

County to receive elder-care study

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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John Grace, whose firm, Grace Team, has been doing a study of services for older people in Decatur County, will meet with county commissioners at 1 p.m. Sunday on the third floor of the Decatur County courthouse to present his findings.

"The plan is to put forth four or five options and list their advantages and disadvantages," said Mr. Grace at a community meeting Jan. 30 at the Golden Age Center. "And you'll have to remember, it's best to take action when you can instead of in a crisis. There's no silver bullet; we can see that, but there are ways to get through it."

Combining management of the Cedar Living Center at the Decatur County Hospital and the Good Samaritan Center, both owned by the county, will likely be one of those options, he said.

"It looks to me there are about four big options," he said in an interview Monday. "Just with the limited resources, one of those would be combining the centers. The difficulty is that there isn't enough room in one facility for everyone who needs it. So when I say combine, I mean combining operations — both facilities would remain open."

"A second option would be to have the hospital manage the (Good Samaritan) and a third is to try and set up a separate nonprofit corporation where Good Sam would go away, but there would be another nonprofit group operating the building and they would continue to collaborate with the hospital."

"I don't see closing either one as an option; there's too much support for both. So somehow, collaboration between the two is going to be the solution."

"When I've seen mergers," he told the group at the meeting, "there's a little bit of savings that occurs on the administration side, but not huge. So you'd still have some kind of economic impact..."

Numbers tell their tale

A lot of numbers were thrown around at a public meeting held by John Grace, a consultant whose firm is studying ways Decatur County can improve its services for older people. Among them:

- In 2000, the county had 909 people 65 or older, but by 2018, that number is estimated to drop to 848.

- Of that number, the fastest-growing subgroup is people 85 and older. In 2000, those numbered 151, and in 2018, the estimate is 157.

- In 1980, 20 percent of the elderly in nursing facilities in Kansas were on Medicaid, a state-federal health insurance program, and today an average of 60 percent are on Medicaid. "Private-pay" patients, Mr. Grace said, typically bring in \$10 more a day. Medicaid typically pays about \$150 a day for nursing home care and private pay is at

least \$160 day, he said.

- The nursing homes here are at 75 percent capacity, he said, so there wouldn't be an easy way to combine them. Neither facility could accommodate all of the people.

- Use of nursing-home care is declining. It used to be that in Kansas, an average of 5.6 percent of those 65 and older would live in a nursing home. Nationwide, that number is down to 3.6 percent. In Decatur County, however, it's 8 percent.

Another study discussed at the meeting was done by a group called Kansas Rural Health Works of Kansas State University. It showed:

- Decatur County has 126 employees at the hospital.

- The nursing homes have 77 jobs.

- The entire health care services industry here employs 262 people.

"But the reality is that in the long term, something needs to be changed."

Mr. Grace's study was approved by the county commissioners on Nov. 6, and he said he plans to complete it by mid-March.

"In 2004, total occupancy was 74," Mr. Grace said of the two nursing homes, "and last year it was 62. That's a decline of 16 percent. The general figures I've come up with so far, at this point, shows we have enough nursing facility beds. Even with (minimal) growth, you're not going to have those days with lots and lots of people."

"People have asked, do we need assisted living? Decatur doesn't have any assisted living, though we do have Wheat Ridge (Terrace Apartments, run by the hospital) that functions like assisted and in-

dependent living. So there may be some need for assisted living in the future. Not a lot, but some."

"Based on the study so far, I don't see a great demand for independent living facilities."

"I'm finding a lot of support for both nursing facilities, given the economic impact of them and the fact that just one couldn't accommodate all your people."

Mr. Grace said he's still looking for feedback on what is not available here that people would like to see. He also wanted to know if anyone has any ideas on ways that the hospital could collaborate with other elder-care agencies in a way that could connect all of the services for ease of use. Can call him at (785) 506-6003 or email jr1grace@gmail.com.

Soups up!



THE OBERLIN BOOSTER CLUB was at it again on Friday, as John Sater and Abby Hisson helped serve up a tasty soup dinner during the varsity basketball games.

- Herald staff photo by Stephanie DeCamp

Judge reviews career after 30 years of service

By **STEPHANIE DeCAMP**
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Judge John Bremer, who served Decatur County for almost 30 years, retired this month after deciding not to seek re-election in November.

Over those three decades as district magistrate judge, he said, he's learned a lot.

Judge Bremer, 66, said he was first elected in 1984, and served the county 28 years. Before that, he had two terms as the county attorney, a private law practice with Elmo Lund, worked by himself for a while, and was the in-house counsel for Medicalodges Inc., a skilled-nursing-home firm based in Coffeyville.

He graduated from Washburn University in 1968 with a bachelor's degree in business administration and finished a doctorate in law in 1973. He was in the Army from 1968 to 1970, serving in Korea.

"The most enjoyable part of my career was adoptions," he said. "They have to be approved by the court, so social services does home studies, and the court approves the adoptions based on those and any other information the court seeks. Everybody leaves the court happy,



Judge John Bremer

and that doesn't happen with a lot of things. Most the time, half of them are disappointed, and in some cases, both sides are disappointed."

"The most challenging part of the job was probably the juvenile cases. They stick with me most. Or the child-in-need-of-care cases, and neglect and abuse cases, which are all confidential, of course."

Another challenge, Mr. Bremer said, was being as unbiased as possible — something that can be hard

to do in a small town.

"You've got to be able to absolutely forget everything you know," he said, "except the evidence presented to you. Because you really don't know what you 'know,' and you have to make decisions based on what happens in the courtroom, because your preconceived notions aren't based on real evidence."

"The one thing I would change are the forces that are trying to change the courts. Right now, we have one judge per county, and there's a very good deal we have: a law that allows laymen to be magistrate judges. They don't require a law degree, and I think that's a good thing. You can get the job if you pass a qualification test, and the test has to do with general knowledge of the procedural aspects of the law."

"There's a move to eliminate the one-judge-per-county rule, and if they have fewer people in those positions, they might be able to fill them all with lawyers. Also, if there's only one judge for more than one county, I think it would make it hard for those with handicaps or people with businesses to have to close up and go to another county for their cases. They've been mak-

ing these proposals since the courts were unified in 1964, and it's kind of an uncertainty that discouraged a lot of qualified people from running for judge."

Judge Bremer said he would like to see the Decatur County courthouse get a full-time court reporter, someone who could serve for the hearing impaired as well as for recording statements on the record, so that court decisions could be appealed based on that record instead of having to start a new trial before the district judge.

"As far as if I wanted to throw money at something," he said, "I would do that — have the ability to record the proceedings and make an appeal from the record. We oc-

asionally have court reporters, and it's a special occurrence when you have one before a magistrate judge."

Judge Bremer and his wife Diane have two daughters, Jessica, who lives in Oberlin, and Kristen, who lives in Colby with granddaughter Rowan, 11 months. The Bremers are members of St. John's Lutheran Church.

"I'm happy about retirement," Mr. Bremer said. "It took me a while to decide that I would step out. It was good people and good work, and the general public is great. The people I worked with in the courthouse were super, so I'll miss that."

"I've found that I'm very locked into the job, so I'm going to try to

get out and do things. I'm going to keep my license up to practice law, but I'm not certain I will do any legal practice. I probably won't other than my own."

And vacations? Forget about it, he said. Some habits die hard.

"I don't need vacations," he said. "I intend to stay here. This community has been good to me, and I would just as soon keep supporting the community."

"During the period of time I've been out here, I've been very active in the community as far as various groups and projects, and I think people owe it to the community to do things with it. And those things I am active in, I intend to stay active in."



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17	18 Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab	19 Dr. Frederick C. Miller Cardiology	20 High Plains Cardiologist	21 Kirsten Angel Dietitian	22	23 Cardiac Rehab MRI'S
24	25 Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab	26	27 Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab Diabetic Clinic	28		

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 Mary Henzel (785) 470-0218.

