

The Bank offers to buy branches

By CYNTHIA HAYNES
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The Bank of Oberlin has made an offer and is asking for state and federal authorization to buy three branches of First National Bank of Goodland.

The Bank hopes to acquire the Colby, Bird City and Quinter branches of First National and has placed legal notices in *The Oberlin Herald*, *Colby Free Press*, *Goodland-Star News*, *Bird City Times* and the *Gove County Advocate* in Quinter as part of the purchase process. Publication was to begin today.

The Bank President Gary Walter said that the first step in the purchase was to reach an agreement with First National to buy the

assets and liabilities of the three branches. The second, he said, is to get permission from the state Banking Commissioner and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., which insures both banks.

The third step, required by law, is to publish a notice in the local newspapers of the three branches – Colby, Bird City and Quinter – and two home offices – Oberlin and Goodland – of the affected banks for four weeks.

During and after the publication period, people have a chance to comment on the sale and say if they have some problem with it, he said.

If everything goes right and there are no huge problems during the comment period,

the state and federal agencies will either OK the application or ask for additional information.

Mr. Walter said he couldn't say how long the process will take but estimated 60 to 90 days if all goes well.

"It's completely dependent on approval of the regulators," he said. "I'm hoping for the end of June."

It would be good for both banks, he noted, if the sale could go through by the end of June because banks have to put out a call report, or statement of condition, each quarter and that would be the end of June.

First National has branches in Goodland, Colby, Oberlin, St. Francis, Bird City, Quinter and Kirk, Colo.

Mr. Walter said the decision to buy just the three branches is purely a business decision and he couldn't really comment on it. Nor would he say how much The Bank has offered for the three. Both those items, he said, are covered under a confidentiality agreement signed by both banks.

In Goodland, Dwane Timm, president of First National Bank, said that he could not comment on whether any of the other branches were for sale or not. A deal to sell the entire operation to a Colorado firm fell through last year.

While the approval process is going forward, Mr. Walter said, The Bank's people are working to make sure the information systems between the two can work together.

This could take quite a bit of time, money and manpower, he noted, since computer and software systems of two businesses are seldom compatible.

However, he noted, the The Bank officials are optimistic that the sale will happen and want to be as ready as possible to make an easy switch over.

Customers of the affected branches shouldn't worry, he said.

"The only thing people will notice is a name change on their checks and the sign on the building," he said.

The Bank will buy back any checks that still say First National from the customers in those branches that change, he said. (See BANK on Page 8A)

City has rights to pump water from new wells

By CYNTHIA HAYNES
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The city's lead engineer reported that Oberlin has the water rights it needs to get water from the Ogallala Aquifer and pipe it into town and has 60 days to pick four well sites.

Chris Miller of Miller and Associates, the Nebraska firm that does the city's engineering, said at a meeting April 19 that bid proposals had gone out to three companies on drilling the wells and two responded.

Woofter Pump and Well of Hoxie was the lowest bidder at \$42,360 while Sargent Drilling of Broken Bow, Neb., bid \$48,400.

The test drilling will take 30 days, he said, and then the water must be tested for quality to make sure it doesn't have arsenic, lead or uranium in it. The wells also have to be able to produce enough water.

The council OK'd the drilling. The test sites have been picked, Mr. Miller said, and reserved for 60 days. During that time, no one else can drill in those areas. Everything is going according to schedule, he said. The city had a contractor working on improvements to its distribution system already.

He said the test drilling will be the proof of whether these wells will work for the city.

After a question from Councilwoman Fonda Farr, Mr. Miller explained that for the test holes, the drilling company uses six-inch plastic pipe, which isn't enough for municipal water but will be used for supply water when the actual wells are drilled with 12-inch or 16-inch casings. The 12-inch work fine, he said, but for long-range benefits, some cities like to do 16 inches. That way, if a well needs relining, in say 30 years, a 12-inch casing can be put in without all the expense and trouble of drilling another well.

The 12-inch casings are cheaper up front, he said, but re-drilling a well is expensive.

In other business, the council:

- Heard that the new sewer rates were to go into effect Tuesday with the start of the summer season. Sewer rates are based on water use over four winter months.

- Received a thank you from Susan Rynearson for doing something about the mold in the buildings at the former youth ranch at Sappa (See MAYOR on Page 8A)

Council debates another dog issue

By CYNTHIA HAYNES
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The Oberlin City County found itself deep in the middle of another dog debate during its final meeting of April.

Dog owner Melissa Uehlin came to the council with a complaint at the meeting April 19. She said that she and her dog were in the front yard of her home when Judge Preston Pratt walked by. The dog, she said, barked at Mr. Pratt but never left the

property. She took it inside.

Later, she said, Jeff Johnson, the city animal control officer, came and picked up the dog because it had been "at large."

"I got the maximum fine," Ms. Uehlin said. "\$143 on the ticket."

She said it was ridiculous that a person couldn't play fetch with their dog in their own front yard.

"What can we do with people to change this?" she asked the council. (See COUNCIL on Page 8A)

Decatur County might get a trooper

If everything goes as planned, Decatur County will have a state trooper stationed here starting in June.

Tod Hileman, public resource officer for Troop D, which covers this part of the state, said a Kansas Highway Patrol officer has been assigned to Decatur County, but that's based on successful completion of this training.

Graduation from the patrol academy in Salina, said Trooper Hileman, will be Saturday, June 9. The training lasts 23 weeks. After graduation, he said the new officer will then spend about 58 working days

in the field with a seasoned master trooper out of Norton.

The last trooper who was stationed in Decatur County was Jerry Stritt, who left in 2005.

Trooper Hileman said the coverage area for the new trooper is up to his captain, but officers usually stay in the area around their home county. Currently, there's no trooper in Decatur, Rawlins or Cheyenne counties.

That could change soon though, he said, as one of the troopers stationed in Goodland has asked to be transferred to Atwood and that's been approved.

in Jewell County. That's a drive of more than 325 miles, or more than six hours. And as the senator points out, Jewell County is in eastern Kansas, one county east of the center of the state.

If you think he sounds a little upset, irritated, maybe even angry, about that map, you could be right. It's difficult enough to represent the huge 40th District as it is, he said Monday.

The leadership's map, known as Ad Astra, would take away two counties on the southeast corner of the

district – Ness and Trego – and add four to the north-east – Phillips, Smith, Jewell and Osborne, plus half of Hamilton, stretching the district two-thirds of the way to Oklahoma and a county into the east. At 20 counties, he'd have fully one-fifth of the state.

"It's awful," he said, adding that redistricting should come up this afternoon on the Senate floor. He said he's pushing for a map by Sen. Steve Abrams which would add counties, but keep his district compact and nearly square.

"We're going to try one more shot," he said. "We're going to try one more amendment."

With that map, he said, he'd gain Phillips and Rush counties, but not Smith or Jewell farther east. He'd keep Rush and Rooks, but not dip into Hamilton.

(See SENATOR on Page 8A)



STARRING IN HIS OWN ARTWORK. Chris Anderson (above) smiled through a steel star he created and displayed at the High Plains ArtFest this weekend. On Friday, Jennifer Juenemann (from left, below), Amanda Grafel and Cricket Ketterl enjoyed the artwork, the refreshments and each other's company at the opening gala. — Herald staff photos by Cynthia Haynes

Artists display pieces

More than 400 pieces of artwork decorated The Gateway from Friday through Sunday as the eighth annual High Plains ArtFest got underway.

"It's the best we've ever had," said Connie Grafel, one of the organizers. "Most people, most entries, most schools."

"It's a lot of work, but it's a good event." Volunteer workers from the ArtFest Committee and the Oberlin Arts and Humanities Commission helped with the event, she said.

As in the past, the event was divided into adult and student divisions, with cash awards for first and second place in nine categories for both divisions.

The event drew 339 pieces by 106 adult artists, plus 80 pieces from 62 high school artists. Those came from 12 schools, Oberlin, Colby, Hill City, Norton, Phillipsburg and Wheatland; Cheyenne Wells, Colo.; and Hitchcock County, McCook, Victory



Christian Academy in McCook, Southern Valley and Cambridge from Nebraska.

Guitarist Adam Gardim played background music during the opening gala Friday night when patrons, who paid \$100 per couple, mingled, enjoyed wine and hors d'oeuvres and admired the art.

There were 300 at the Friday night gala, organizer Mary Henzel

said, with another 202 visitors viewing the artwork on Saturday and Sunday.

Much of the art – paintings, photography, ceramics, multimedia pieces and more – was for sale, and 45 pieces were purchased for \$5,275.

Artists were from McCook, Cambridge, Stamford, Bartley, Franklin, Holbrook, Stratton and

Trenton, Neb.; Golden, Wheat Ridge, Colorado Springs and Lakewood, Colo.; Ballwin, Mo.; and Oberlin, Colby, El Dorado, Goodland, Hays, Lakin, Norcatur, Norton, Rexford and Phillipsburg.

Next year's show is already being planned for the last weekend of April, Mrs. Henzel said.

Senator bucking leadership over odd shape of the proposed district

By STEVE HAYNES
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State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer says he hopes to make one more run at getting a compact district for northwest Kansas out of the state redistricting process, but he's not holding out much hope.

His mostly square 18-county 40th District would stretch to 20 counties along the state's west and north borders under a map backed by the Senate leadership, from Syracuse to St. Francis and all the way to Manakto

