

# Farm banquet put off for year

The Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce board had a lot to discuss at its meeting Wednesday, Jan. 2, including the resignation of a board member and confirmation that the Farmer-Rancher Appreciation Banquet won't be happening this year.

Deb Smith, co-owner of J.W. Smith & Sons Custom Knives, who has been on the board since March, sent an e-mail shortly before the meeting saying that she didn't intend to attend due to a disagreement on the new direction the Chamber has been taking.

Chamber President David Swank said that there were no hard feelings.

"We will miss her and her support," he said, "and wish her well. We thank her for all she's done."

As for the Farmer-Rancher event, board member Galen Olson noted that the Chamber had held one in 2012 and before that, in 2010, so the group decided to stick with the every-other-year model. This, the members agreed, will help the Chamber adjust to its new responsibilities and to try and not take too much on at once. The banquet will be held in even-numbered years

only, starting with 2014, the group agreed.

The "Welcome Wagon" program is almost ready to get going again, said member Ruth Miesner. Almost all of the supplies have been collected, and they are waiting for the bags to come in from a program in the Philippines that benefits orphans there. Whitney True, the newest member of the board, suggested that maybe the residents at the Good Samaritan Center, where she is the activities director, would be interested in helping put them together.

"They've been looking for something to do lately," she said, "and I really think they'd love it. They'd really like to be involved."

Ms. True said she would look into it and report back at the next meeting.

Mr. Olson gave an update on the membership drive.

"We've sent out over 365 letters this year," he said. "There are 65 people and/or businesses that have signed up so far. Last year we had 48 members, and we're still a little early in the game. I'm hoping if we give some reminders, we might add another 15 to 20 memberships."

# Chamber to hold meatloaf contest

The next big thing coming from the Decatur County Area Chamber of Commerce is the annual membership meeting and dinner with the Oberlin Business Alliance coming up on Saturday, Feb. 2.

This year, board member Galen Olson said at a board meeting Wednesday, Jan. 2, it will feature the Chamber's first meatloaf cook-off, which if successful, the board hopes to make an annual event.

"We're having this tongue-in-cheek cook-off," he said, "where people will make their loaf and decorate it. It all has to be edible, and they will bring it to the Bohemian Hall. Each contestant will be given a number, and the judges will go through and have specifics they rate them on."

"They fill out a sheet and other people can watch the judging. Then we'll get started with the meeting. So at 6 p.m., it's the judging, at 6:30 we do the welcome and 6:35 is the invocation.... After the judging, each person will serve their loaf, and the chamber will need to provide plastic wear, corn, rolls, butter, sour cream, coffee and tea and cake."

Mr. Olson said that so far, the contestants that have signed up include Carolyn Plotts, Byron Hale, Phil Wurm, Jason Tally, and chamber board members Ken Badsky, Ruth Miesner and Whitney True.

"At 7 p.m.," Mr. Olson said, "we announce the winner. We'll have a red cape, plastic flowers and a trophy for the overall winner. There will also be winners for different categories, and we'll crown them, too."

"After that, we'll do the minutes of the previous annual meeting, goal statements, the treasurer's report, an update from the Oberlin Business Alliance and (Oberlin-Decatur

County Economic Development Corp.), then guest speaker Bob Moorhead is going to talk. Then there will be the closing remarks, and pictures of the highlights of the event projected on the wall, right there."

Treasurer Ruth Miesner said that usually, the event draws around 30 people, but this year they're shooting for 75. Mr. Olson said that as of Friday (Jan. 18) 25 people had signed up.

"If I can get it to go well," Mr. Olson said of the contest, "by the third year it will be a tradition."

If you're interested in submitting a meatloaf, Mr. Olson said, the Chamber needs to know by Monday, Jan. 28. Because the Bohemian Hall doesn't have a kitchen, there is no expectation that the meatloaves submitted will be hot. There will, however, be added points for decorations.

"If it all goes according to plan," said Mr. Olson, "the judging will start at 6 p.m. and people should be able to get out of there by 8 p.m. if they want. There's still some details to work out, but that's the plan."

In other Chamber news, the board:

- Discussed having Santa Claus come for his second visit at a location other than the Golden Age Center next year. Mr. Olson said that few people showed up, but that afterward, Santa went to the Good Samaritan Center and the residents loved it.

- Decided to brainstorm ideas for Fourth of July, should the drought continue and fireworks still be banned. Mrs. Miesner suggested maybe putting together a parade. Also suggested were a watermelon carving contest and a cookout.



**GIVING COMMISSIONER RALPH UNGER** (above) a brisk handshake, Mayor Rob McFee congratulated him on 40 years of service to the county. The swearing-in ceremony at the Decatur County courthouse last Tuesday

commenced with Judge Jay Tate (below) and welcomed new Commissioners Sid Metcalf and Brad Marcuson.

- Herald staff photos by Stephanie DeCamp

# Commissioner ends 40-year run

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**  
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Forty years, three death threats and too many other board and association positions to count—that's been the career of outgoing County Commissioner Ralph Unger.

Mr. Unger and Gene Gallentine both stepped down from the commission last Tuesday before the swearing in of the new commissioners, along with County Clerk Colleen Geihlsler, Register of Deeds Kari Ketterl, Sheriff Ken Badsky and County Attorney Steve Hirsch.

Of the five people who spoke at a reception on the second floor of the courthouse, every one of them talked about Ralph.

Mr. Unger himself started the speeches, but let Commissioner Stan McEvoy take over for him midway, when he became too emotional to continue. Mr. Unger asked that those taking over preserve the history he helped assemble in the commissioners' room. He said he'd collected many valuable things there over the years.

"I thank you for your trust in me these 40 years," he said, choking up. "It has been my great honor and privilege to serve the community for so long."

Mr. Unger read a passage from the Declaration of Independence, asking those who will carry on in public office to fight to protect and defend those rights.

"Lastly," he said, "I believe the flag poles are in the right position, and the address to the courthouse should be to the front door and not the side door."

The crowd broke out in laughter at the old jokes, the first a long-running story in the courthouse about a retiring commissioner who insisted that his last act be to move the flag poles, and the second in reference to how everybody only uses the west-side door to the courthouse Main Street instead of the front one on Hall. A few years ago, the post office actually changed the official address to Hall Street.

County Attorney Steve Hirsch stood to speak next, saying that Mr. Unger was one of the best commissioners he'd ever worked with.

"Ralph," he said, "I don't know how I could have found a better friend in the 24 years I've been here. I don't think anyone here knows how much you've always put the county first in everything you do. I don't know if anyone realizes how many hours you've put in, and how hard you've worked."

Commissioner Stan McEvoy echoed Mr. Hirsch, saying that Ralph is well-known and respected at the county and state level.

"We're going to miss him a lot," he said. "The knowledge, history and experience he brought to the table has really helped me in my time as a commissioner. In fact, Ralph is one of the three longest serving commissioners in the state of Kansas."

Mr. Unger's wife, Norma, standing beside him, also chimed in, saying that you could say Ralph only worked as a commissioner for 39 years, seeing as he had to, at some point, take at least a Sunday off.



Even Mr. Unger had to chuckle at that. And before Commissioners-Elect Sid Metcalf and Brad Marcuson were sworn, they too said a few words for Mr. Unger.

"I'm just so honored to be taking this position," said Mr. Metcalf. "Now I probably can't do what Ralph has done, because in 40 years I'll be 112. But I know I have a size 48 shoe to fill, and I'm going to do my best."

Mr. Marcuson sounded a similar note.

"It's humbling to be here today," he said, "to become a commissioner. And I know I'm going to need a pole-vault to try and go as far as you... thank you, Ralph."

And with that, the new commissioners took their vows with the register of deeds, county clerk, sheriff and county attorney, and headed in to work—the noise of back slapping and congratulations bouncing off the walls behind them.

# Congressman to be in town hall next week

Congressman Tim Huelskamp will be in Oberlin from noon to 1 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 31, for a "town-hall" meeting in the courtroom on the third floor of the Decatur County Courthouse.

"It is a chance to listen and learn from my constituents," Mr. Huelskamp said in an e-mail. "Things have to change in Washington.

We have to put an end to the overspending and the overregulation. We have to put the American people back in charge."

Mr. Huelskamp said that the format for the meeting will be the same as last time. He will start with a brief presentation to open things up, but wants to focus most of his time on taking questions from the audience.

"Despite the enormous size of the 1st District," he said, "every community is unique, and I want to make sure that I hear from real Kansans about their concerns and priorities for Washington...."

"There's a lot that we have in common across the 1st District,

but like I said, every community is unique. I host these town halls not to have a town like Oberlin fit into my agenda, but to make sure that my work in Washington matches what Oberlin and all of Decatur County wants.

"I anticipate that we will spend

lot of time talking about overspending and the upcoming debt limit increase. We have also had a lot of calls in to our offices about the Second Amendment (right to bear firearms), and I know that issue is weighing on folks' minds."



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