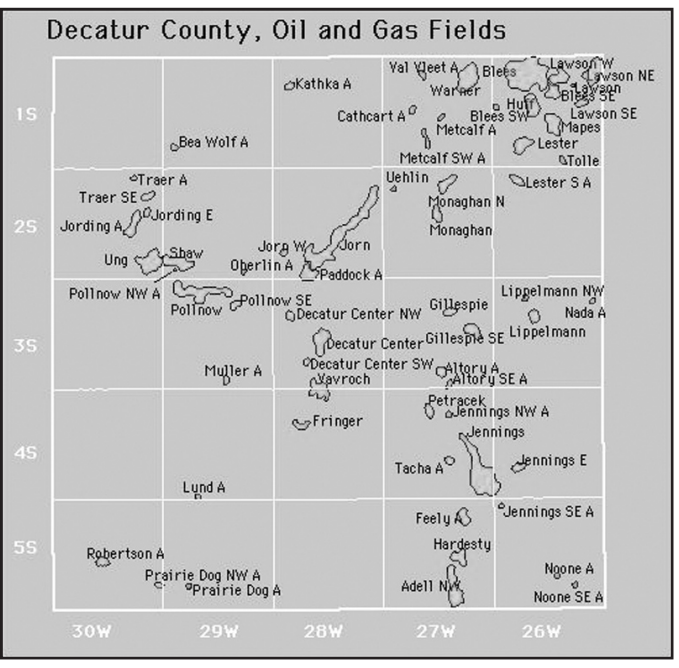
*Oil prospectors buying up nearby land



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"So the important thing for a landowner to do is to get them to drill a well. When a lease broker comes to the landowner, they'll usually guarantee that they'll shoot seismic (exploration), and that's good; you want them to. When they lease your land, the more activity they guarantee you, the better."

"There isn't that much land play right around Decatur County," said Bob Gaskill, owner of The Bank, who follows area land prices. "If you go south, it has affected the value. Around Logan and Thomas counties. I've seen a much stronger trend there, where leases for oil historically have been $15 to $25 maximum, and some of them are getting up to $300 for large acreages.

"There's a chance that (the land values) could go up here, too. Real estate is one of the prime investments, and it's increased leaps and bounds here lately, probably doubled in price in the last two years. The poor farm ground has appreciated less, but it's still all on the very positive side. Sales even a year ago looked anemic compared to what you can get today on the market."

"The Mississippi play is a thousand feet lower than the old one, the Kansas City-Lansing play," said Mr. Nedland, referring to the last time that wildcatters (drillers who move into unexplored areas) found oil here. "Most of them didn't drill deep enough to hit it. They just hit oil and stopped because nobody believed the Mississippian had potential.

"In May, there were 163 permits issued to drill for oil out here (in the state of Kansas). By October, that number had doubled, due to permits to drill to the Mississippian."

Another contributing factor to getting the Mississippian oil is a relatively new technology called horizontal drilling. This involves drilling straight down about 6,000 feet, then turning the bit and cutting horizontally a mile or two to tap a wider area of ground. The Mississippian Lime will then be "fracked," or fractured, using hydraulic pressure to enhance the flow of oil or gas. Without fracturing, the Mississippian Lime is "tight" and does not give-up its oil, he said.

Oil companies in the region already include Sandridge Energy, with 2 million acres of land under lease, Mr. Nedland said, Circle Star Energy, with 175,000 acres; Double Eagle Development, with 40,000 in Rawlins and Thomas counties; Superior Oil and Gas, with "tens of thousands" of acres in leases; and Apache Energy, which has 600,000. Circle Star and Apache, said Mr. Nedland, have acquired land right in our county.

"They are drilling for these barrels," said Mr. Nedland. "The future is here. Our governor has even called meetings with the oil people to have conferences about the Mississippi play.

"Hopefully it will bring new people, money and enthusiasm to this part of the world."

*Mayor upset about pool

(Continued from Page 1A)

important things.

The big upcoming hardship, he said, he learned about at a Kansas Municipal Energy Agency meeting he attended a few months ago. The whole country is facing an energy crisis as the government shuts down coal-fired power plants, he said – and so is Oberlin.

"Our electric contract is up and everyone says that when we renew it, the rates will go up, and no one knows how far up they'll go. It's as high as two cents (per kilowatt hour), anywhere up to that. So that's a problem.

"They talked about not having enough generating capacity and having rolling brownouts and blackouts across the country. If we have our power plant where we can operate it, then that's not a problem. Except in the summertime, because we don't have enough generating capacity to run it at all in the summertime.

"Plus we can only run our generators four days a year, and it will take $150,000 to $200,000 apiece to make them EPA compliant, and there are five of them. So we're looking at a million dollars there. Plus several of them need new radiators, and we just had a new one that was $60,000 or $65,000 not too long ago, so we're looking at a million or million and a half to make sure we have electricity."

Mr. McFee also talked about the likelihood of upcoming penalties for water conservation, and how the state is looking into requiring cities to have new sewage treatment plants built if their creeks turn up positive for too many pollutants.

"We have streets that still need fixing, electric lines that need to be replaced, poles that need to be done, and Dan (Castle, city foreman) said that it would take about $20,000 a block to work our electricity. I figure we got 200 blocks, and that puts it at about $4 million, and we can't do it all at one time."

Misgivings

"We've got things that need to be done and things that we want to do," said Mr. McFee. "And I'm sorry, but a pool we have. And it's not the best pool in the country, and it's not ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant, but it's a pool and it holds water and they can swim in it.

"And we've got a group of people that have worked very hard to get financing passed to build a pool, but that financing has not proven itself as to whether it will or not."

One thing that really bothers Mr. McFee about the pool project is that the sales tax approved by the voters had no end date, or "sunset" provision.

"One thought I had," he said, "when we were talking about this tax business, is that it goes on forever. It doesn't end. I would have been way more supportive of a tax that had a sundown. A 1 percent tax with 10 years on it, and then they could have redone it, and I'd have been way more in favor of that.

Mr. McFee said that he also would be more for the project if he knew that the sales-tax was going to generate as much money as everybody thinks it will. He acknowledged that projections say it will, but he said the drought complicates matters, and the city is financially shaky at best.

"The immediate short-term benefits for the swimming pool is that we have a new one and 30 people might use it," he said. "The benefits of the airport are that 12 people with planes have a place for their hobby, or to assist with their business. So we spend $1 million for 12 people or $2 million for 30 people, for three months a year? It just doesn't make sense."

The veto as symbolic gesture

According to the League of Kansas Municipalities handbook, even if the mayor vetos the motion to create a public building commission, the other council members can override that veto with a three-fourths majority – which they already have, assuming none of the members change their mind.

"I expect it to be overridden if I veto it," said Mr. McFee. "It may not be; I don't know. There are other things that I can do that are also symbolic. It can become a rule without my signing it. That's what the two weeks is about – if I don't sign it in two weeks, it becomes a rule.

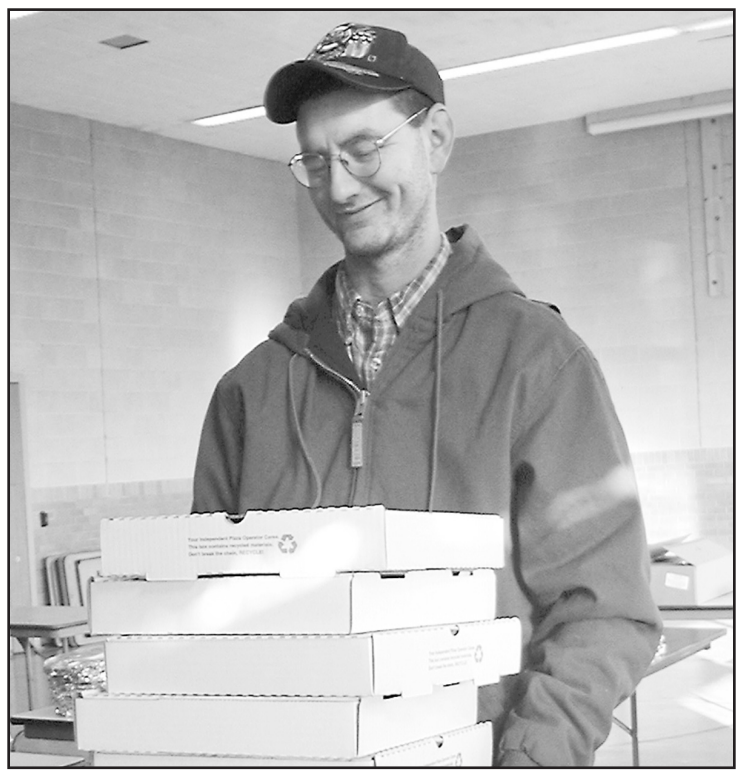
"The 1,700 people that live here now, when this is all said and done, will owe $7,000 apiece if the pool goes through. They're going to owe $4,000 regardless, completely because of the EPA (the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency). It's frightening. I don't have $7,000 that's just lying around that I want to do this stuff with. Most people don't."

"I'm just a dumb old country kid. I didn't ever think I'd be doing this."

The big picture

"I don't want to be the first community our size in the state of Kansas to go bankrupt because we can't pay the damn bonds off," said the mayor, sighing. "And I don't want to raise our property taxes to the point where people can't afford to live here, because if we're not the highest municipal property tax in our size group, we're awfully close to it.

"There's such a divide between people on everything.... The area of compromise has become so small that no one is using it. I guess I'm partly guilty.... I know you can't go on getting everything you want without somebody paying for it down the road. We've got stuff that'll need to be paid for in 20 or 30 years, and these young people aren't thinking about their grandkids paying for it."



VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER Troy Wentz carried a stack of pizzas ready for delivery Sunday afternoon during the annual Norcatur Firemen's Pizza Fund Raiser.

—Herald staff photo by Carolyn Plotts

Delivered! Pizza rakes in the dough

By CAROLYN PLOTTS
c.plotts@nwkansas.com

With assembly-line precision, Norcatur's volunteer firefighters produced a record number of pizzas for this year's fund raiser.

"We made 620 pizzas," said Fire Chief Carl Lyon. "That beat last year by a hundred."

This was the 12th year for the popular fund raiser. The firemen took orders for a few weeks before their deadline and then over the course of this last weekend, they prepared the ingredients, including about 330 pounds of hamburger and 220 pounds of sausage, assembled the pizzas and delivered them to households all over Norcatur and even into Oberlin and Norton. Some were delivered hot and ready to eat, but most were wrapped in foil, ready for the freezer.

There is no set price, the chief said, just whatever anyone wants to pay for them. Most contribute more than what a franchise pizza would cost. Last year, the department took in more than $4,000. This year looks to be even better, Chief Lyon said, although a final tally has not been made.

Any money raised goes to buy equipment for the department.

"We would like to add on to our firehouse," the chief said, "especially a washroom so we could clean up after we come in from a fire. Right now, all we have is a hose."

Norcatur boasts 15 volunteer fire fighters. The pizza sale is the only fund raiser they do all year, Mr. Lyon said.

*Candidates have filed for city elections

interested in are water and the pool project.

"I am passionately committed to this town," Mrs. Johnson said. "We moved here for a small town, and my parents moved here a year and a half ago. This is my home, and I want Oberlin to succeed. I want it to prosper."

Mrs. Horn said that she ran not only to be involved in the city but to make sure that voters get more of a choice. She said she's lived and worked in Oberlin for 30 years, both at the children's home that used to be in Sappa Park and as county clerk. Her experience, she said, is what keeps her interested in keeping the town going.

"(My husband Steve and I) live next door to the airport," she said, "so that's a passion – and I am not for it. We do not believe that we need the extra-long runway.... I imagine the swimming pool will be the biggest challenge, and concerns of the city's, like the houses they've talked about for months – that's hard. It's hard to tell someone that you wish they would clean up."

"I really am not for the pool at this time; I thought they should have done it earlier and now I feel we really can't afford it. I'm not against a swimming pool per se; we'd just have to look into the cost. My husband and I own a shop, and so people have to pay us that sales tax, and they will holler when it goes up. And we're not alone."

Mrs. Horn said that more than anything, she wants voters to know that she's open to listening to them. She's retired, she said, so she has the time, and people are welcome to call her at (785) 475-2626.

Meeting about weed control set for February

Graham County Exension and the Twin Creeks Extension District will give a free weed management update on Wednesday, Feb. 20, at the Morland Community Building.

Farmers, agricultural chemical dealers and applicators, crop consultants, county weed directors and government personnel are encouraged to attend.

Three continuing education credits for pest management and three credit hours for commercial pesticide applicator recertification will be available. Topics to be covered include optimizing glyphosate performance, managing herbicide-resistant weeds and general updates.

Make reservations by Monday, Feb.18, at the Graham County Extension office, (785) 421-3411, or the Twin Creeks Extension office, (785) 675-3268.

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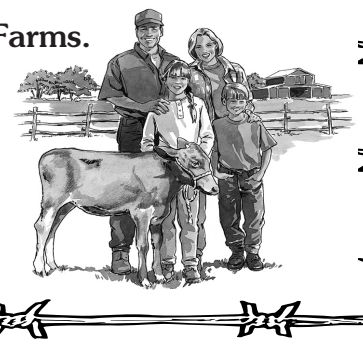

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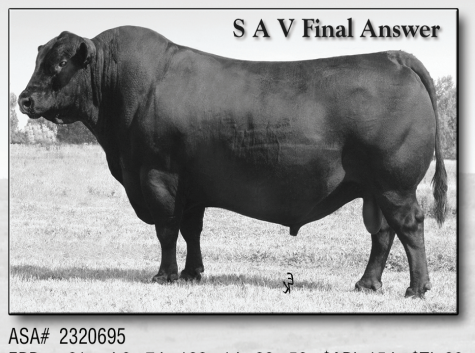
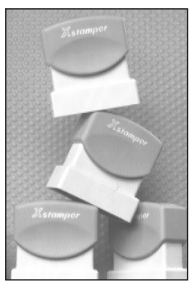


ASA# 2320695
EPDs: 21 -4.3 74 122 14 22 59 $API: 154 $TI: 80
An outstanding set of black bulls featuring sons of Final Answer, Manifest, Dual Focus and DX Thunder.

Purebred & SimAngus™ Bulls

ASA#2409687
EPDs: 8 2.4 73 101 11 29 65 $API: 115 $TI: 72
Ten red bulls sell featuring a herd sire prospect by HSF High Roller. Other featured sires include DX Wonderboy, Shear Force and Red Iron.



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