meet with the Federal Aviation Administration in Kansas City to explain the project.

## Time to spring forward

Daylight Saving Time begins Sunday, so be sure to “spring forward” and set your clocks up an hour.

While the official time change is at 2 a.m. Sunday, most people prob-

ably will set their clocks up either before going to bed on Saturday or in the morning Sunday. But don’t forget, or you’ll be having a late start to your day.



**KINDERGARTNER** A.J. Johnson was one of many kids who got to celebrate Dr. Seuss Day on Friday afternoon by either making or bringing their own funny hats, ranging from hamburgers to the iconic red and white cat-in-the-hat hat.

— Herald staff photo by Stephanie DeCamp

## Jury motion to be heard

A last-minute hearing in the Coryell murder case will be held Thursday in Decatur County District Court, where the prosecution and the defense will argue motions on the selection of jurors for the trial.

The case is scheduled for a two-week trial, March 18 to 29, before Judge Preston Pratt.

A motion to contest some of the jurors was filed by the defense under seal, which means that it is not open to the public. It likely won’t be unsealed until the day of the hearing.

Those who have been subpoenaed as witnesses so far include Oberlin Police Chief Troy Haas, Sheriff Ken Badsky, Police Officer Bret Marietta, former sheriff’s Deputy Jay Tate (now the elected district magistrate judge), Undersheriff Allen Marcum, Cameron Weishapl, Logan Fortin and Andrew Richards.

