

## Yep, 2009 really was a wet year

Decatur County received almost six inches more moisture than normal last year and a little more than five inches more than 2008.

According to the National Weather Service in Goodland, the county received 28.55 inches of moisture last year. Meteorologist Dave Floyd said the service gets the figures from a weather observer in the county.

In 2008, he said, the county got 23.23 inches of moisture. Normal here is 22.57

inches, said Mr. Floyd.

While a lot of areas in northwest Kansas seemed to get more moisture than the previous year, he said he can't tell if it's a trend or not. What he does know is that as far west as Goodland there was more precipitation.

Storm tracks, he said, depend on the upper wind flow. Last year, said Mr. Floyd, it was such that the area had repeated storms. The track didn't go way north or south, missing Decatur County completely, as it

has before in the past.

The storms formed over this area and then moved through, he said.

For the year Decatur County was 2 degrees below normal temperatures. It was a cool, wet fall, said Mr. Floyd. The average temperature was 9.5 degrees below normal in October and 8.3 degrees below in December.

It was also a kind of a cool spring, too, he said, and the county was half a degree

to 3 degrees below normal, depending on the month.

On the extreme temperature side, said Mr. Floyd, on average the county has 62 days of weather 90 degrees or hotter. There were only 37 last year. That leaves the county almost a month short of hot days.

Normally, he said, we have 11 days with weather over 100 but there were just two this year, both in August.

On the low side, he said we normally

have 10 days with the low below zero and last year the county had seven.

Decatur County only had five severe weather reports, he said, which is virtually nothing compared to 13 in 2008 and 15 in 2007.

Overall, said Mr. Floyd, Decatur County had cool, wet months in 2009 with not as much severe weather or extreme heat.



## Council votes to give raises to all workers

By KIMBERLY DAVIS  
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After 45 minutes behind closed doors Thursday night, the Oberlin City Council approved a 3 percent pay increase for all employees and a little more for three workers.

The council budgeted for pay increases last year, said City Administrator Austin Gilley, although it didn't make a decision on how much to give. The city didn't increase property taxes last year.

Mr. Gilley went over several factors before the council went into closed session for 30 minutes and then voted for another 15 minutes with the council, administrator and city attorney.

The city has no policy to give employees a cost of living raise, said Mr. Gilley. The city government hasn't felt the recession like other businesses have, he said, and probably won't for a few years. Jobs at the city don't compare "apples to apples" to others in town.

It's more appropriate to compare the city jobs and pay to other third-class cities, he said. Comparing wages in the departments to those in other area cities, the foreman is the only one who makes more than in other places. This would suggest an across-the-board pay increase, Mr. Gilley said.

The city doesn't have a policy for performance-based pay increases now, said Mr. Gilley, and seniority is only a small factor.

Last year, the council raised the pay for some of the positions that were lower paid, he said, as part of a long-term strategy to fix some of the inequities.

Mr. Gilley suggested a 3 percent increase for everyone and improving the pay for four positions.

Mr. Gilley showed a slide that had five spots highlighted, all which are

### Council roundup

At a meeting Thursday, the Oberlin City Council:

- Brainstormed priorities for the year, making no decisions. Story at bottom of page.
- Approved giving a 3 percent pay increase for all employees and a little more for four. Story at left.
- Decided not to spend money from the Bremer donation on operating costs at The Gateway. Story on Page 3.
- Heard that a project to put an Automated Weather Observation System at the airport is moving along. Story on Page 12.

held by women and all the lowest paid in the breakdown of the three kinds of jobs at the city which are jobs required by city laws, mid-level management and labor.

Councilwoman Rhonda May asked how the treasurer's job fits into the picture. Mr. Gilley said that job was on the slide as one of the highlighted ones. It would appear to be a "pink collar" ghetto, said Ms. May, meaning the women are paid less. The part-time treasurer's spot is a job only someone who is supported by someone who has benefits can afford to take, she said.

The situation presented itself that could save some money making the treasurer position from full-time to part-time and save money. It just so happened that the position was filled by a woman. Mr. Gilley said there were six or seven applicants with one being a man.

Mr. Gilley said if the council wanted to talk about specific em (See CITY on Page 12)

## Kids enjoy sunshine

**IN THE SUNSHINE**  
Monday afternoon, Gracie Vontz (above left) and Makenzie Urban sat on a new bench on the Oberlin Elementary School playground. The bench was set up on the playground that morning in memory of the late Jim Buchholz, longtime music teacher at the school, who died last year. Breckin Sauvage (left) climbed a ladder to the monkey bars.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

## Farm conference to offer no-till ideas at The Gateway

Area farmers are invited to the annual Cover Your Acres winter conference on Tuesday and next Wednesday at The Gateway in Oberlin.

The conference, put together by Kansas State University Research and Extension and the Northwest Kansas Crop Residue Alliance, will cover topics on no-till farming for area farmers.

While early registration is already closed, people can still sign up at the door, said Brian Olson, K-State regional agronomist. It will cost \$45 for either day.

The two-day conference will have the same topics at the same time both days, giving farmers an option. They also can attend both days and listen to different topics.

Cover Your Acres, said Mr. Olson, is designed to provide information on lots of different topics and give farmers a place to ask questions of experts from industry and the university.

Topics on the agenda are "farmer-driven," he said, adding that he listens all year for anything new or different that can be added to the event.

Some of those topics this year include weed control in fallow fields, common production problems, long-term crop rotation results, cover crops of western Kansas, a guide for setting up on-farm research and getting started in agriculture, to name a few.

Anyone wanting to mail in their registration can send it to Northwest Area Extension Office, attention Brian Olson, Box 786, Colby, Kan. 67701.

The conference will be held at The Gateway, at the intersection of U.S. 36 and U.S. 83. This is the seventh year for the winter conference, Mr. Olson added.

This year, "diamond" sponsors include the Decatur Co-op Association, Pioneer Seed, Hoxie Implement, Lang Diesel, Sims Fertilizer, Crop Production Services, Monsanto, Cargill Ag Horizons, the High Plains chapter of the National Sunflower Association and Farm Credit of Western Kansas.

## Council makes list of priorities for year

The Oberlin City Council brainstormed priorities for the year Thursday, compiling a list of ideas to be voted on at the next meeting.

City Administrator Austin Gilley said he had a list from the fall retreat and one from the top interests of those who filled out the city's 2009 survey.

Councilman Bill Riedel asked if Mr. Gilley was going to do a survey this year and Mr. Gilley said he was. Mr. Riedel said he thought that was a good idea.

Water was people's top concern, according to the survey results, Mr. Gilley said.

City residents, said Councilwoman Rhonda May, get letters from the city about the water, saying it's bad according to Environmen-

tal Protection Agency standards. The city is out of compliance with new drinking water standards, she said, adding that she thought a letter should say that only the federal standards have changed. This is the same water people have been drinking for the last 100 years. The letter doesn't have anything to do with whether it's healthy to drink the water, she said; it tastes bad, but isn't necessarily bad for you.

Mr. Gilley said he would be happy to include another letter to the residents. The letters that are sent out are ones that the city receives from the government and has to send, he said.

When the council first talked about the priority list, said Ms. May, it was mainly for guidelines for Mr.

Gilley. That way, the council could all agree on what they were going to grade him on at the end of the year.

Right, said Mayor Joe Stanley, but it should be the same goals for the city so everyone is on the same page.

Communication was one thing the council talked about at the retreat, said Mr. Riedel, getting information to the people and having everyone work together. People need to know more about what's going on. The best way to do that is to attend the council meetings.

Mr. Gilley said *The Oberlin Herald* has offered to let him write a monthly column, which will start this month.

No list of priorities could be done without the airport project, said

Ms. May.

Mayor Stanley suggested starting with short-term items that can be accomplished this year.

The council brainstormed ideas including:

- Airport.
- Community relations.
- Shelterhouse at the Sappa Park.
- Blighted properties.
- Fixing some of the streets. The city did four intersections last year. Mr. Gilley said he would bring the information about streets and the council can decide which ones to fix.
- Fixing the curbs downtown.
- Copying old city records. Mr. Gilley said he has done some pre- (See COUNCIL on Page 12)



Give a little, gab a little

# \* City workers will receive pay increase

(Continued from Page 1) ployees, he would appreciate doing it in closed session.

Councilman Bill Riedel asked about the two spots that were vacant and plans to hire people for them. One was the treasurer position, said Mr. Gilley, which now has a part-time person in it. The other is the parks department, where the opening is being handled partly by other city crew members and partly by contract labor.

The council went into closed session shortly after that. The closed session was followed by the vote for raises, which was unanimous.

The increase will cost the city

\$35,000, said Mr. Gilley, and with the employer liability including taxes, retirement and unemployment, it will cost 17 percent more. That overall cost to the city will be \$40,950.

The three positions that received raises include the water manager for a 15 percent raise taking the yearly salary from \$33,180 to \$38,392, the cemetery sexton for a 11 percent raise taking the position from \$23,146 to \$25,748 and for the utility billing clerk at 18 percent from \$23,150 to \$27,422.

The council didn't approve a raise for the treasurer position.

# City gets money for weather station

The Oberlin city administrator told the council Thursday that the project to put an Automated Weather Observation System up at the airport is moving along.

Administrator Austin Gilley said the city has received \$60,000 of the \$90,000 from the Kansas Department of Transportation. The city crew looked into the equipment to trench a power line for the system, but that part of the project is turning into more than the city can do. Mr. Gilley said he's talked with BWR, the engineering firm doing the city's airport plan, and they are going to help find someone to do that job.

The electric line needs to go under the existing runway, he said.

The county, said Mr. Gilley, has approved a plan to relocate a township road north of the airport, which was the last hurdle for the environmental assessment of a plan to build a new, longer runway at the airport. A public hearing for the environmental assessment will be coming up in the next month or so.

Design work for the airport project continues, too, said Mr. Gilley. He said he plans to meet with BWR at the beginning of February. The next round of grant applications is coming up, he said.

Mr. Gilley said the past year, his first on the job, he needed to spend

a lot of time in his office. With community relations as one of the things identified at the council's fall retreat, he said he attended several meetings recently, including the Convention and Visitors Bureau, Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce, Oberlin Business Alliance and has plans to go to the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp. board meeting next week.

In other business, the council:

- Hired Janice Elliot as the part-time city treasurer.
- Heard that the agenda for the Thursday, Feb. 4, meeting will include picking a contractor for the circle drive on the south side of The Gateway. Bids are due by Tuesday, Feb. 2, Mr. Gilley said.



AT THE GATEWAY last Wednesday, Gary Orr talked about crops with Dick Vahling (front) while the two men donated blood for the American Red Cross drive. —Herald staff photo by Cynthia Haynes

# \* Council names years's top issues

(Continued from Page 1) liminary talking with the museum about digitizing the old records.

- Putting up a wall around the new section of the cemetery.
- Fixing the front wall of the bandshell.
- Continuing with the energy efficiency report.

- Finishing the transition to the new software in the office.
- A water treatment plant.
- A new radiator at the power plant to replace one sold by a previous council.
- Tree trimming in the alleys. Mr. Gilley said they are working on a contract with Larry Van Otterloo for that.
- A recreation coordinator.

- A new motel. While that's important to the town, said Ms. May, she said she thought that fell more to the economic development corporation. The corporation has asked the city to pay for a feasibility study, said Mr. Gilley, and the motel might need land at The Gateway. He said he doesn't plan to try to recruit anyone, but to support the corporation.

- Landscaping at The Gateway. Mr. Gilley said some trees have already been ordered and a plan has been set up, which will be brought to the next meeting.

Instead of making decisions on the priority list, Councilman Ray Ward suggested getting a list together and then having each council member go through it and prioritize it by the next meeting.

# Top football players named

Toby Peters, a senior who played end for the Decatur Community High School football squad last fall, has been named to the Class 2-1A All-State first team for the second year.

Wiley Farr, a senior back, also was named to the team.

Named to the All-League first team for the Northwest Kansas League from Oberlin were Peters, a

senior receiver, offense; Josh Ritter, junior lineman, defense; Justin Williams, senior lineman, offense; Farr, senior quarterback, offense; and Daniel Jordan, senior linebacker, defense.

Honorable mention went to Dakota Soderlund, Kaden Macfee, Dalton Dolan and Nolan Peters, juniors, on defense.

# Ad man joins staff at Herald

The Oberlin Herald has a new advertising representative.

While new to the company, Timothy Davis isn't new to Oberlin. He's lived in town for the past 9/12 years, when he moved from Colorado to be closer to his parents.

Mr. Davis is married to Kimberly Davis, managing editor of the paper. He started as the full-time ad salesman this week.

The Davises have two daughters who live in Colorado, a granddaughter and two foster daughters.

Mr. Davis said he plays in the worship team at Lund Covenant Church, loves to cook, do carpentry and electrical projects and loves spending time in the mountains four wheeling, fishing and camping.

Anyone who wants to advertise can call Mr. Davis at (785) 475-2206. He said he's been out on the street trying to meet as many customers as he can.

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# Oberlin man pleads guilty

An Oberlin man pleaded guilty to one charge of making false information last week.

Dave Nichols, former chief financial officer for Decatur Health Systems, was charged with 22 counts of making false information for writing checks on the Wheat Ridge Terrace account last year. The firm, which also manages the Decatur County Hospital, oversees and manages the senior apartment complex.

The checks totaled \$37,766.

Last Tuesday, Mr. Nichols pleaded guilty to the first felony count, but agreed to making restitution on the whole amount.

Judge Bill Elliott set sentencing for 9:30 a.m. Tuesday, Feb. 9.



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