

Mayor finds a big check in the mail

The City of Jennings got a nice surprise the other day: a check from the Dane G. Hansen Foundation of Logan for \$25,000.

Mayor Marge Hartzog said the check came unannounced, in an envelope with the foundation's return address. It was in the city's box when she picked up the mail last Tuesday.

She said she thought surely some group, maybe the fire department, had asked for a grant from the foundation. The agency, formed from the estate of Mr. Hansen, a widely known Kansas highway contractor and an influential Republican, may be best known for its annual scholarship program.

Mayor Hartzog said Norton got \$105,000 the same way, \$15,000 for the fire department and \$90,000 to use as the city sees fit.

"I called the next day to see for sure if it wasn't in response to something," she said. "This is not

in response to a request for money for a specific purpose. It has been given to the city with no strings attached. Their only suggestion is that the money be spent and that it be used to benefit the Jennings community."

The City Council is asking for suggestions as to how people would like to see the money used, not necessarily limited to those living within city limits. The mayor said Jennings is an inclusive city, and the council will welcome suggestions from anyone who's interested.

"We all have our own ideas for what it could be used for," the mayor added. "When I called them, they just said, 'no, no, we just wanted the town to have it.'"

Council members taking suggestions include Pat Hall, Rick Foster, Stann Hartzog and Louise Cressler. For questions or comments, call the mayor at (785) 678-3010.

Airport opens with a surprise

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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The Oberlin City Council, airport advisory board and friends and family all came out last Wednesday to see the ribbon cutting of the restored runway at the Oberlin Municipal Airport.

The ramp area was made about three times bigger, manager Bob Fraker said, and the taxiway and runway are both are feet 10 wider. The big surprise, though, was the unveiling of a huge sign that read "Fraker Field" in honor of Mr. Fraker, who has managed the field for 65 years.

"I was surprised and highly pleased that they did what they did," said City Councilman Jim Miesner. "I didn't know anything about it. They did a good job of keeping a secret, and it's a well-deserved honor to Bob."

But no one was as surprised as Mr. Fraker himself.

"I was about to fall over," he later said, "I didn't know that was coming. It was an honor, and I really do appreciate it."

Mr. Fraker started working at the airport in 1947, after he got his wings in the Navy and decided to come home. He did flight instruc-

tion, machine inspection, ambulance and charter work.

"Back when I was still active," he said, "I kept the snow off and mowed the grass, but since I retired, the city hires people to take care of all that."

"We didn't have any parts service at all in the beginning, no inside bathroom, just that big steel, round-top hanger was the only building here."

"I'd still just as soon use a grass (runway) as I would a hard surface. As long as you don't have snow. Back in Lindbergh's day, they didn't have any hard surfaces, all pasture flying. The barnstormers landed wherever the engine quit at; those planes weren't too reliable then. ... Only the brave and the curious would go up in those."

When asked what he most loved about flying, he just laughed.

"I never stopped to analyze it," he said. "After I got started flying in the Navy, I just continued here."

"I have always been fond of flying. I enjoy working on them, too. I'm sure I'll be here as long as I'm able. I'm almost 90 now, and probably don't have too many years left where I'll be able. But I'll be here as long as I can."



DRIVING HIS COMBINE through his corn fields north of Jennings (above), Jason Rowh talked about his love of farming and the challenges that this year's drought have

caused. The corn (below), which last year yielded up to 160 bushel per acre, will be lucky to produce 45 this year. — Herald staff photos by Stephanie DeCamp

Corn harvest worst in years

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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"It ain't like last year, we'll just say that." Jason Rowh says this as he steers his cherry-red Case International combine through his wilted corn crops. The wheat harvest was good this year, he said; they got lucky. But the corn? It hurts.

"We've been fortunate to get the moisture at the right times," he said, talking about how wheat fared in the spring and how this fall's the planting is going. "But if it stays dry, we could be in trouble. We'll see a year from now. That's another thing about farming: It makes you plan ahead. You have to be ready for

plan B." If Mr. Rowh talks a lot about farming, it's because it's what he loves to do. This year's corn crop, he said, has really suffered from the drought. Last year — one of the best he's had — they got 150 to 160 bushel per acre on dry land corn. This year, he said, he's getting 20 to 25 in some spots, and said they'll be lucky to get 45 average.

This year to date, Decatur County has received 9.76 inches of rain. Last year at this time, according to the official weather report, it was 24.13. With the corn crop all but decimated from the dry heat, farmers are crossing their fingers that when the moisture comes for wheat, it will come at the right time and in the right amounts.



On this crisp October Wednesday, the corn is a little damp from the weekend's rain and snow and the night's dew. "When it's too wet, it's too much moisture for the Co-op, and means you have to wait long-

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City needs help with volunteers

The Oberlin City Council will discuss how to handle volunteers who offer to help rehabilitate blighted property at 7 p.m. Thursday, as well as the nuisance ordinance itself, which members have discussed overhauling for a more modern take on the issue.

City Administrator Karen Larson said that the city has been receiving a lot of calls about volunteering, and it is going to look for a group or club to maintain the volunteer committee so that it will be a community effort, and not just a city one, she said.

"The city doesn't want the volunteers to be organized as a city

committee," she said. "They want it to be a community committee; we're just not sure who will take charge."

"And people should know it's not that the city doesn't want to help, it's that we can only do so much. People can still go to the city office to sign up as volunteers or for help."

Mrs. Larson said that it is likely they will put the ordinance itself on the agenda, too, since City Attorney Steve Hirsch provided examples from other cities for the council to review at the last meeting.

County mourns death of young man

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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Decatur County mourned the loss of one of its sons, Gatlin Reichert, who died by his own hand Sunday, Oct. 7.

"We'll never be sure if it was a tragic accident or a bad split-second decision," his mother, Jill Reichert, said. Undersheriff Allen Marcum, who took the report that night, agreed.

"It's not our job to speculate," he said, "but no one was with him, and there was no (sign of) foul play."

Friends and family wrote about Gatlin, and time and again, one story was brought up: a simple incident when he and his brother had gone to the Crossroads Express for burgers. Someone saw them go outside and encounter an unknown, dirty hitchhiker. The boys gave him their food. The witness later told his mother, who said she never heard the story from either of the boys, but that it demonstrated Gatlin's affable and giving nature.

"He was friendly with everyone, genu-



Gatlin Reichert

inely friendly," said his brother Grant. "He did not look or talk down to anyone ..."

"He was someone who could get along with vastly different people, without changing who he was. But he was also hard on himself. He didn't realize what everyone else saw about him, and what everyone thought he already knew — how amazing he was."

Gatlin was passionate about his music, art and video games, said his aunt, Amy Anderson, who recently moved to Oberlin. She said he worked with her at a summer camp for people with muscular dystrophy.

"He was optimistic, outgoing, creative and extremely funny," said Hannah Jacobs, who worked with him at the camp. "He was always by his campers' side, trying to get them to do

new things."

Friends say his sense of humor was sarcastic and clever, smart and simple.

"He appreciated subtle wordplay," Grant said, "ridiculous and abrupt imagery and a strong sense of irony. (His humor) was both highly intelligent and incredibly goofy at the same time, a mixture which made even the most intense subjects incredibly light-hearted. He could joke about anything at any time."

Gatlin graduated from Decatur Community High School in 2010, and went to Colby Community College to study art.

"He took art his senior year and fell in love," his mother said. "There was a multitude of mediums that he could express himself through, and he enjoyed every one. He was also in a couple of school plays, and loved the freedom that came with being somebody else."

He enjoyed southern rock and bluegrass music, and even some underground independent music, friends said. Grant said that Gatlin embodied two

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Community conversation planned by Decatur Tomorrow at high school

By STEPHANIE DeCAMP
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Terry Woodbury has been helping rural towns come back from the brink for decades.

At 6:30 p.m. Monday at the high school auditorium, he'll be back to Oberlin to hold another of his "community conversations," working as usual with Decatur Tomorrow.

He has had these sessions a few times in the past here — and from those came the Beautification Committee, the Golden Age triplex cinema and other progressive ideas.

Mr. Woodbury runs a nonprofit called Public Square Communities Inc., and it's through this organization that he mediates these conversations. The nonprofit works to foster

partnership between 59 towns and 19 communities it serves to solve problems and transform them into thriving places once again.

The conversation next week, he said, will be about how to deal with the blighted property situation and the desire to get new residents and keep the ones Oberlin already has, among other issues. Decatur Tomor-

row hasn't released all of the talking points yet, said Deanna Castle, co-convenor of the group's steering committee, but they should cover a range of public concerns.

"The public square," Mr. Woodbury explained, "which for generations brought people together to socialize, has all but disappeared in today's society. We don't interact

the way we used to, and we don't socialize as much.

"But with these conversations (that his group holds), ideas can be presented before the whole community, and then they become community ideas. Everyone becomes involved, and that's the only way any project gets off the ground."

Mr. Woodbury said he spent

30 years of his career working with inner-city neighborhoods, as president of the Wyandotte County United Way, a community consultant, director of planning and outreach for Donnelly College.

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