



Biologist would live in Oberlin

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
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The Oberlin City Council agreed Thursday to give \$2,500 to Pheasants Forever to bring a regional wildlife biologist here in a project designed to boost hunting and bring some income to businesses and farmers in the area.

Councilwoman Rhonda May said she would like to offer use of a city-owned house at the old youth ranch instead of the money and make that the first offer. If not, she said, then the city could give \$2,500, which would help pay the biologist's salary. The city would do one or the other, she said.

The council approved the motion.

Rick Pauls, with the Sunflower Chapter of Pheasants Forever, said the group needs about \$33,000 a year to pay for the position. He said he'd been talking to organizations for the last week. Devon Walter with the national Pheasants Forever organization was here on Monday, Jan. 11, to talk with the Oberlin-Decatur County Economic Development Corp. about the idea.

Mr. Pauls said he took Mr. Walter to Sappa Park, and Mr. Walter said he couldn't believe the asset the city had in the park. Mr. Pauls said he also took him to the former youth ranch, and he was excited about the National group doing something with it. Mr. Pauls said he thought the group would be working on some kind of proposal for the ranch.

Before attending the council meeting on Thursday, Mr. Pauls said he had received a \$2,000 commitment from the Oberlin Convention and Visitors Bureau and \$2,500 from the county commissioners.

Mr. Pauls said he had talked with the economic development board, but was told their coffers are a little dry. Marketing Director Connie Grafel said the new recreation center has kind of drained the group.

County gives money

By KIMBERLY DAVIS
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The Decatur County commissioners voted last Tuesday to give \$2,500 towards the salary for a regional wildlife biologist if that person will live in the county.

Rick Pauls, with the Sunflower Chapter of Pheasants Forever, was at the meeting last Tuesday to ask for the money and explain why a wildlife biologist is needed here.

Pheasants Forever, he said, is a national organization that tries to support habitat for birds, boost hunting as a sport and keep the ball rolling in rural America.

In the last 20 years, he said the number of hunters and birds in Kansas have declined and that the group wants to bring Kansas back to the top for bird hunting.

The biologist would cover Decatur, Thomas, Norton, (See COUNTY on Page 8A)

Lastly, he said he will talk with the Oberlin-based Sunflower Chapter of Pheasants Forever.

Ms. May asked what a wildlife biologist would do here. The person would be able to help landowners by pointing out programs that would work for their land to get money in their pockets and help wildlife habitat. (See CITY on Page 8A)



Farmers show support

AT THE GATEWAY last Wednesday, Tom Jasnock (above left) with the Republican River group talked with Robert Martin of Herndon at the Cover Your Acres Winter Conference. Charlie Swartz (left) of Hoxie looked at an implement with Jerry Keller of Ellis in the arena. The conference brought 740 people to Oberlin over the two days, said Brian Olson, regional agronomist with K-State Research and Extension.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

Commissioner elected to state post

Decatur County Commissioner Stan McEvoy traveled to Topeka earlier this month for County Government Day at the State Capital on Tuesday, Jan. 19.

He chaired a meeting of the Kansas County Commissioners Association, of which he has been elected as president for 2010. He represents the 18 northwest counties on the board. Other members are Vice President Gary Scoby, Nemaha County; Lyle Wobker, Miami County; Duane Patrick, McPherson County; Dan Woydziak, Butler County, and Cliff Mayo, Finney County.

Commissioner McEvoy attended a Kansas Association of Counties meeting, reception and supper, where commissioners got to visit with legislators and heard comments from Senate President Steve Morris from Hugoton, House Speaker Mike O'Neal of Hutchinson and Sen. Jay Emler of Lindsborg, chairman of the Senate Ways and Means Committee

and vice chair of the Joint Budget Committee.

He was also able to visit with 120th District Rep. John Faber of Brewster, who represents this area, about issues affecting Decatur County and northwest Kansas. The general consensus, he said, is that the upcoming session will be taken up mostly by discussions on the state's budget problems and possible solutions. Revenue estimates have come in short of projections, he said, and the 2010 state budget looks to be short about \$400 million.

Other major topics will be finding more money for the Kansas Public Employees System pension plan and trying to build a new comprehensive transportation program.

On a lesser note, he said, the Legislature will be dealing with a possible statewide smoking ban, a mandatory seat-belt law and finding more money for treatment of autism in Kansas children, a growing problem.

Electric transfer to pay for The Gateway

The Oberlin City Council approved a transfer of \$140,000 from the electric fund to The Gateway account at its meeting Thursday.

The transfer was needed after a vote at the meeting on Thursday, Jan. 7, not to transfer money out of the Bremer gift into the civic center account. That would leave the fund short \$140,000, said City Administrator Austin Gilley. The earlier vote prevents any money being transferred from the Bremer money.

The council can transfer the money out of the electric fund instead of the Bremer account, said Mr. Gilley, or operate the center until the money that's in the account now is gone and then make a decision. In past years, the electric account has supported

Council Roundup

At a meeting Thursday, the Oberlin City Council:

- Talked about a letter written by the city administrator, with changes by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, to be sent to residents explaining the situation with the city's water supply. Story on Page 3A.
- Approved giving \$2,500 to Pheasants Forever to bring a wildlife biologist here or allowing the biologist to live a house at the former youth ranch. Story top right.
- Approved a budget transfer for

\$140,000 from the electric fund to The Gateway account. Story at left.

- Received a list of 26 items to be ranked as city priorities. Story on Page 3A.

- Talked with a Hoxie woman about helping enforce some of the city codes, but made no decision. Story on Page 3A.
- Talked about having an engineering firm come in to work on a capital improvement plan, including streets that need repaired. Story to come.

Out of the Bremer money, he said, the city has spent \$227,671 on a new roof, heating, ventilating and air conditioning, engineering plans, an electric piano, electric repairs, equipment and decorations. That leaves \$809,223.

At the last meeting, said Councilwoman Marcia Lohofener, she made the motion that the money for operations shouldn't come out of the Bremer account. She said that she thinks the money should come out of the electric fund.

Councilman Bill Riedel asked what the surplus is in the electric fund for the year. It started with \$265,000, said Mr. Gilley.

So a transfer of \$250,000 out of electric, said Mr. Riedel, would pretty much wipe out the account.

It shows \$145,000 in the 2010 actual spending line for the electric department, said Mrs. Lohofener. (See ELECTRIC on Page 8A)

the center. While the budget is showing a \$140,000 shortfall, said Mr. Gilley, if it's more than that, the council

will need to have this conversation again. He suggested a \$250,000 transfer, which he said is what was budgeted.

Winter sports inside

THE OBERLIN HERALD'S
Winter Sports '10

Decatur Community High School - Golden Plains High School



The annual Winter Sports section is inside today's Oberlin Herald. The section includes team pictures from Decatur Community Junior-Senior High School and Golden Plains High, and individual pictures of the Oberlin Red Devils basketball players and wrestlers.

A round of applause



DURING AN ASSEMBLY last Tuesday, Adrienne Pauls (left) and Mary Olson clapped in appreciation for the hard work their teachers put in. The students and staff had just learned they would get a day off Monday as a reward for the test scores on last year's state assessments.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis

*City Council shows support for a biologist

(Continued from Page 1A)

tat and hunting, Mr. Pauls replied.

There are programs that aren't being used here, said Mr. Pauls. The biologist will be able to read through the information on various programs and be able to tell the landowners which ones will work for them.

"This is a unique opportunity to bring some young people to Oberlin," he said.

Councilman Bill Riedel asked if the biologist would be committed to living in Oberlin. Mr. Pauls said yes.

It would be a three-year contract, said Mr. Pauls. The job opening will be advertised at the beginning of February.

Mr. Riedel asked who would underwrite the rest of the salary. Mr. Pauls said most of the money would come from the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the person will be a federal or state employee.

This isn't a huge expenditure considering the possible benefits to the community, said Mr. Pauls.

While there was some discussion on using the house as an in-kind donation instead of the money from the city, Mr. Pauls said he hadn't heard if that would work.

Mayor Joe Stanley said he was somewhat reserved about paying someone to move to Oberlin. The

city doesn't do that for a new doctor or teacher, he said. The city wouldn't be paying someone to move here, said Ms. May. The money is going to pay a person's salary.

This would be a marvelous thing for a new hotel, too, said Mr. Riedel.

The idea is to look at hunting as an economic base, said Ms. May.

The Pheasants Forever chapter could pay for the whole thing, said Mr. Pauls. The community has really supported its annual banquets.

Last year, he said, the group set aside \$10,000 for Walk-in Hunting to kind of sweeten the pot and only \$3,400 was used. The group budgeted \$4,000 for Sappa Park and spent \$1,000 on a youth shoot.

Councilwoman Marcia Lohofener said she knows what hunting used to mean to the town's businesses. It needs to get back to that point, she said.

It's a great idea, said Mr. Riedel. If Oberlin can partner with other cities and all have already OK'd this, and the city can benefit from the person living here without putting up a lot of money, that's great.

Mr. Pauls said other cities that have already committed money to the project include \$2,000 from Goodland, \$5,000 from Colby, \$7,000 from Norton and \$10,000 from Hoxie.

*County gives OK for salary money

(Continued from Page 1A)

Sheridan and Sherman counties.

Commissioner Gene Gallentine, who farms near Jennings, said he understands the economic impact of hunting, but asked how the money hunters spend would help landowners who provide the place for hunting.

The biologist would work with landowners showing them which state and federal programs would work for them and help them get the money. There are several programs that aren't being used in Decatur County, he said.

The land is always going to be here, Mr. Pauls added, but will the grocery store be here? People are moving away because they want to make more money, but also for recreation. This part of the state doesn't have mountains for skiing or a lake, but there is hunting.

"Hunting is a big business," said Mr. Pauls. "Let's keep that money here."

He added that he wants hunting to still be affordable for teenagers to get out in the field, which is one reason why the state's Walk-In Hunting program is good. Many out-of-state

hunters come here because they have developed a relationship over the years with landowners, but teenagers haven't been able to establish that and maybe can't afford to pay for hunting.

Commissioner Ralph Unger, who farms west of Oberlin, said he doesn't appreciate people hunting on his land without permission. He said he had 17 people last year on his land and none of them had asked to be there. Those experiences last quite a while, he said, adding that he doesn't want hunting to just be a rich man's sport either.

There's a serious movement going that way, said Mr. Pauls.

One of the major assets in this county, said Mr. Gallentine, is the land. Maybe it's time to promote economic development using that asset.

This year, said Gary Anderson, owner of the LandMark Inn, hunting demand has been bigger than in the past 10. He said he had some hunters just last weekend.

While the county couldn't commit to three years, which is what Mr. Pauls was asking for, they did agree to \$2,500 for the first year.

Impromptu reunion planned

An impromptu Red Devils reunion will take place in Overland Park in the middle of February.

Jill (Mermis) Minton, who graduated from Decatur Community High School in 1996, said any alums in the area are invited. They plan to get together at Tanner's Bar and Grill in Overland Park from 7 to 10 p.m. on

Friday, Feb. 19.

Mrs. Minton said if someone wants to let her know they're coming, they should e-mail her at jill@minton.com. She said she's trying to get as many e-mail addresses as possible to let people know about the evening.

*Electric fund to pay for civic center

(Continued from Page 1A)

That will pretty much be spent on bills for electricity and payroll for the department, said Mr. Gilley. Budget figures show \$737,446 in the electric reserve fund.

The Bremer will said the money should be used "For the benefit of The Gateway," said Councilwoman Rhonda May, but spending it on operations isn't "for the benefit." Without the donation, the money would have come from the electric fund, she said, so if the money is used out of the Bremer account for operations, it actually benefits the electric fund, she said.

When The Gateway was first built, said Mr. Riedel, no one intended that the electric fund would

pay for it. Every year, he said, it gets a little more costly to run the building.

The building is operated at the expense of everyone who pays a utility bill, the councilman said.

The city should take the money out of the electric fund, said Ms. May, and use the Bremer money according to the will.

What happens when the electric fund runs out of money? Mr. Riedel asked. Use at The Gateway could be restricted, she replied, or there could be less staff.

If the electric fund can't pay for the building, said Mr. Riedel, the Bremer money will have to.

If the city didn't have the Bremer money, said Mrs. Lohofener, the

electric fund would still have to be paying to make up the difference and it wouldn't be upgraded.

If the city doesn't use the money appropriately, she said, others who might be thinking of leaving money might change their minds.

Can the city continue to ask the people for an increase in their electric bills? asked Mr. Riedel. Can it continue paying for an increase for The Gateway until it starts making a profit?

The history of the electric fund, said Ms. May, is that it's paid a lot of that that people didn't want to pay for from their property taxes.

The electric lines and equipment are in dire straits, said Mr. Riedel, so that money should go to rebuilding

the system. If the surplus is gone, he asked, where will the money for repairs come from?

Mayor Joe Stanley asked for a council recommendation, which was met with silence.

Mr. Gilley said he highly recommended, with the cash balance what it is, that the council approve the transfer. Otherwise, he said, The Gateway will be out of money by the end of March.

The council approved taking \$140,000 from the electric fund with Councilman Ray Ward, Ms. May and Mrs. Lohofener voting for it. Mr. Riedel cast a no vote and Councilman Rob McFee was absent.

Gateway office space project moves forward

The Oberlin City Council decided Thursday to move ahead with bids to remodel new office space for the city staff at The Gateway, as well as other expenses to be paid out of the Bremer gift.

The city staff now works in the front office, said City Administrator Austin Gilley, while Kathy Brainard, Gateway director, operates out of a makeshift office in an unfinished storage room.

The plan is to switch the offices and have Ms. Brainard in the front and the staff in the back after it's finished.

Miller and Associates, a McCook engineering firm used by the city, did a drawing of the new space, which the council looked at during the meeting. Mr. Gilley said the estimated cost of the work is \$50,000, but the city won't really know until the bids are back.

It's not very professional, said Councilman Bill Riedel, the way Ms. Brainard's office looks, to have someone come in and book an event.

The council approved proceeding with asking for bids on the work.

The council discussed several other items for The Gateway, including landscaping outside, which they put on hold, waiting for more information on a proposed new motel on the southeast corner of the site. The landscaping estimate from Common Scents in McCook was \$10,660.

Other bids approved included: • Four awnings at \$950 from Gorman Tarps, with three at the front door and one at the back.

• Finishing the painting, including the arena floor, walking track, the north stairs, north room downstairs, storage room off the kitchen, in the theater, west stairway, office, room one and two closet and the ceiling of the downstairs lobby. There was no amount set.

• Changing the filters on the rooftop heating units at \$1,662 from CB Heating and Air Conditioning of Colby.

• Putting in a light at the bottom of the west staircase for \$375.

• Exhaust fans in the upstairs

men's and women's restrooms at \$250 each.

The council discussed other lights in the building, but Councilman Ray Ward suggested getting information on different kinds of lights before making any decisions.

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