

Census shows loss here

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

Decatur County suffered a 13.7 percent loss in population in the last 10 years, according to U.S. census numbers, but the small towns took an even bigger hit, topped by a 30.1 percent loss in Dresden.

All four cities had a decline since 1990, with Oberlin losing the smallest share of its population.

- Oberlin had 2,197 people in 1990 and 1,994 last April, a loss of 203 people, which comes out to 9.2 percent.

- Jennings had 188 people in 1990 and 146 in 2000, a decrease of 42 people or 22.3 percent.

- Norcatu had 198 people in 1990 and 169 in 2000, down 29 or 14.6 percent.

- Dresden went from 73 people in 1990 to 51 last year, 22 people or 30.1 percent.

The continued decline came as no shock with machines taking over agriculture jobs. Most of the decline in Oberlin came after oilfield jobs were lost in the early 1990s. A boundary study released at the beginning of the year suggested closing small schools like the one in Jennings because of the decline.

But the Jennings schools aren't closing and people in the county aren't yet ready to give up the fight of trying to get younger families to move to the area.

Helen Gee, manager of the Oberlin-Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce, is often the first contact for people who are thinking about moving here. She said that she tries to sell the area to people who call in.

For the older people, she may promote safety and the younger families who have kids, she tells about the schools.

"If they have kids, I always include something for them," said Mrs. Gee.

She sends brochures on Oberlin, the area, the Last Indian Raid Museum, the schools and from anyone who has supplied the office with them.

Lately, she said, she has started referring people to the chamber's website, which has information about the county.

Mrs. Gee said she would like to see the chamber board members make contact with people after they move to the area to see how they are doing and help make them feel welcome.

A public meeting this year revealed that the No. 1 goal of people in the county is to attract young families who would stay and make the area their home and enroll their kids in the schools.

Vickie Bailey, president of the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp., said the board is working on ideas to help attract those young families.

The main way she sees this happening is to help promote businesses jobs to bring them to town.

She said the board is working with the Decatur County commissioners to get new businesses tax breaks, giving them some incentives for moving here.

If there are jobs, people will be able to move into the area, she said.

The board, although it meets in Oberlin, is trying to serve the entire county, she said. In the past, they have looked at trying to get a dairy in the Jennings area, which Mrs. Bailey said would help bring families in and kids to a school which has declining enrollment.

Oberlin Superintendent of Schools Duane Steele, vice president of the board, said the district has recently hired some young people but there isn't much turnover of teachers. He said the best way the system can help bring young people in is through promoting the quality of education.

He said that the schools here offer a positive learning experience and that needs to be stressed and promoted to people who come and look at the town.

There are no quick fixes to declining population, all parties agree, but the answer is moving young families into the towns and helping the population grow through jobs, quality living and education.

"That is what we need to gear everything towards, getting young families here," Mrs. Bailey said. "Young people are going away to school and not coming back, and our population is getting elderly."

Although it is good to have those people retired in the area, said Mrs. Bailey, the county needs younger people who will make homes here and keep the area alive. The same people will serve on the boards and enroll their kids in the schools, she said.



WITH ONE LEG OVER THE BIKE, a first grader learned from school nurse Ruth Wolfram (above) that the rig is too big for him, since he can't stand with both feet on the ground. The lesson was part of "Wellness Day" last week at the school. Paul Nepodal, physical education teacher, demonstrated a helmet which is too small.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Brandt

Bike riding '101'

Helmets most important for riding safe

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

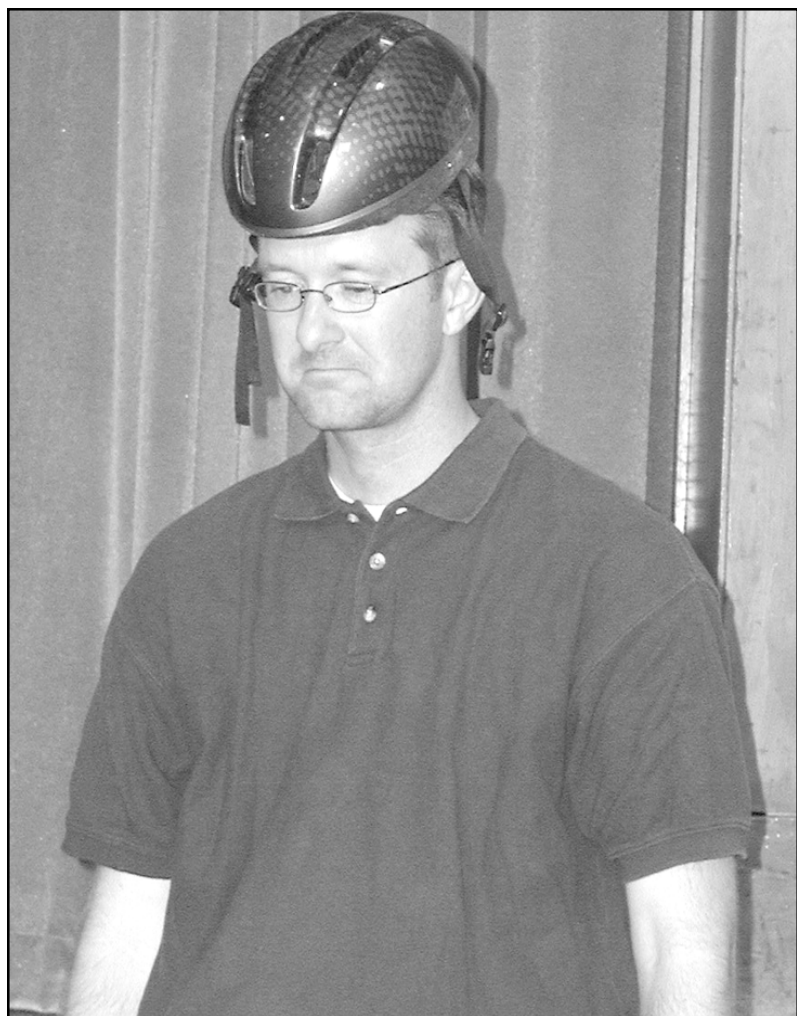
Warmer days are ahead and kids and adults are dusting off their bikes and breaking out the scooters they got for Christmas to spend time outside.

At Oberlin Elementary School last Wednesday during "Wellness Day," students learned important safety instructions for using their wheeled toys.

Nurse Ruth Wolfram and physical education teacher Paul Nepodal demonstrated how to check a bike before riding, what type of bike and scooter kids should ride, hand signals, road signs and safety gear with each class from kindergarten to sixth grade.

Mrs. Wolfram said the most important piece of equipment when riding a bike or a scooter is the helmet. It should fit on your head, she said, not sit on top. Then you should fasten the straps under the chin.

Mr. Nepodal said with a scooter,



the wheels are little enough to get stuck in cracks or you can slip on rocks or a soft spot. It is a long way from your head to the ground, and you can get hurt, he said, so scooter riders should wear a helmet, too.

He asked the first graders what else they should wear when on a scooter. One little boy said hand pads, but Mr. Nepodal said only to wear them if the scooter doesn't have hand brakes be-

cause if you are trying to use the brakes, the hand pads may get you stuck. The kids knew to wear knee pads and elbow pads in case they fall.

He placed his foot on the scooter, which he said belonged to his neighbor's kid, and asked students if it was the right size for him. The kids said "no." Mr. Nepodal said a scooter is the right size if you can fit both feet (Please see BIKE on Page 10A)

Clerk wants at least half of voters out

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

An eight-way race for three seats on the Oberlin City Council, with six candidates on the ballot and two write-in campaigns, will be determined by those who vote from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Tuesday.

County Clerk Marilyn Horn, who also serves as the county election officer, said people should go to the same polling places which they used in the general election, even though not everyone in the county will vote. People who live outside the city limits or in school board member districts with no race won't head to the polls this time around.

In the Oberlin School District, there are 2,003 registered voters, in the Jennings school district there are 276, Mrs. Horn said. The City of Oberlin has 1,332, Dresden has 33, Jennings has 104 and Norcatu 115.

In Oberlin, she said, there are no districts for the City Council election. People can choose three candidates from among the six on the ballot and the two who have declared themselves as

write-ins. With the write-ins, she said, it is important to not cross out any names because the ballot will then be spoiled and not counted.

Mrs. Horn said in the case of Ken Shobe, who has declared himself as a write-in, he has made stickers to be put on the ballots for people who want to vote for him. She said it is OK to put the sticker on the ballot, but don't let it cover anyone's name.

She noted that the Oberlin council meets Thursday night after the election, and the current members will be in office at the meeting, since the commissioners won't canvass the ballots until Friday morning. New officers will then be sworn in before the April 19 city meeting.

Seats which are up for election are now held by Stan McEvoy, who is seeking another four years; Leslie Bartels, who isn't running; and Gary Walter who recently became mayor. On the ballot are Jay Anderson, Judy Cathcart, Phil Erickson, Stan McEvoy, Richard Russ and Jim Soderlund. Running as (Please see POLLS on Page 10A)

Reversed ruling for arsenic says water here is OK

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

Reversing a last-minute Clinton Administration ruling, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency last week withdrew a proposed standard for arsenic in drinking water, meaning that Oberlin may not have to put in a treatment facility.

The ruling was to lower the standard from 50 parts per billion to 10 parts per billion. During President Clinton's last days in office, it was pushed through and then put on hold, giving the incoming Republicans a chance to change it.

On Tuesday, the agency withdrew the lowered proposal to look at the science of the project and costs to communities. Although the agency and scientists agree that the standard needs to be lowered, they say they don't know where that should be lowered to.

"It is clear that arsenic, while naturally occurring, is something that needs to be regulated," said Administrator Christi Whitman. "Certainly the standard should be less than 50 parts per billion, but the scientific indicators are

unclear as to whether the standard needs to go as low as 10 parts per billion."

The agency has asked for a 60 day stay and will release a timetable shortly as to what their next steps will be.

In Oberlin, arsenic levels range between eight and 12 parts per billion, meaning that according to the proposal, the city could be over what was going to be allowed.

Thaniel Monaco, with Miller and Associates, a McCook engineering firm which has been working with Oberlin on water issues, said that the statement was that 50 was too high, but 10 was too low. He said he hasn't had any clues as to where the agency will head from here.

Arsenic is a naturally occurring element in rocks, soil, water, air, plants and animals and can have a long-term chronic effect on people who get too much. Some of the problems caused can be skin, bladder, lung, kidney, nasal passages, liver and prostate cancer (Please see ARSENIC on Page 10A)

Extreme bull rides will be fair event

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

The Decatur County Fair Board plans to add bull riding in front of the grandstand on either Tuesday or Friday night at this year's fair.

After discussion at their meeting Thursday night, board members agreed to take a chance on something new and bring in bull riders from an outfit called White Buffalo Rodeo Productions. The firm provides everything, the bull riders, pens, bulls the entire set up, said board member Jim Wasson.

At a previous meeting, a representative from the bull riding organization presented what they do to the board. Since then Byron Hale, county extension agent, said he has talked with the Better Business Bureau in Iowa, Nebraska and Missouri to check on the group. He said there aren't any claims against them and all the people he has talked to who have hired the group only have positive things to say.

The board signed the contract for the bull riders either on Tuesday, Aug. 7, or Friday Aug. 10. The board will put up a \$500 deposit and then \$4,800 when the crew arrives. It is also recommend to have a \$1,000 purse for the winner, which the board agreed on.

Mr. Wasson said the representative from White Buffalo said they will get 40 rides and will have a few slots open

for locals who want to try. Mr. Hale said for a local to participate, they will have to call in.

For \$200 extra, the company would provide a singer for the intermission of the bull riding. The group didn't approve the singer in the motion, however.

To help offset the cost and get people from town involved, the board agreed they would be selling banners which will be on gates and the grandstands so businesses can advertise during the event.

The board is preparing for the fair, which starts Tuesday, Aug. 7. Books are almost ready to be printed, although the schedule and entertainment still have to be added in.

At the meeting Julie Kennedy, with KSN, asked the board if a group in town was to sponsor a parade for fair, with a barbecue afterwards, if the board would endorse it. Mr. Wasson said they could put it in their advertising as the fair parade.

Ms. Kennedy said the parade and barbecue has worked in other towns and helps bring people into the city and get them excited about fair week.

Sonya Gillespie, with the board, said they are always looking for things to add to the week. Some of the board (Please see FAIR on Page 10A)

Volunteers organize to sell bond issue for school renovation

By KIMBERLY BRANDT

Bond salesman Steve Shogren advised volunteers last Wednesday evening to break into five action committees to sell the \$5.6 million bond issue for improvements at the grade school and high school.

The bond election is June 5. The issue would add three bathrooms, a media center, two classrooms, heating, ventilating, air conditioning and wiring at Oberlin Elementary School. At the high school, it will cover heating, ventilating, air conditioning the hottest rooms and electrical work.

Mr. Shogren, with Ranson and Associates in Wichita, said the group has about 10 weeks to educate the public on the bond issue and tell them why they should vote yes for it. There were 11 people at the meeting, excluding media people, the superintendent, and board clerk, although he said they need about a 40-to-50-volunteer pool for the project.

The group called the KIDS Committee, standing for Keep Improving Dis-

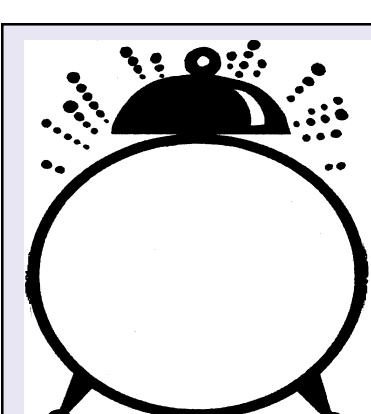
trict Schools, was given a layout of how to organize volunteers. Mr. Shogren said he would like to see each of the volunteers focus in one area so they don't get burned out and then those people need to find people to work with them.

The group was split into five action committees. Each committee has two co-coordinators who work under co-chairs. Although the volunteers are split into groups, he said, they are all working towards one goal.

"Make sure every voter is an informed voter on June 5," said Mr. Shogren.

Jack Metcalf, owner of R.J. Metcalf Real Estate, said he would be a co-chair and the group thought Rusty Addleman, owner of Addleman Drug Store, would be a good co-chair, although he wasn't able to make it to the meeting.

Other include a speakers bureau, which is in charge of holding public meetings and getting together with other (Please see BOND on Page 10A)



Spring forward

Spring has arrived, and with it the warmer weather and sunlight hours stretching into the evening, allowing for outside chores, walks and field work.

Daylight Saving Time will start on Sunday, April 1, yes April Fool's day, but no fooling, it is time to set the clocks up an hour, allowing for an extra hour of sun.

Remember to set the clocks in your home an hour ahead. Although time officially changes at 2 a.m. on Sunday, most will set their clocks forward an hour on Saturday night before bed.

* Bond issue committee organizes campaign plan

(Continued from Page 1A) Organizations in the area to talk about the bond issue. Co-coordinators are Gordon Matson, principal of the high school, and Don Fredrickson, a retired grocery. Community relations committees co-coordinators are Casandra Stallman, a fifth grade teacher, and Richard Anderson, an area farmer. The committee is in charge of pamphlets, door-to-door information and getting the bond issue visible for the people. The group thought they would ask Mayor

Gary Walter, with The Bank, to sit on the ways and means committee, which is responsible for fund raisers and the budget. Information central co-coordinators are Dave Stapp, a Norcat farmer, and Brenda Breth, a high school English teacher. Joe Stanley, owner of Stanley Hardware, said he would help with that committee. The group is responsible for brochures and media related items. The last committee, voter registration, is in charge of targeting people who haven't registered and getting people to the polls. There

weren't any volunteers for this group. Mr. Shogren said in his experience, districts can pass a bond issue by targeting two publics; parents and people who work in the buildings. "In effect, what defeats more bond issues than anything else is apathy," he said. The group needs to keep in mind that they can't use district money to promote a yes vote, only to give out information. The school board can pay for an information brochure but not something that tells someone to vote for the bond issue. Mr. Shogren said they also can't use

the school paper or channel 2 to promote the bond issue. He advised not to use students to sell the bond issue. Mr. Shogren said it is always hard answer a question about a tax increase and sell, but the group needs to make sure everyone knows what is happening and be able to answer it with facts. One fact he said which will help is that if the bond issue passes, the district will get about 13 percent state aid for the project, which adds up to about \$1.223 million dollars that the area will get back from Topeka. He said this is essentially

the county's money from taxpayers which will come back to the area to help pay for the school. Although he said it is important that board members and school officials can answer questions, he said it is necessary to show the people that the volunteers, members of the community, want the bond issue to pass. Their job is "to justify the need," he said. The committees have to show how the improvements will benefit the kids and the area. The next meeting was scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday at the district office.

* Arsenic ruling reversed

(Continued from Page 1A) to name a few. It has long been used as a rat poison. The city is now starting a water project which was decided on in late August to blend water from two wells to lower nitrates in well No. 6, to re-drill well No. 7, build a new well house and replace a water line on Cass Avenue to help with pressure. These improvements will not lower the arsenic levels, however. What it means for Oberlin, said Mr. Monaco, is that, depending on where the agency sets the level, they may be sitting fine. "Until we get a final answer, though, it will be tough to tell," he said. Mr. Shike said that at 15 parts per billion, it would still make him a little nervous but 20 would be reasonable and could still promote public safety. Since there isn't anything to comply with at this time, Mr. Shike said the best thing for Oberlin to do is see where the level is set and make a decision then.

* Bike safety important for kids

(Continued from Page 1A) on it and the handle bars are a little higher than your waist. On a bike, Mrs. Wolfram said while throwing her leg over the mountain bike, you should be able to straddle the bar in the middle and stand with both feet on the ground. Each student was sent home with a checklist to go over with mom or dad. Parents need to check the spokes to make sure none are broken or loose, the seat is secure, reflectors are intact, brakes work, the handlebar is straight and tight, and the chain doesn't squeak. While riding a bike, skate board or scooter, said Mrs. Wolfram, you have to obey the traffic laws. In Oberlin, there is a law that you can't ride wheeled vehicles on the sidewalks

Fourteen steps to root beer



HOMEMADE ROOT BEER maker Josh Lahnanen poured out samples for comparing his 14-step brew to a popular soda at the Jennings Academic Fair held Friday evening. — Herald staff photo by Jeanette Krizek

downtown, she said. She said students need to remember to ride on the right side of the road and obey traffic signs. That means stopping at a stop sign, slowing down at a yield sign to look for cars and giving the other traffic the right of way, and also to stop at railroad crossings and look for a train. Along with following the laws and reading the road signs, said Mrs. Wolfram, you have to signal with your left arm what you are going to do. In order to turn right, she said, hold your left arm

out at a 90 degree angle with your hand pointing at the ceiling. For a left turn put your left arm straight out and if you are stopping, put your arm at your side. When riding on the road, she said, travel in a single file line. At the end of "Wellness Day" for the first graders, Mrs. Wolfram asked, "What should you make sure you wear every time you get on your scooter or bike?" The kids replied in chorus, "A helmet."

* Polls stay open all day for voters

(Continued from Page 1A) write-in candidates are Gale Cook and Mr. Shobe. In Jennings, the city council has three positions that will be open, now occupied by Mayor Richard Rowilson, Louise Cressler and Bob Jones. All are four-year positions. Mrs. Cressler is the only one who has filed for the election. The Norcat City Council has four positions up for election, including one which is vacant now. The others are held by Mayor Doug Dempewolf, Linda Hunt and Colleen Ramsey. Those positions that are up on the council in Dresden are held by Mayor Russell Rhodes, who took over after the

former mayor resigned, and the position vacated by Mr. Rhodes, which was taken over by Ron Jacobs. If they want to continue in the positions for the remaining three years of the terms, they will have to be elected. Three other seats which are up for election are held by Don Sulzman, Don Ritter and Clifford Mowry, all two-year seats. In the case where people didn't file for re-election, the top vote getters which have their names written in will be elected. On the Oberlin School Board, Delayne May, who represents district 4; DeWayne Jackson, who represents

district 5; and Chris Bailey who represents district 6, have terms up. All have filed for re-election for four years. No one else filed and all are unopposed. On the Jennings School Board, positions up for election are held by Vickie Bailey, Rhonda Wildeman and Jeff Wahlmeier for four-year terms. There is also one two-year term which is now held by Sarah Coiner, who filed for re-election. Seats in the Jennings district are elected at-large. Mrs. Horn said her goal is to have 50 percent of the voters turn out although she said it is important for everyone to use their right to vote.

* Fair board will provide new event

(Continued from Page 1A) members said it would be a good idea to do the parade and the food and then bull riding to make an evening of it, but the date looked at in the end was the Saturday before the fair so it wouldn't interfere with something already planned. Ms. Kennedy said she would talk to others and report back at the next board meeting at 7 p.m. Wednesday, April 11.

For the future, the board is trying to put a livestock building at the fairgrounds. Mr. Wasson had an application to get a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Administration for the building. He said their may be groups in town which could also help. The board has money also. In other business, board members:

• Heard a request from Wheat Ridge Terrace who are putting on an antique appraisal day the Saturday before fair at The Gateway and wanted to be part of the fair advertising. The group didn't know if that would open the door to any group asking to be a part of the advertising and agreed to ask Wheat Ridge manager Marcia Lohofener to the next meeting explore the options.

Police look for information on missing tool box

A tool box and tool worth almost \$700 were taken from West Maple Street across from Southwest Implement sometime between Tuesday and Thursday last week. Police Chief Wade Lockhart said the box belongs to Lonny Brewer, 47, who had left it outside. The box, made of black plastic-like material, is full of personal tools. Chief Lockhart said anyone with information on the box should call the police office at 475-3392. On Friday, March 16, Jennifer Monaco, 32, was backing out of a drive at

108 S. East Ave. in her Tahoe and hit a Camero parked across the street belonging to Christina Gillespie. Mrs. Monaco received a ticket for inattentive driving and faces a fine of \$25 and court fee of \$30. Mrs. Gillespie's car had just

over \$500 in damage to it. Chief Lockhart said the search for a fourth officer for the Oberlin Police Department is over. They have hired a man who will start on April 1.

Author performs over satellite

Best-selling author Max Lucado will present a musical, evangelistic satellite event based on his book, "He Chose the Nails," from 4-6 p.m. on Sunday at the Evangelical Free Church of McCook. He will be joined by musical artists

Kim Hill, Natalie Grant, Wes King, and Nicole Mullen in a two-hour program designed to impart the gospel message creatively and powerfully. It is free and the public is invited.

Prairie Land Electric Cooperative, Inc.
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