

# Water use rates will increase in January

The Oberlin City Council agreed Thursday to raise water usage rates by about 20 percent starting in January to help pay for the city's water project. Meter charges, paid every month whether water is used or not, won't change, however.

The increases for water used are 5 cents, from \$12.20 to \$12.25, for the first 750 cubic feet of water used; \$2.82, from \$14.03 to \$16.85, for 751 to 2,000 cubic feet and \$3.10, from \$15.30 to \$18.40, for 2,000 cubic feet and up.

The increases average about 20 percent, said City Administrator Karen Larson. The rates go up with increased usage to encourage conservation.

For water users outside the city, the rates will be \$15.30 for the first 750 cubic feet, \$21.10 for 751 to 2,000 cubic feet and \$23 for 2,001 feet and above.

Rates for the meter charge, based on the size of service, will stay the same at:

- 5/8ths-inch to 3/4-inch line, \$10.20.
- one-inch line, \$17.
- 1 1/4-inch line, \$23.80.
- 1 1/2-inch line, \$30.60.
- 2-inch line, \$44.20.
- 3-inch line, \$57.80.
- 4-inch line, \$71.40.

The rates are going up now, said City Administrator Karen Larson, so the city can look back at an entire year of water rates next December. The increases are needed to help pay for the city's upcoming water project, which includes either a \$4 million treatment plant, or new wells and a pipeline, and improvements to the distribution system.

## Council roundup

At its meeting last Thursday, the Oberlin City Council:

- Approved raising water rates, effective at the beginning of January, by about 20 percent to help pay for water-system improvements. Story at left.
- Received complaints from an Oberlin man about the slick condition of some of the streets after recent storms. Story to come.
- Approved a 10-year contract Thursday with Sunflower Electric Corp. to provide power for the city starting in January. Story to come.
- Talked briefly Thursday about a proposal to get the old caretaker's house at the former youth ranch at Sappa Park cleaned up and livable, but didn't make a decision. Story at right.
- Agreed to continue helping to pay the electric bills for the town's nonprofit movie theater and museum. Story to come.
- Heard that the police chief has hired a new officer to help replace one who's off on disability. Story to come.

The council approved the rate increases on a 3-0 vote. The increases will be in effect for the January bills, said Mrs. Larson.

The rates were increased last on Sept. 16, 2010.

## Late night shopping



AT THE LANDMARK INN last Thursday, Judy Shirley purchased an item during the Oberlin Business Alliance's Ladies' Shopping Night.

— Herald staff photo by Kimberly Davis

# Council discusses old house

The Oberlin City Council talked briefly Thursday about a proposal to get the old caretaker's house at the former youth ranch at Sappa Park cleaned up and livable, but didn't make a decision.

Susan Rynearson proposed during the first meeting in December hiring two men to clean out mold in the house and getting it livable so she and her friend, Kathleen Worlicky, could live there.

City Administrator Karen Larson said they checked with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and didn't find any regulations on cleaning up a building unless there is asbestos involved. The proposed clean-up is for mold.

She said one man came in and said that the city could get into trouble with the government for messing with the mold. Mrs. Larson said she called the Department of Housing and Urban Development, but hadn't received an answer yet.

If someone gets sick after taking out the mold, asked Councilman Josh Williby, would the city be liable?

County Attorney Steve Hirsch said the city would need to put the liability back on the people doing the work.

"Is this something we want to do?" asked Mrs. Larson.

Ms. Rynearson said she has been looking into the work, and they aren't going to take out the interior walls. They just need to remove the damaged sheet rock, she said.

What about dumping the debris and liability? Mr. Williby asked.

Mayor Bill Riedel said the city needs an update on the cleanup.

Ms. Rynearson noted there are no appliances in the house. She said they would also like to see a wood stove installed. Mrs. Larson said the city probably needs to get estimates before moving forward. There isn't much money to pay for any work, she said.

# McCook couple arrested for thefts

A man and woman from McCook have been arrested several burglaries and items taken from Oberlin businesses have been recovered there.

Chief Wade Lockhart said he had been working with the McCook Police Department on the case. At the beginning of the month, six Oberlin businesses were broken into, two of them twice. This week, McCook police arrested two people. The burglaries in McCook and Oberlin, he said, were very much alike, and McCook recovered some of the items taken from Oberlin.

More than likely, he said, charges will be brought for the burglaries in Oberlin, but as of now, those cases are still under investigation. Businesses broken into included Plains Equipment Group, the Decatur Co-op, Reeves Seed House,

Shear Creations West, the Oberlin School District office and Hansen Mueller.

Hap Wells and Tammy Knight, both 36, were arrested in Nebraska, with bond set at \$100,000 each surety or 10 percent cash.

According to *The McCook Gazette*, the couple have been linked to burglaries at McCorkle Motors, Quality Irrigation and two break-ins at Stockman's Feed and Supply.

Mr. Wells is looking at seven felonies and one misdemeanor charge, including felony burglary and felony theft by receiving stolen property.

Miss Wells is facing five felonies and one misdemeanor for felony burglary, felony aiding consumption of a felony, and felony theft by receiving.

# Patrons comment about postal plans

By KEVIN BOTTRELL  
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One citizen summed up the mood of the crowd at a U.S. Postal Service meeting Monday when he remarked that "Nobody wants two-to-three-day service."

"It doesn't seem like cutting back service is a way to attract business," the man added.

Roy Reynolds, district director of mail plant operations, gave a presentation on the nationwide study of mail processing centers now underway, including the proposed move to a two-to-three-day delivery standard for first-class mail. Then he moderated a contentious and sometimes heated question-and-comment session with the ??? or so members of the public present.

Mr. Reynolds was asked point blank why it is necessary for in-town mail to go to Denver and back. He responded that Colby, which once sorted mail for the entire surrounding regions, won't have enough employees to look at every piece of mail by hand, and the automated sorting machines once used at the regional center are already gone.

Vera Sloan of Colby asked if the outcome of the study was a foregone conclusion.

"Is the postal service's mind already made up?" Mrs. Sloan asked, to which Mr. Reynolds said, "no." He said plans to move work from two Nebraska towns to Cheyenne, Wyo, were put on hold when the service discovered the Cheyenne

post office would need an addition to handle the work.

Ken Poland of Gem said moving Colby's mail processing out of Kansas doesn't make sense.

"Now we're going to send everything to Denver, which has been a black hole," he said.

Mr. Poland also objected to the two- to three-day delivery, saying that, in his experience, two days would be optimistic and the mail to rural areas would likely take three days or more. Mr. Poland said he does business with grain brokers, who do not take money over the Internet, so any checks sent to them would take days to get there, even if they were in the same county.

Mr. Reynolds replied that Mr. Poland could use express mail, which will not go to Denver first. That service, which costs \$15 to \$18, has been offered for years, he said.

Mrs. Sloan asked why the service spends so much money on advertising. Mr. Reynolds said its because many people don't know about all the services the post offices have to offer. Mrs. Sloan went on to say that the post office should not be concerned with being profitable when it receives some taxpayer money.

Mrs. Sloan said she is also concerned the service would not get mail ballots back in time for the votes to be counted. She said people here support their post office and do not want a change.

"We are efficient here," she said to general applause. "We have good employees. We care about each

other. Please keep our post office intact."

Many in the crowd agreed that if processing has to move, it should go to Wichita, saying that the weather is better heading east. Many times during the winter, several said, I-70 is closed at Colby heading west, but remains open going east. Saturday mail from Colby has been processed in Wichita for some time with few problems.

When asked how much money these Area Mail Processing studies cost, Mr. Reynolds said the calculations of time, distance, maintenance and money saved are done in-house by an employee who is working full time anyway, so there's no extra cost. The studies also include the public comments from the meetings, he said.

Colby resident Mel Fry asked whether the impact on local business had been taken into account at the Postal Service headquarters. Mr. Reynolds replied that it hadn't, but the service's economists expect to lose another 39 billion pieces of mail and some of that would likely come from people who choose not to use the post office as service declines.

Fry suggested that since the federal government wants to create jobs, the post office should go back to hand-sorting so it can hire on more people and have better service. He also suggested the service raise fees.

Colby Free Press Publisher Sharon Friedlander said she thinks the

service is forcing newspapers out of the system, which in turn is not good for the service.

Free Press Systems Administrator Evan Barnum said that his mother-in-law received medication through the mail that had to be kept chilled. It was mailed in a cold pack that is good for 24 hours, but might not be good for 72, he said.

State Rep. Rick Billinger said that if the service wants to compete, it's going at it all wrong, and that it should start cutting at the administrative level.

Martha Ruiz Martinez, a representative for Sen. Pat Roberts, was at the meeting. She distributed two letters the senator has sent to Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe. In the first, sent in October, Mr. Roberts wrote about 134 rural post offices in danger of being closed.

"Sure, given the threat this policy poses to the identity of small-community America, there must be some other alternative!" Mr. Roberts wrote by hand at the bottom of the letter.

The second concerned the processing centers. Mr. Roberts said he understood the pressure the Postal Service is under, but he urged Mr. Donahoe to consider the economic loss in jobs and delays caused by closing rural centers.

The service proposed closing all centers in Kansas except the one in Wichita. Mail now sorted in Topeka would go to Missouri, from Independence to Tulsa, from Liberal to Texas and from Colby to Denver.

# Businesses to close for Christmas

Make sure all your Christmas shopping is done by Friday, because when Christmas Eve rolls around, almost all Oberlin businesses will be closed, most until Tuesday.

Dollar General will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Christmas Eve, closed on Sunday and open regular hours on Monday.

With the holiday coming on a Sunday, all city, county, state and federal government offices will be closed Monday, as will all banks.

Raye's Grocery will close at 4 p.m. Christmas Eve and re-open at 7 a.m. Monday.

The Oberlin Livestock Auction will be closed Monday, as will *The Oberlin Herald* office. The paper will be printed a day later than usual, with copies at the newsstands on Wednesday and in the mail mostly on Thursday. (The same schedule will apply for New Year's week also.)

The two convenience stores in Oberlin will be conducting business as usual. The Eagle Travel Stop will serve customers 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and CrossRoads Express will keep regular hours: 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Most restaurants will shut down early on Christmas Eve: Frontier at 10:30 a.m., the Teller Room at the LandMark Inn at 1:30 p.m., Subway Sandwich Shop at 3 p.m., and Pizza Hut and the Re-Load at 6 p.m. Most will be open for business Monday morning, however.

Ward Drug Store will be open until 3 p.m. Christmas Eve, but closed Monday. The Decatur Health Sys-

tems Family Practice Clinic will be open Monday, however.

Stanley Hardware will be open until 4 p.m. Christmas Eve and closed Monday while the Home Planning Center will be closed both Christmas Eve and Monday.

Sunflower Recreation and the bowling alley will not be open Christmas Eve. It will reopen at 5 p.m. Tuesday.

Sunflower Cinema will show "The Muppets Movie" at 7 p.m. Friday. The theater will be closed Saturday and Sunday, but will have shows at 7 p.m. Monday and Tuesday.

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