

County sets tax increase for budget

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
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The Decatur County commissioners approved a proposed budget for 2008 last Tuesday, including a 6.325-mill increase in the property tax levy to allow the county to spend \$293,978 more.

Final decisions won't be made until after a public hearing at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 2. The increase would boost county spending by about 15 percent.

This year, said County Clerk Marilyn Horn, the property tax levy was 59.583 mills and the proposed levy for next year is 65.908. Each mill brings in \$33,475 for the county to spend, she said.

Mrs. Horn said the budget for this year was \$1,912,315 with the proposed budget for 2008 is \$2,206,293, an increase of more than 15 percent.

A homeowner with an "average" house appraised at \$50,000 will pay \$378 in county taxes next year, Mrs. Horn said, \$36 more than last year.

A business owner with a \$50,000 building will pay \$823, \$79 more than last year. Mrs. Horn said it will depend on what farm ground is appraised at as to how much more in taxes a farmer will pay.

The tax hike would be used to pay for elections, employee benefits, a mapping project associated with

County roundup

At their meeting last Tuesday, the Decatur County commissioners:

- Proposed a budget for 2008 which includes a 6.325-mill increase in the property tax levy, allowing the county to bring in \$293,978 more. Story at left.

- Approved purchases for six drums of oil, two barrels of 2-4D weed killer and other chemicals for fall musk thistle spraying. Story to come.

plans to name and number county roads, airport improvements, emergency management, employee pay increases and general costs of operations, she said.

The increases will allow \$30,000 more for elections, the clerk said, since the county will have to pay for maintenance on the new voting machines required by federal law.

The commissioners added \$35,000 to employee benefits and \$10,000 for mapping just in case the county doesn't actually receive a grant for the project. So far, the (See COUNTY on Page 5A)

Board agrees to negotiated agreement

The Oberlin School Board approved a negotiated agreement between the school district and the teachers union after 30 minutes behind closed doors last Monday.

The board went into the closed session to discuss negotiations, although it made the decision in open session.

The board held three closed sessions of 10 minutes each.

Superintendent Pat Cullen said the union, the Unified School District 294 Teacher's Association, had approved the agreement, and now it was up to the board.

The contract passed unanimously. Dr. Cullen said there were two main changes this year, with the district adding \$920 to the base pay of all teachers.

The change will cost the district about \$35,800 a year, he said.

The district has 39 teachers who make anywhere from \$31,170 to \$45,570.

That means a first-year teacher will make \$31,170 a year instead of the \$30,250 paid last year, an increase of 3 percent.

The other change is that the district can buy back personal days that teachers don't use at the end of the

School roundup

At a meeting last Monday night, the Oberlin School Board:

- Talked with the grade and high school principals about how teacher are evaluated. Story to come.

- Approved a negotiated agreement between the board and the teacher's union after 30 minutes behind closed doors. Story at left.

- Approved a 3 percent raise for all "classified" staff, including hourly personnel, bus drivers and contracted workers. Story to come.

- Approved a policy against bullying and a day of training on the subject for staff and students. Story to come.

- Talked with the new high school counselor about what she has accomplished so far this year and what she wants to do. Story on Page 3A.

year. The district will pay \$45 for each day, he said.

Hansen Mueller building new facility

Hansen Mueller Co. plans to relocate its downtown elevator and grain operation to the north side of town, just off U.S. 36, with a larger facility which could mean adding at least two jobs here.

Jim Mendlik, vice president of operations in the Omaha office, said the firm has been looking at the operation in Oberlin for some time. They came to the conclusion that they had two choices: either to upgrade the facilities or get out of the business in Oberlin.

"The facility is inadequate", he said, "for the service we normally provide for our customers."

The expansion, he said, doesn't just mean a bigger, user friendly fa-

cility, but more jobs. The company will be hiring at least two more full-time employees, Mr. Mendlik said, and they also always need part-time help during harvest. Currently, they have five full-time employees in Oberlin, he said.

The present operation, on the west side of Main Street at the railroad tracks, he said, just doesn't have enough room to expand, so the firm bought land north of the highway from Jim Reeves. The site is behind the former Decatur Co-op fertilizer station.

The only way to expand downtown, said Mr. Mendlik, would have been to tear everything down and (See DIRT on Page 5A)



Taking time out from class

AT RECESS on Monday at Oberlin Elementary School, Stephani Noone (above) crossed the sliding monkey bars while Shylo Shields (left) dug in the dirt. Meghan Davies, Joseph Barron and Shawn Cressler (below) played on the wave, a new item at the playground. It was purchased with \$1,500 from the school district and Support our Schools and \$1,125 from box-top money.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis



Fines raised for underage drinking

Oberlin's city judge says youths under 21 caught with alcohol or beer can expect stiffer fines and those caught buying drinks for minors will do a month in jail.

City Judge Paul Lueschen said Kansas judges discussed the fines and penalties at a conference he attended and agreed they need to make people more accountable for their actions. Judge Lueschen said there's been no change in the law, but this is how he has decided to handle these cases.

It used to be that someone with a

minor in possession ticket paid \$100 plus court costs, he said, and that was it. There weren't any other consequences.

Effective Friday, he said, anyone guilty of minor in possession will be fined \$350 plus court costs and their driver's license will be suspended. On the third offense, he said, a youth can lose his or her license for a year.

People who bought alcohol and beer for minors used to have a \$500 fine with 30 days in jail, but could be released after five days with a year's probation.

That has changed, said Judge Lueschen. Those buying alcohol now can be fined \$750 plus court costs. They will have to serve the 30 days in jail. There will be no exceptions, he said; no one will not get time off for good behavior.

Judge Lueschen, who has been municipal judge in Oberlin for 26 years, said he thinks there comes a point when the consequences need to be more severe. Parents need to be more responsible for what their kids are doing, he said. Adults, including parents, need to be aware of

the consequences when they provide beer and alcohol for minors, even their own kids.

In the last year, he said, he has probably dealt with eight to 10 cases of minors in possession and maybe one for someone furnishing the drinks. Kids are reluctant to turn adults in for buying alcohol for them, he said.

Anyone with questions, said Judge Lueschen, can come talk to him at the police department on the second and fourth Thursdays of each month around 7:15 p.m.

Kids challenged to volunteer time

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**
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Members of the Decatur Tomorrow strategic planning committee and leaders from the "public square" last Wednesday challenged students at Decatur Community High School to get out and work on community projects as volunteers.

Decatur Tomorrow, said Jesse Carter with Farmers Bank and Trust, is helping make this community better. The group hired a consultant, Terry Woodbury of Leoti and Kansas City, to help get things going, he said. Now they are building around what he calls the "public square," which includes education, business, health and human services and government.

Part of living in a small town, said Mr. Carter, is volunteering. That's what it takes to make things work.

The youth of Oberlin do a great job, he said, and we are here to thank you for the job you do and ask you to do more.

How many of you have volunteered for something that you wanted to do? asked Abby Hissong,

part of the planning group's intergenerational committee. About half to three-fourths of the students raised their hands.

Everything in Oberlin has a volunteer in it somewhere, she said, adding that her committee's goal is to have 50 percent of the graduating class active as volunteers.

"Thank you for volunteering," said Mrs. Hissong, "and being a part of the community."

We know there is a need for a "really cool" place for students to go hang out, said Carolyn Burtis, a member of the Sappa Park Committee with co-convenor Heidi Wiebe standing next to her. Lots of hands went up.

What if that place already exists? asked Mrs. Burtis. It's Sappa Park, she said. She said the committee would like the students' help at the park and would use their ideas. A group of high school students put in a disc golf at the park, she said, and the course is in use today.

Pheasants Forever members are busy planting food plots at the park, (See STUDENTS on Page 5A)

Students to show spirit this week

Students at Decatur Community High School will celebrate homecoming this week by dressing in fun outfits, making floats, cheering and attending the football game Friday night.

Things started on Monday with students dressing in their favorite pajamas.

On Tuesday they dressed like someone else and today the theme is dressing in a designated color, with the faculty in black, seniors in pink, juniors in green, sophomores in blue and freshmen in purple. On Thursday, the students are supposed to wear their favorite professional or college team colors or mascot. On Friday, the students are asked to wear red to show school spirit.

On Thursday, the students will meet in front of the high school at 6:15 p.m. and then walk down to the courthouse, where the cheerleaders will do a dance and lead the cheering before heading fur-

Homecoming banner inside!

ther south down Main Street for the traditional bonfire.

On Friday, the homecoming assembly will start at 1:15 p.m. in the auditorium, followed by a parade at 2:30 p.m. on Main Street. The football game will start at 7 p.m. that night at Smick Field.

Queen candidates are Heather Glodt, Amy Ritter, Leanna Scheaffer, Jenny Ploussard and Kenzie Fisher. King candidates are Ace Manning, Jared Marcuson, Sean Ybarra, Colt Diederich and Royal Fisher. The flower girl is Brittany Farr and crown bearer is Reegon Witt.

The 10-year queen is Kristi (Olson) Ostmeier.