

Looking Forward

The city manager's report

It is difficult for representatives of the City of Stigler to look forward without reviewing the effects of COVID-19 during the past year, said City Manager Bobby Mouser.

"In my lifetime, it was probably the most difficult period, both lived through and managed through, as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 situation," and the effect of the pandemic on the city, its employees and its citizens, he said.

"We've had to deal with COVID. We've had to change how we do business, the way we approach our jobs as we dealt with COVID," he said. "But we've made the adjustment and we're going to come out on the other side stronger than we went into it."

Mouser expressed appreciation to city employees for their dedication to their jobs; school personnel, administrators and school board members for their commitment to provide in-person learning for students; and business owners and employees as they faced unprecedented challenges.

He said that he and many

others will be looking to have some degree of normalcy by summer. "We're making plans as if that will occur," he said.

The city faced another challenge earlier in 2021. "Some of the coldest temperatures recorded in my lifetime put challenges in front of all of us," Mouser said. Haskell County saw temperatures remain below freezing for a 10-day period, with several days below 0 degrees.

A bright spot during that time was finding out that the city's new wastewater and water treatment plants "performed flawlessly," even though neither plant was designed to operate in those extreme temperatures," he said.

Mouser credited the city council and the city's citizens for having the foresight to invest in the plants, and the city's employees for making sure both plants provided services without interruption. Stigler was one of the few municipalities that had "zero interruptions" in service during that time, he added.

A highlight of the past year was welcoming a suc-



cessful buyer for the hospital in Stigler, Mouser said. The hospital had been closed for several months after the former owner declared bankruptcy. The hospital reopened as Haskell Regional Hospital this past year and "it is continuing to increase its level of services," Mouser said, adding that it is "one of the more important assets to have for this community."

As of this interview, Stigler has seen 10 successive months in increases in its sales tax revenue. This has occurred during an economic downturn. It was apparent that people were shopping locally in greater numbers, Mouser explained. The city's use taxes (from online sales) also increased.

The city will continue its sharp focus on improving its equipment fleet, including road equipment and police cars as the city budget allows. "As you replace equipment, your maintenance costs go

down and your productivity goes up," Mouser added.

City officials also will continue to focus on investments that will make Stigler a destination and a place for residents to elect to remain for recreation.

Mouser cited two examples of this type of investment.

For the first time, the city is planning a full slate of events this season at the new sports complex. Numerous tournaments have been scheduled and each will bring players, coaches, parents and other fans to Stigler.

The city also has completed engineering plans and submitted grant applications for construction of a bike trail around the old city lake. The first phase of the project will be for four miles. Engineering plans have been completed for another two phases, and could eventually extend the trail up to 12 miles "which would really be a nice addition for our community," Mouser added.



Bobby Mouser, City Manager