

Electric co-op has good year

\$2.34 million profit on books

By VERONICA MONIER
Prairie Land Electric Cooperative is in good financial shape and continuing to move forward, members heard at the co-op's annual meeting.

Board President Gilbert Berland said at the meeting Tuesday, April 19, in Norton, that the cooperative had a margin, or profit, of \$2.34 million in 2004 and has reached its goal of having 40 percent equity.

He said that although Prairie Land is out of the satellite television business, it still is involved in "WildBlue" with Nex-Tech. He said "WildBlue" is a high speed satellite Internet service that will be available to areas of western Kansas where broadband service isn't available. He said it should be up and running in May.

He said turtle meters, a device which will allow the meters to be read by cell phone, have been installed for all residential customers and now they are working on installing the non-residential meters. The cooperative is also involved in economic development and youth programs.

Mr. Berland thanked the board for its work in ensuring a sound financial cooperative, the employees for all of their work, and the customers for making the co-op possible.

Ken Carter, treasurer of the board, said 2004 was a good year. He said the substantial margin was due primarily to the sale of the satellite television business to DirecTV. Payments from the sale will be flowing in over an 80-month period, he said.

The financial report included total assets and liabilities, of \$34,365,801; income, \$13,177,044; expenses, \$12,163,270; operating margin, \$1,013,774; non-operating margin, \$130,871; extraordinary margin (sale of DirecTV), \$1,195,587; total margins for 2004, \$2,340,232.

General Manager Allan Miller said the cooperative has 8,587 consumers, 5,379 miles of line, 1.6 meters per mile of line, \$8,484 in investments per mile of line, \$160 million in power sales; and \$13.2 million in sales revenue for 2004.

He said both power sales and revenue have been going up.

The margins are also going up, he said, but sale of the satellite business made the margin this year higher than normal. He said Prairie Land got into the DirecTV business in 1994 and has been successful, getting almost 2,000 subscribers.

Mr. Miller said the cooperative had several opportunities to sell it, but instead the board chose to stay in it and take care of the customers. When the contracts with Direct TV were terminated, he said Prairie Land tried to stay involved, but when it couldn't regulate customers' prices, the board decided to sell.

Mr. Miller said 41.4 percent of the co-op's income is commercial and 56.2 percent of expenses are power costs. Operations were 15.9 percent of the total expenses.

Member equity is \$13.7 million, with Prairie Land just hitting the 40 percent mark. Other goals are to increase plant investment, install new technology and retain stable rates.

Mr. Miller said in 2004, the cooperative put about \$3 million in plant investment, including four new substations. Prairie Land employees have been busy installing turtle meters, he said. They hope all of the meters will be installed by the end of the year.

Mr. Miller said since 1999, \$1.1 million has been refunded to its members and \$1.6 million given out in grants and loans for economic development.



Assistants listen, eat and talk

AT THE ASSISTANT'S DAY LUNCHEON last Wednesday, Jessica Bremer and Leslie Marcuson performed several songs about love with the Chante' group from Decatur Community High School. Glenva Nichols (right), manager of the Oberlin-Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce, welcomed the assistants and praised them for their hard work. There were around 60 at the luncheon, held at The Gateway.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis



Work started for automatic car wash

Two Nebraska men plan to build an automatic car wash on North Penn Ave.

Chad Leibbrandt and Steve Wallin of Imperial, Neb., purchased the former Jr's Used Car lot at the

intersection of North Penn and Jefferson from the Frank Black family.

Mr. Leibbrandt, a grandson of former Oberlin residents Martin and Lois (Moore) Leibbrandt, said plans

are to start construction of the metal building by the middle of May. Grading has begun. The men own a similar business in Imperial.

Mr. Leibbrandt and his wife, Amy, have a son, Carter. Mr. Wallin

and his wife Char have a daughter, Natalie. They will continue to live in Imperial.

The business will be called Blue Sky Auto Wash. Equipment will be installed by Marlant Industries of Imperial. It will be open 24 hours a day and customers will be able to use credit cards.

"We plan an open house the latter part of June," Mr. Leibbrandt said, "and are looking forward to meeting everyone."

Meth found in man's bloodstream

The Decatur County sheriff's department is trying to figure out how an 83-year-old Jennings man wound up with methamphetamine in his system.

The Decatur County attorney's office reported the situation to the sheriff on Friday, April 22, said Undersheriff Michael French.

He said the man, Jay Kump, told officers he went to the clinic for a routine examine and had blood drawn for diabetes. The blood work showed meth in Mr. Kump's system.

Undersheriff French said the only way for the drug to show up in a person is for it to be ingested. Mr. Kump, said Undersheriff French,

doesn't know how the drug got into his system.

Meth can be smoked, injected or crushed up in food or drink. Undersheriff French said they are trying to figure out how it got into Mr. Kump's system, since he knows nothing at all about it.

The undersheriff said he called the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services and asked workers to check on Mr. Kump's welfare.

County Attorney Steve Hirsch said he had no comment.

Work to start on courthouse

Workers from Mid Continental Restoration will start repairs today on the north, or back side of the Decatur County Courthouse.

The company has been hired to do tuck pointing and seal the building. County Clerk Marilyn Horn said they will work for eight days straight, then take a break, and then be back if need be.

CONSIGNMENT AUCTION
Saturday, MAY 7, 2005 • 10:00 a.m.
Location: Gateway - Oberlin, Kansas

CONSIGNORS: DAVID AND HILDA MCGEE, CLOYCE AND JUNE HAROLD, MAX AND VEANNA CARMAN, FRED HELMKAMP ESTATE AND OTHER GUEST CONSIGNORS

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Council agrees to study

Airport may need object-free area at south of runway

The Oberlin City Council has approved a study on the south end of the airport runway, hoping to get federal money to acquire some property.

At the last meeting in April, the council heard that the city may be able to get grant money from the Federal Aviation Administration to buy land for the airport or to just control the land.

Gary Shike, city administrator, said the agency has the money available but there is a problem because there is no "object free zone" at the south end of the runway. After take off, planes fly right over the parking lot of the fair grounds.

In order to go further with a grant, he said, a study needs to be done to show if this is a problem and what can be done about it. The study will cost the city 10 percent of the total cost, while the agency will pay 90 percent.

In Goodland a few years ago, the agency had the city shift its main runway 700 feet south to get it away from a highway. The government paid for most of the project.

The city should get a recommendation from Bucher, Willis and Ratliff, the consulting firm doing the study, said Steve Hirsch, city attorney. If the firm says the planes can't fly over the parking lot and the city doesn't change anything, he said, the airport might not be eligible for federal grants.

If the study says the city has to change something, asked Councilman Patrick Pomeroy, who says for it? Mayor Ken Shobe said the city isn't at that point yet.

The danger in not doing anything, said Mr. Hirsch, is that the government knows there might be a problem. The city needs to convince them there isn't.

How much money does the city receive from the agency? asked Mr. Pomeroy. The city doesn't get much, said Mr. Shike, but if it was a major project, it would need the government money.

Is the city going to be forced to do something? asked Councilman Joe Stanley. Mr. Hirsch said he didn't know enough about the situation to answer.

Actually, he said, it might end up being a county thing because the county set up flight restrictions at the fairgrounds.

Mr. Hirsch looked over the contract, and the council agreed to the study.

Mr. Shike said the additional land the council discussed buying or controlling was at the sides of the runway, not at the end. That was when the object free zone at the end of the runway came up. He said the paperwork is in the mail.

NEW ON THE MARKET!

307 N. INGALLS. SELLERS WANT TO DOWNSIZE! Don't pass this one up! Sumptuous 4 bedroom., 2 1/2 bath, 1965 home offers everything you want in 2,523 sq. ft. on 2 levels. Upper level showcases U-shaped spacious kitchen, formal dining room, large living room with big brick fireplace, master bedroom with his-and-her closets and 1/2 bath, guest bedroom, bath and sunny laundry room/office. Lower level boasts family room with wood-burning stove, cozy den, 2 bedrooms and bath. The furnace room features lots of storage and the fruit room displays the property's bountiful garden goodies. A lush landscaped yard stays green with underground sprinklers and the oversized workshop/double garage, single garage and garden shed are added amenities.

213 S. YORK. This charming 2 bedroom Bungalow features original woodwork, hardwood floors under carpeting, new bath with ceramic floor, sun room, central air and heat, plus basement with lots of possibilities. Priced to sell!

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