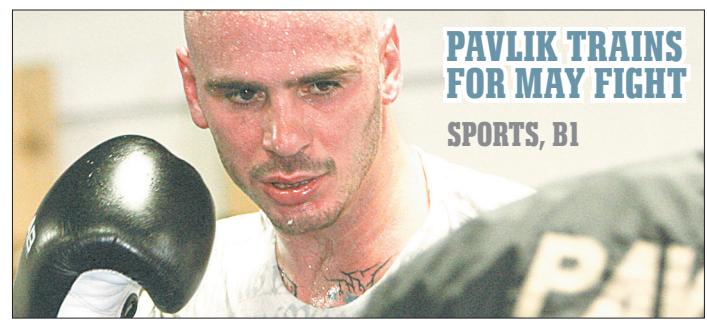




MOM KNOWS BEST?  
TELL US WHY & WIN!  
VALLEY LIFE, D1



SB 5'S FATE RESTS  
ON VOTER TURNOUT  
BERTRAM DE SOUZA, A14



PAVLIK TRAINS  
FOR MAY FIGHT  
SPORTS, B1



A WATCHDOG OVER  
YOUR GOVERNMENT  
TODD FRANKO, A2



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# The Vindicator

Geologist Ann Harris documents abandoned mines in the Valley that she's tracked over 34 years



VINDICATOR FILE PHOTO | JUNE 15, 1977

George Panno, former Youngstown fire chief, and Ann Harris, a Youngstown State University professor, survey the hole that was left after an abandoned mine collapsed under a West Hylda Avenue home on Youngstown's South Side more than 30 years ago. The garage was situated directly above the mine shaft, which left a hole more than 100 feet deep.

## MINING KNOWLEDGE

By KRISTINE GILL  
kgill@vindy.com

YOUNGSTOWN

IT WAS A WEST HYLDA AVENUE sinkhole that first piqued Ann Harris' interest in abandoned mines more than 30 years ago.

The ground below the South Side home weakened in the freeze and thaw season during the spring of 1977, creating a gaping hole where the family's garage floor once was — unwittingly situated above a mine shaft abandoned around 1917.

"They heard a large noise and a whooshing sound and opened the garage door to find the whole floor of a 20- by 20-foot garage was missing," said Harris, an emeritus professor of geology at Youngstown State University and certified professional geologist.

Since then Harris has compiled what is perhaps the most comprehensive mapping of abandoned mines in Mahoning, Trumbull and Columbiana counties. Her web-

site, [www.ysu.edu/mines](http://www.ysu.edu/mines), includes data for most of Ohio and western Pennsylvania.

In 1977, she and other city officials warned residents of risks associated with 260 known abandoned mines in the three-county area. Now Harris estimates that number has grown to more than 1,000 mostly clay and coal mines in eastern Ohio. More than 4,300 abandoned mines have been documented in the state, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

"We're always adding to it," Harris said. The walls of her two basement storage rooms and office in YSU's Moser Hall are lined from floor to ceiling with county histories and mine inspector reports. The stacks of papers and boxes are narrow, and only Harris knows what each contains and where she's stowed it away.

"I'm not going to live forever," said Harris, 76. She's been meeting weekly with Uni-

See MINES, A4



ROBERT K. YOSAY | THE VINDICATOR  
Harris has an office and two storage rooms with stacks of files and drawers full of information about abandoned mines in Ohio and Pennsylvania. She's working weekly with a university archivist who will make sure the information is properly catalogued and kept.

### ABANDONED MINES Around the Valley

Here are the numbers of abandoned mines in Trumbull, Mahoning and Columbiana counties. For more detail on mine location, go to [www.ysu.edu/mines](http://www.ysu.edu/mines) and choose your county, then township.

MESOPOTAMIA	BLOOMFIELD	GREENE	GUSTAVUS	KINSMAN
FARMINGTON	BRISTOL	MECCA	JOHNSTON	VERNON
SOUTHBROOK	CHAMPION	BAZETTA	FOWLER	HARTFORD
BRACEVILLE	WARREN	HOWLAND	VIENNA	16
NEWTON	LORDSTOWN	WEATHERSFIELD	LIBERTY	HUBBARD
MILTON	JACKSON	AUSTINTOWN	YOUNGSTOWN	COITSVILLE
3	2	39	42	1
BERLIN	ELLSWORTH	11	7	POLAND
SMITH	GOSHEN	GREEN	BEAVER	SPRINGFIELD
16	8	56	34	30
KNOX	BUTLER	PERRY	FAIRFIELD	UNITY
12	2	32	11	53
WEST	HANOVER	SALEM	ELK RUN	MIDDLETON
20	12	83	61	48
FRANKLIN	WAYNE	WASHINGTON	MADISON	ST. CLAIR
2	11	60	44	24
YELLOW CREEK	LIVERPOOL	51	17	

Source: Ann Harris, YSU department of Geological and Environmental Sciences professor

## How are your tax dollars spent?

◆ VINDY.COM ADDS WATCH  
SITE TO EASILY TRACK  
GOVERNMENT SPENDING

By ASHLEY LUTHERN  
and ELISE FRANCO  
[news@vindy.com](http://news@vindy.com)

YOUNGSTOWN

The Vindicator launches Government Watch online today, giving readers the building blocks to track how tax dollars are spent.

Government Watch will provide salary and budget information for government entities — a beneficial service, said Aimee Edmondson, a longtime journalist and assistant professor at the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University.

"Most people don't have time to go to the courthouse or to go to the various places they need to get the public records. To have one-stop shopping, I think, is valuable," she said.

Ensuring government transparency can be time-consuming. Some government entities responded to requests from The Vindicator for information in a reasonable amount of time, as required by law. Other entities have yet to comply fully with requests, citing technical or other barriers.

Reporters at The Vindicator began to file Freedom of Information requests with Valley entities in early March to start the project. The goal is to have raw budget data reflecting every gov-

See WATCH, A4

## GOVERNMENT WATCH

◆ Go online to [vindy.com/government-watch](http://vindy.com/government-watch) for information on your community.

◆ Inside: Poland schools officials were slow to comply to requests for employee salaries. A4

◆ Todd Franko, Vindicator editor, introduces Government Watch as a repository for information that local governments often are unlikely to share. A2

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PLEASE RECYCLE	8 59423 00002 5



Women of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 33 N. Arlington Ave. in Niles, take a break from a recent rehearsal of the drama "It Is Finished" to make palm crosses. The crosses will be distributed at performances scheduled 7 p.m. today, Palm Sunday, and Maundy Thursday.

RAMI DAUD | THE VINDICATOR

**BUYING  
GOLD &  
SILVER**

By LINDA M. LINONIS  
[linonis@vindy.com](mailto:linonis@vindy.com)

**NILES**  
A cross-making project at First Christian Church engages the hearts and hands of members.

They make palm crosses to distribute at two presentations of "It Is Finished," a dramatization of the last days of Jesus Christ. Members made the crosses as individual efforts at home or at play rehearsal or as part of a group

See PALMS, A5

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## WATCH

Continued from A1

overnment salary and budget online and available within the year.

Boardman and Poland townships and Salem and Struthers schools responded to the request and provided the information electronically, as asked. The Western Reserve Joint Fire District did respond promptly, but with a paper printout, which will appear as PDFs on the Government Watch page on Vindy.com.

The Poland school district did respond in part, but did not include salaries as requested.

Documents from Youngstown and Mahoning County collected during

those governments' budget processes are included on the site.

Government Watch also links to outside websites and blogs that work in the public interest. If readers want to search by individual teacher name for salary and pension information, The Buckeye Institute link is a key resource. Much of the video work of *Vindicator* Columbus correspondent Marc Kovac appears on his Capital Blog, which is updated daily.

There are direct links to the Ohio Ethics Commission and Ohio Ethics Law, too.

Another Government Watch feature provides at-a-glance recaps of who voted for what in both chambers of the Ohio General Assembly.

Government Watch will link to relevant stories writ-

ten by Vindy staffers, and readers are encouraged to interact with the material by posting comments to stories on Twitter using the #gov-watch hashtag.

"I can't think of anything in a democracy more important than an informed citizenry," said David Marburger, an Ohio attorney specializing in public records who also represents *The Vindicator*. "It's obviously important to people who pay taxes; it serves the people."

Edmondson said the public, including reporters, often don't realize what information is available through open records law.

Under Ohio's Sunshine Law, although there are exemptions, "the baseline is you assume it's open and ... a lot of people don't take the

time or have the time to investigate that," she said.

Edmondson added that increasingly newspapers are linking to records in stories because of additional space provided online.

"When you write 'according to records,' a lot of times in the story we don't say where we got the record, and an average reader might not understand where we're quoting from," Edmondson said.

Posting the original documents online "will help with our credibility in an era when we're perceived as not as credible as we should be," she said.

The information provided is just a start for Government Watch, but even what's available now makes for interesting comparisons.

For example, budget in-

formation for three police departments, Youngstown, Boardman and Poland Township, show differences in uniform allowance.

In 2010, full-time patrolmen in Youngstown were allotted \$542.40 annually for uniforms; all full-time officers in Boardman, \$1,000; and those in Poland \$850.

Even within this relatively narrow parameter, there are different rules based on contracts. An officer in Boardman must purchase his or her bulletproof vest using the uniform allowance, whereas an officer in Poland does not. A bulletproof vest usually costs between \$600 and \$800 and lasts five years.

Kyle Miasek, Youngstown deputy finance director, said the \$542.40 uniform allotment for patrolmen was a

negotiated decrease in the new contract. Patrolmen will receive their full allotment, \$1,085, this year. Ranking officers negotiated to waive all of their uniform allowance in 2010. They'll receive \$1,050 in this year.

Miasek said officers' contracts don't stipulate that the money has to be used solely for uniforms.

"They're not required to submit documentation supporting what they use the money for," he said. "For at least six years, that's what's been in place."

In Youngstown, patrolmen receive about \$805 annually in hazard pay, ranking officers, about \$780; Boardman and Poland Township officers do not receive hazard pay.

— Karl Henkel contributed to this article.

## Poland schools stall in releasing public records on salaries

By KARL HENKEL

khenkel@vindy.com

## POLAND

After Poland approved a 6.9-mill emergency operating levy in 2003, Poland Superintendent Robert Zorn appeared meticulous about the district's finances.

In an effort to show the district's fiscal responsibility, he noted every layoff and cut in a seven-page outline. He shared that outline with *The Vindicator* in February, complete with spending-rate comparisons with other Mahoning Valley school districts and possible cutbacks in Poland should the 4.9-mill levy fail in May.

But this month when it came to releasing salary fig-

**"IF A RECORD DOES NOT CLEARLY FIT WITHIN AN EXEMPTION, THE PUBLIC OFFICE MUST DISCLOSE THE RECORD."**

## OHIO PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

ures for every district employee, Zorn and the district have appeared unwilling to cooperate.

*The Vindicator* submitted a seven-item public record request to Poland Treasurer Donald Stanovcak after the Feb. 28 school board meeting as part of the new Government Watch initiative on *vindy.com*.

Other districts presented with the identical records re-

quests produced documents in a timely manner. But in a response dated March 10, Stanovcak said documents containing the "five-year total compensation history of every employee — including but not limited to the annual salary amount" were "non-existent."

This week *The Vindicator* pressed the district for salary figures for all its employees.

"Sorry," Zorn told an editor Wednesday, "it's not my department or I'd give it to you."

Stanovcak, whose department should have the information, didn't say he didn't have the numbers, but that he didn't have them in the requested format.

"We do not have that information in that format," he told an editor. "We are not required to create a document to match your request."

David Marburger, an Ohio attorney specializing in public records who also represents *The Vindicator*, said public offices will often find loopholes to avoid pro-

viding information.

He said the newspaper's request was imprecisely worded, allowing the district an "out," a topic he covers in his upcoming book "Access with Attitude."

Still, Poland officials should have provided the information, he said.

"It's obvious what you wanted. It's obvious they had it," he said. "And it's obviously a disservice to the public."

According to the Ohio Public Records Act, requests for public records should be "interpreted liberally in favor of disclosure ... where the decision whether to disclose a record is a close call, a public office should dis-

close it."

"If a record does not clearly fit within an exemption, the public office must disclose the record."

When asked again for all Poland schools' employees salaries, the district then provided *The Vindicator* with current teaching staff salaries faxed from pages of a budget book.

After another request, administrator salaries were hand-written on a piece of paper and faxed. After a third request, the superintendent's salary was faxed as well.

Those documents can be found in PDF format on the Government Watch site.

## MINES

Continued from A1

versity Archivist Ben Blake to assess the information she's collected and ensure it is preserved.

"I think the great advantage is having her right there to go through the papers," Blake said.

And mapping is important considering problems with subsidence can largely be avoided if a builder or homeowner is aware of nearby abandoned mines.

"I don't want these records lost," Harris said.

Abandoned mines riddle eastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania. Lack of regulation in the 1800s resulted in thousands of unmapped sites now blamed for landslides, flooding and sinkholes.

Before 1874, mining operations weren't reported to the state. Even after laws were enacted to change documentation procedures, mines with fewer than 10 employees did not have to report. Families who mined coal for themselves and their neighbors in the winter and farmed on the land in the summer left behind hundreds of undocumented, potential problems.

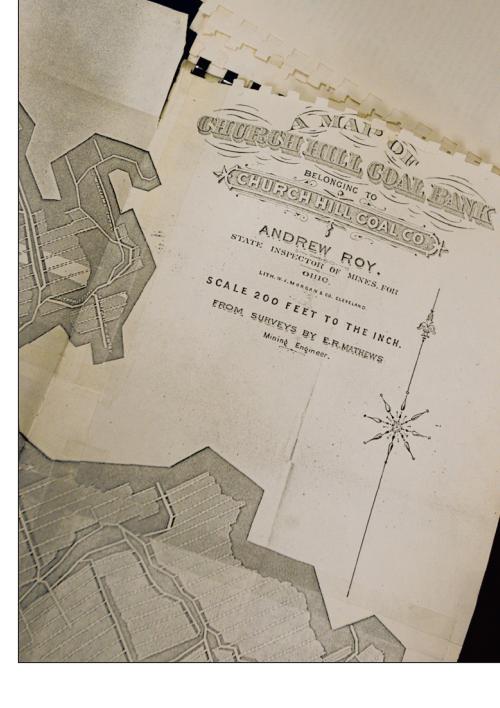
"At the time everybody knew who had mines," Harris said. "But those people move away; those people die; there's no record."

Decades later Harris has had to collect most of her knowledge about mine locations through anecdotes and oral histories. She relays that information, sometimes sending copies of maps and data she has on file to homeowners who call her for help. On Tuesday, she had more than six calls to attend to in the busy sinkhole season.

"There's a lot of snow that's melting and rain," said Tim Jackson, emergency program administrator for the Division of Mineral Resources Management's abandoned mine lands program. "Water percolating through the soil system can cause natural problems and mine subsidence."

Those factors contributed to a rash of sinkholes in the summer of 1977 following the sunken garage on West Hylda Avenue. Harris would later tend to a sunken swimming pool in Mineral Ridge and a 40-foot wide hole in a backyard on Normandy Drive in Youngstown. In August, a giant hole comparable to the Hylda sinkhole opened in front of Kirkmere Elementary School.

The ODNR maintains a comprehensive database of area mines. Jackson estimates his department



YSU professor Ann Harris said she collects mine-inspection reports from estate sales and auctions. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources also solicits copies of old maps with the location of abandoned mines to add to its archives.

ROBERT K. YOSAY  
THE VINDICATOR

receives 50 to 60 complaints of subsidence each year. His department works on half of those projects. After conducting initial testing, they're revealed to be mine-related.

"A lot of different circumstances can cause subsidence," Jackson said. "Sewer lines collapse; water lines leak; it could be the collapse of a mine or poor soil."

Projects are prioritized depending on where the subsidence is located and how much danger it poses. Shallow mines can be filled with stable material and deeper mines are filled mostly with grout. If subsidence has occurred under a home or building, federal funds are available through the Ohio FAIR Plan, which collects a tax from current mine operators. Established in 1968, the Ohio FAIR Plan made all Ohio residents eligible for property insurance.

The ODNR regularly solicits maps from Ohio residents to add to its records. The materials can be donated or loaned. But ODNR can't afford to contact property owners when mines are discovered near buildings or homes. It's up to the home or business owner to seek that information.

"Geological survey just returned to me my maps and records they borrowed to scan. I feel better having this information in more than one place," Harris said.

After all, knowledge prevents major problems when it comes to abandoned mines.

Harris knows. The mine enthusiast stood next to the rig when the abandoned mine in her East Judson Avenue home's backyard was test drilled. She had a mine map and bought the home knowing what laid beneath. She knew the property's his-

tory. She wasn't concerned. "When the word got out that Professor Harris bought a house with a mine shaft and it was OK, a lot more houses sold," she said.

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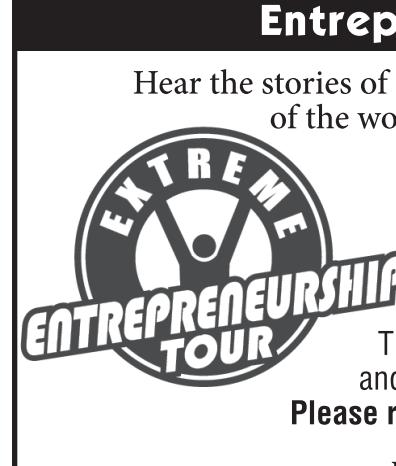
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## Attend a PrimeTime Health Plan meeting:

Wednesday, April 20 - 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

PrimeTime Health Plan - 214 Dartmouth Ave. SW, Canton

Use Dartmouth Building parking lot.

Thursday, April 21 - 10:00 a.m.

Salem Community Center - 1098 N. Ellsworth Ave., Salem

Thursday, April 21 - 2:00 p.m.

O'Charley's - 930 Windham Court, Boardman

Wednesday, April 27 - 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

PrimeTime Health Plan - 214 Dartmouth Ave. SW, Canton

Use Dartmouth Building parking lot.

Wednesday, May 4 - 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.