Uplink

October 2000

PHILANTHROPY

Private foundations

By Jeff Porter
Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

Outside of the grant-seeking or grant-making industries, the term "private foundation" means little.

But for colleges and universities, hospitals and libraries, museums and zoos, the term means this: money.

We assign scores of reporters to cover government. An entire section is devoted to business. But when it comes to philanthropy — billions and billions of dollars — we write routine stories about big gifts and seldom look below the surface.

James M. Naughton, president of non-profit The Poynter Institute, would tell you that's wrong. In a speech last year for the Knight Program in Ethics in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications at Washington and Lee University, he said:

"Nonprofit businesses had 7 million employees. They represented 6 percent of the nation's total economic output. Since 1970 they were growing at a rate four times as fast as the rest of the economy. You would think that they — and the implications of their growth — would be at least Topic C, if not Topic A or B, in the news."

Taking Naughton's advice, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* last fall embarked on a detailed look at private foundations.

What we found was astounding.

Arkansas' 273 private foundations controlled about $1.5 billion in assets and handed out $116 million during the last year reported. And that's for a state that lags behind the rest of the nation.

Without the foundations, the impoverished Mississippi River Delta would be even more desperate. Fewer students could afford college tuition. The arts would have a much smaller canvas. To match just one 1998 grant from the Walton Family Foundation in Bentonville, Ark., the Girl Scouts would have to sell 110,000 boxes of cookies.

It became clear to us that, directly or indirectly, the life of every Arkansan is touched.

Naughton repeated an old journalism adage: "Follow the money."

That turned out to be easy.

Most nonprofit organizations of any size are required to file tax returns — called 990 forms — with the Internal Revenue Service each year. The returns are open to the public. The nonprofits themselves are required to provide copies for reasonable fees. The

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INTERNATIONAL CAR

Money talks in Russia

By Natalya Shulyakovskaya
The Orange County Register

Five hundred dollars speaks volumes; $1,500 can do miracles. And you might not want to know what $5,000 worth of Russian databases is ready to tell you. (Well, I didn't have enough cash to properly test it.)

Russia is a wonderland for a CAR junkie.

My ears first perked up when I bought a train ticket from St. Petersburg to Moscow in early 1998. A hefty woman selling tickets at the train station demanded my ID and dutifully typed my name and passport number into her computer. When a printer spewed out my yellow ticket, my name was on it.

Later, I asked a friend who runs IT services for a new Moscow magnate if there was a way to get a copy of a database listing all train tickets. He said: "Sure, I have

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Inside Uplink

This month's *Uplink* features ways that reporters have used CAR to report on non-profit organizations. Jeff Porter of *The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* (see this page) recounts his experience uncovering the mysteries of private foundations. And Harvy Lipman of *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* looked into IRS Form 990s and found fundraising expenses don't always add up.

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Doctors

Jack Dolan of *The Hartford Courant* shares how he used the public version of The National Practitioner Data Bank for the series, "White Coats, Dark Secrets," on medical malpractice.

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Health gap

Dave Davis and Beth Marchak of *The Plain Dealer* used Excel and the Centers for Disease Control's mortality file to explore the racial gaps in health care across the nation.

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Student discipline

Despite claims of academic freedom, universities can be notoriously tight-lipped when it comes to public records. Meggen Lindsay, a recent graduate of Miami University, Ohio, describes her project on student disciplinary records.

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Uplink

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NICAR is a joint effort of Investigative Reporters and Editors and the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

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FIRST VENTURE

Boot camp lessons

By Edward L. Carter
Deseret News

Analyzing city employee salaries for a story on pay equity reinforced three lessons I learned at NICAR's computer-assisted reporting boot camp:

- Do your homework
- Get everything
- Guarantee the "minimum story"

My initial attempt at applying what I learned at a March boot camp was the well-traveled "pet name" story, which seemed to make an impression on readers and editors of the *Deseret News*, a 70,000-circulation daily in Salt Lake City.

With that small success under my belt, I decided to research employee salaries for two cities on my beat. Editors asked me to expand it regionally. The result was a story about the challenges facing female employees in Utah's patriarchal culture.

My first lesson

The first lesson I learned was the importance of doing your homework, especially on FOI issues. When I approached the cities' personnel directors, I was told I could have ranges of salaries but not the exact earnings of employees. However, I knew from researching my state's open records laws that salaries had to be disclosed. I submitted formal requests and waited.

After the obligatory stops on the attorneys' desks, my requests were approved. One city told me I would have to pay a programmer's hourly costs to run my reports. I recalled IRE and NICAR Executive Director Brant Houston's advice ("Your negotiating position should begin at zero," he told us) and I told the personnel director I wouldn't pay unless they first told me how much per hour and how many hours it would require. Two days later, I got a call saying a floppy disk was ready for me. Money was never discussed again.

When I attempted to convert the disk's text file into a Microsoft Excel document, I ran into a snag. Only about half the data came in, and I couldn't find the rest. Bypassing administrators, I called the programmer back and asked him to re-send the salary data in Excel format.

Getting everything

My second lesson was to follow Brant's advice about getting everything. I recall him saying at boot camp that it's easier to remove unnecessary data than it is to fight for information a second time. Unfortunately, I learned the hard way. I had only asked for employee names, salaries and job titles. Once I began running some pivot table reports, I realized I also needed tenure and the city department in which the employee worked (it wasn't always obvious from the job title). I ended up going back to the cities to get the departments, but I never got the years of service. I also had to backtrack and get employees' gender since I couldn't tell from some of the names.

Additionally, I neglected to push for the record layouts and code sheets, which was stressed at boot camp. In this case, I was able to work through the problem.

Minimum story

Third, I learned the value of the "minimum story." Being a computer-assisted reporting novice, I didn't want to get in over my head. After spending several days perusing and sorting the data, I had several ideas about where the story could go. But the most obvious thing — and the easiest story to do — was that female employees were very scarce at the top management levels. In one city, only two women graced the 100 top-paid employees. I also realized that women were concentrated in jobs as secretaries, police dispatchers and librarians —not a revelation, to be sure, but the data allowed me to quantify it.

I pursued that angle, and used a few simple Web searches to gather information from a couple of national organizations about pay gaps between male-dominated jobs and female-dominated jobs. One of the most interesting results came from pivot table reports I ran to compare men and women who held the same job titles. That showed that women who got the same jobs as men earned comparable salaries, but the hang-up was that few women had crossed the line from the traditional female jobs to the traditional male jobs. Readers responded well to the story, a topic of interest not frequently investigated in this state.

Edward L. Carter can be reached by e-mail at carter@desnews.com

Doctors and damages

By Jack Dolan
The Hartford Courant

Cracking the "public use" version of the National Practitioner Data Bank — the secret national repository for records of adverse actions against doctors since 1990 — took ten percent CAR skills and 90 percent shoe leather.

The data file has the barest of identifying information attached to more than 200,000 records including malpractice payments made on behalf of medical practitioners, state license actions and disciplinary measures taken by hospitals. The practitioner's names are replaced by random ID numbers generated by Department of Health and Human Services computers. Ages and medical school graduation dates are given to the nearest decade.

So, before you start trying to attach names to the anonymous records of 100,000 doctors in the databank, make some careful choices about whom you think is worth tracking down.

Once you've picked your targets, the real work begins.

For our "White Coats, Dark Secrets" series, *The Hartford Courant* focused on doctors with at least 25 entries overall, at least $3 million in total malpractice payments and at least one disciplinary action taken by a state licensing board. We ignored dentists and podiatrists since their screw-ups, although a great inconvenience for the injured patient, aren't likely to be life threatening.

Be prepared for strong resistance from the medical community to almost any criteria you select. They will argue that the number of malpractice suits a doctor faces depends more on his specialty than his skill. They'll also say certain areas of the country are simply more litigious than others. The truth is, they are right on both counts.

Our criteria were so broad, however, that nobody from the American Medical Association or on the staff of the NPDB seriously argued that we were unfairly skewering good doctors who had caught a few bad breaks.

Once you've picked your targets, the real work begins. State disciplinary actions are almost always public, but that doesn't make them easy to find. Most states have Web sites with some information about regulatory actions. Some, such as Massachusetts, New York and Florida, let you look up physicians by name. When working with the NPDB, however, you don't have the name.

Instead, we found ourselves working through a tedious process of elimination. For example, if one of the anonymous doctors on our list had a six-month suspension in New York in 1996 and a reprimand in Massachusetts in 1998, we'd go to the records from those states and compare the lists. Most of the time that left us with a shorter list of only a handful of doctors who fit both criteria. Then we checked each doctor's date of birth and year of graduation from medical school (both conveniently provided by the AMA's Web site in most cases) to see which matched the decades listed in the NPDB.

When we needed records from a state that didn't have a decent Web site, we turned to Public Citizen's "Questionable Doctors" series. This hefty, three-volume paperback catalogue lists license surrenders, revocations, suspensions and licenses put on probation from fifty states and the District of Columbia. But it's not cheap. The 2000 version, with actions from 1990 through 1999, costs $400.

Another drawback to the books, aside from the expense and the paper, is that the doctors are listed alphabetically by state and name. That makes a lot of sense if you are looking up your family practitioner. But when you are going from the NPDB you'll be searching for a type of action taken in a given year. We nearly went blind doing this in the Public Citizen books.

Once you have a couple of possible names, however, the Public Citizen books are a great resource. Instead of going from Web site to Web site to make sure all of the actions against a doctor match in each state, you have each doctor's full regulatory history at your fingertips. That means you can quickly pick the right doctor from a lineup of three or four possibilities. If you exhaust the leads provided by state disciplinary actions, and

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Check out *The Hartford Courant's* series, "White Coats, Dark Secrets" on the Web at *www.ctnow.com.* Click on Dangerous Doctors under Special Reports on the left.

The *Courant's* version of the National Practitioners Data Bank is at *http://courant.ctnow.com/npdb.*

Also check out Story #16585 in IRE's Resource Center. Russ Buettner and William Sherman of the *New York Daily News* reveal 15 of the most sued doctors in New York.

In Story #15918, Thomas Maier of *Newsday* has a six-part series on doctor neglect. Health insurance companies are aware of punished doctors but still offer them to consumers under insurance plans.

VBasic resources

Try these Web sites for more on Visual Basic:

http://msdn.microsoft.com/vbasic

www.vbexplorer.com

www.programmersheaven.com/zone1/index.htm

www.vb-helper.com

www.vbsquare.com/beginning

TECH TIP

Programs for parsing

By David Heath

Seattle Times

If you work with data much, at some point you're going to have to deal with files that defy easy import.

Knowing a few tricks can sometimes save you lots of work. For example, if a text file is missing carriage returns at the end of each line — a common dilemma — you can open it in Word and save into a new text file. Voilà. You now have carriage returns.

You can also do a lot with search and replace tools, Excel's import wizard and Monarch, a terrific software package that converts reports back into databases. But there are times when even Monarch falls short. That's especially true if columns don't line up or the structure of each record is not consistent.

When the going gets rough, the tough write a program.

Writing your own program is the only solution I know if you're trying to parse data that's loosely structured. Say that you want to take a collection of Web pages and put all the links into a database. The links aren't hard to find; they always begin with "<a href=" But otherwise, the pages may lack any consistent format.

There is a way to do this, but you have to learn a smidgen of programming. If you already write simple programs to clean data, you probably already have most of the skills needed. If you are a novice or have never tried programming, the good news is that you don't have to learn that much. You'll be working with a limited set of functions and statements.

I'm going to show you how to deal with problems using Visual Basic. You could do the same type of thing with FoxPro or, for those fearless of its steep learning curve, Perl. The latter is especially powerful at pattern matching, making it an ideal tool for finding HTML tags.

VB's chief advantages are that it's already built in to Access, Excel and Word — so you don't have to buy any new software — and it was especially created to be an easy-to-learn programming language. (Although you've already got a version of VB, if you buy the full version you'll get a lot of debugging tools that can be a life saver.)

To manipulate text in VB, you need to learn five things:

1. How to declare variables, which simply means defining them as either characters or numbers.
2. How to open and close files.
3. How to read from files and write to files.
4. How to use text functions, such as MID, INSTR, LEFT, TRIM and LEN
5. How to create loops.

When you're first learning Visual Basic, it's easy to get distracted making pretty pictures: forms, buttons, labels, etc. But your program doesn't have to look good; it just needs to get the job done. In fact, all the tools you need can be found in the old QBasic, that free program that comes with DOS. A great book for learning Basic programming is "QBasic by Example," written by Greg M. Perry.

There's no way to teach you everything you'll need to start programming in a brief article, so I highly recommend getting a book. However, I can walk you through a fairly simple program that parses data, and that should give you a pretty good idea of what to expect.

Let's take the U.S. Census home page, at *www.census.gov*, and parse all the links into a comma-delimited file that we can easily import into a database. Save the page to your hard drive and note the location, because you'll need it for later. The file is tricky because the page is very loosely structured and the HTML tags are not always consistent. Sometimes they are followed by quotation marks and sometimes they aren't. So we have to include some conditional statements in our programs.

Of course, it's not efficient to write a program to parse a single page, but this program could parse scores of Web pages all at once. You'll find plenty of situations where such a program can do wonders.

To run this, go to Tools | Macro | Visual Basic Editor in Excel and type in the following code. Then simply click on the Run button.

```
Private Sub Command1_Click()
```

Start by declaring the data type of all the variables you'll use.

I've just made up the variable names on the left, starting some with "str" to signify

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Parsing

string, int to signify integer or lng to signify Long Integer.

```
Dim strLine As String
Dim intRead, intWrite As Integer
Dim lngFindAHREF, lngEndHere, lngFindAlt As
Long
Dim lngStartHere, lngFindEndTag,
lngFindName As Long
Dim lngFindGreaterThan, lngFindLessThan As
Long
Dim strHref, strAlt, strName As String
Dim strNextLine As String
```

FreeFile() is a useful function that assigns an unused number to a file. Basic requires files to be numbered for opening, closing, reading and writing.

```
intRead = FreeFile()
```

In this case, intRead is now equal to 1. We can now open our Web page to read from as file No. 1.

```
Open "c:\census\www_census_gov.html"
For Input As #intRead
```

Next we want to create a second file, No. 2, that we are going to write the data to.

```
intWrite = FreeFile()
Open "c:\census\filetoimport.txt" For
Output As #intWrite
```

So all we've done is opened the Web page, which was previously saved to your computer. Your path may differ from that above. Then we created a file called "filetoimport.txt" that we will write to.

We're now ready to look through the Web page for patterns. The statement for that is

```
Do while NOT EOF(intRead)
```

Meaning read until you get to the End Of File #1, followed by

```
Line Input #intRead, strLine,
```

meaning

Go to the next line and put it into my variable "strLine."

```
Do While Not EOF(intRead)
Line Input #intRead, strLine
```

Time to start looking for the pattern "a href". The function InStr gives the number of the characters from the left that a pattern appears.

```
vbTextCompare _
```

ignores upper and lower cases.

```
lngFindAHREF = InStr(1, strLine, "A HREF",
vbTextCompare)
```

If we find "a href" in a line, we want to grab that line eight characters to the right of the start of the tag.

```
If lngFindAHREF > 0 Then strLine =
Mid(strLine, lngFindAHREF + 8)
```

Some of the lines wrap, so we have to make them one long line using a loop.

```
Do While Not InStr(1, strLine, "</A",
vbTextCompare) > 0
Line Input #intRead, strNextLine
strLine = LTrim(strLine) + " " +
LTrim(strNextLine)
Loop
```

We're looking for the end of the first tag and will put the text in between into a variable called strHref.

```
lngEndHere = InStr(1, strLine, ">",
vbTextCompare)
strHref = Mid(strLine, 1, lngEndHere - 1)
```

Now we're looking for the ALT tag, which is what shows up if an image can't be displayed on the Web page. If we find it, we'll put the text in that tag into the variable "strAlt." To help find the end of the tag, we're searching for quotation marks. I've used the Chr() function because you can't put quotations within quotations.

```
lngFindAlt = InStr(1, strLine, "ALT",
vbTextCompare)
If lngFindAlt > 0 Then
lngStartHere = InStr(lngFindAlt, strLine,
Chr(34)) + 1
lngEndHere = InStr(lngStartHere, strLine,
Chr(34))
strAlt = Mid(strLine, lngStartHere,
lngEndHere - lngStartHere)
End If
```

Finally, we're looking for the last tag, which sometimes will include text that you see on the Web page as a hyperlink.

```
lngFindEndTag = InStr(1, strLine, "</a",
vbTextCompare)
strLine = Mid(strLine, 1, lngFindEndTag 1)
```

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Uplink story ideas

Have you or one of your colleagues recently published a story using CAR that has not been done before or involved particularly difficult data work?

Do you know of a technical problem (or its solution) that others may like to hear about?

Is there some issue or beat we haven't looked at you would like to see covered?

We'd like to hear from you. Please contact associate editor Paul Monies either by e-mail at paulm@nicar.org or by phone at (573) 884-7711.

Fund-raising expenses

By Harvy Lipman
The Chronicle of Philanthropy

When the Internal Revenue Service last year issued rules forcing nonprofit organizations to provide copies of their tax returns to the public, journalists who cover charities suddenly found themselves with access to a wealth of data that previously was about as easy to extract as an impacted wisdom tooth.

But as *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* has discovered after years of rummaging through those IRS Forms 990, reporters should be cautious about relying on the information nonprofits provide. A case in point might be called "The Mystery of the Disappearing Fund-raising Expenses."

Acting on a tip from a source who teaches nonprofit accounting at a major university — who told us that one of her research papers discovered that many nonprofits with sizeable incomes were reporting spending nothing on fund-raising — we decided to do a computer analysis of the fund-raising expenses reported on the 990s filed by the largest nonprofits in 1996 (the most recent year for which computerized data were available). We reasoned that any charitable organization that raised $500,000 or more in gifts during the year must have spent something to raise those funds.

Keep in mind that the IRS definition of what must be reported as fund raising is pretty broad. It includes, of course, the cost of hiring outside soliciting firms and the salary paid any full-time fund-raisers on staff. But it also covers the portion of any paid staff time devoted to fund-raising (including writing grants seeking money from foundations), an allocated portion of the cost of producing a newsletter if that publication includes requests for funds, the cost of publicizing fund-raising events, and the production of any fund-raising manuals or other materials.

The data we needed was obtainable from the Urban Institute's National Center for Charitable Statistics in Washington, which has CD-ROM sets of basic data filed by the nation's nonprofits. We found nearly 5,000 organizations which reported at least $500,000 in gifts for that year — of which more than 25 percent had reported zero fund-raising expenses. In many cases — approximately half — there were good explanations; the most common being that the charity reporting no fund-raising costs was affiliated with another nonprofit organization that handled all the fund-raising. Another common reason covered the foundations formed by state universities: The schools themselves — which as government entities don't file 990s — do the fund-raising, while the foundations distribute the money from the gifts, so the foundations legitimately are reporting zero in the fund-raising column.

But a large number simply didn't bother to report what they'd spent on fund-raising. In almost every case, the organizations' audited financial statements did list the expenses, which is an important lesson for anyone covering nonprofits: Don't settle for the 990, ask for the audited financial statements, and get real huffy if they don't want to give them to you (ask them what they have to hide).

Don't settle for the 990, ask for the audited financial statements, and get real huffy if they don't want to give them to you (ask them what they have to hide).

We also obtained databases from three states — California, New York and Ohio — that require registration from all professional fund-raisers and charities that use solicitors. We found dozens of examples of charities that had hired solicitors and still told the IRS they'd spent nothing on fund-raising.

The Zoological Society of Cincinnati, for instance, spent at least $500,000 on fund-raising, including the hiring of a telemarketing company that conducted a multi-year soliciting campaign. Trinity University in San Antonio spent $2.5 million on

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The story

The Chronicle of Philanthropy story on fund-raising expenses is available from the IRE Resource Center, Story #16587. Call (573) 882-3364 for more information.

On the Web:

National Center for Charitable Statistics, *http://nccs.urban.org.*

Independent Sector, a coalition of foundations, nonprofits and corporations, *www.indepsec.org.*

The Foundation Center, *http://fdncenter.org.*

National Council of Nonprofit Associations, *www.ncna.org.*

Quality 990, a project to improve the quality of IRS form 990 reporting, *www.qual990.org.*

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Fund-raising

fund-raising over three years. Neither reported any to the IRS.

Some of the explanations were priceless: One group, in a classic case of Orwellian Newspeak, told us that "to put fund-raising in the column called fund-raising would be misleading." Its argument was that since all the organization does is raise money to distribute to other charities, its fund-raising amounted to its official program (program services, the money spent on a charity's stated function, is reported on a different line of Form 990). The IRS was not amused, pointing out that the organization's program is to distribute money, not raise it, and that everything it spent on fund-raising should be listed as fund-raising expenses.

The Arizona Community Foundation insisted it does no fund-raising, and then sent us a copy of its newsletter which included a half-page solicitation of bequests.

A large number of charities pointed the finger at its outside accounting firms, saying they filled out the tax forms. Most of the major firms refused to comment, and those that did insisted their policies require precise reporting of all fund-raising costs.

Why would nonprofits go to such lengths to hide their fund-raising costs? Two reasons: One, most of the watchdog groups in this area rate charities based on the percentage of their revenue they spend on their programs, and if you can make it seem like as little as possible is going toward fund-raising, you come out looking better to potential donors. Two, there are virtually no penalties for hiding fund-raising costs, because the IRS doesn't even look at them.

The results of our investigation should be an object lesson for journalists and the general public. Examine the tax forms of nonprofit organizations with care, and apply common sense.

Harvy Lipman can be reached by e-mail at Harvy.Lipman@chronicle.com.

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Parsing

```
lngFindGreaterThan = InStr(1, strLine, ">")
lngFindLessThan = InStr(1, strLine, "<")
If lngFindLessThan > 0 Then
strLine = Mid(strLine, lngFindGreaterThan + 1)
End If
lngFindName = InStr(strLine, Chr(62))
strName = Mid(strLine, lngFindName + 1)
```

We have a little bit of clean up work to do. There are extraneous quotation marks to remove and pieces of unwanted text. Also, some of the links begin with "http://" and some don't.

```
If Left(strHref, 1) = Chr(34) Then strHref =
Mid(strHref, 2)
If InStr(1, strHref, " ") > 0 Then strHref =
Mid(strHref, 1, InStr(1, strHref, " ") - 2)
Select Case Left(strHref, 1)
Case "h"
strHref = strHref
Case "/"
strHref = "http://www.census.gov" + strHref
Case Else
strHref = "http://www.census.gov/" + strHref
End Select
If Right(strHref, 1) = Chr(34) Then strHref =
Mid(strHref, 1, Len(strHref) - 1)
```

We're combing the ALT tags with the hyperlinks because they do essentially the same thing.

```
If strAlt = "" Then strAlt = strName
```

Now we'll write the variables to a comma-delimited file.

```
Write #intWrite, strHref, strAlt
```

It's time to clean out the variables and run through the loop again.

```
strHref = ""
strAlt = ""
strName = ""
End If
Loop
```

You always have to close files that you've opened.The command for that is simple.

```
Close
End
End Sub
```

David Heath can be reached by e-mail at dheath@seattletimes.com.

Tipsheets:

Tipsheet #1235 from 2000 IRE national conference. This tipsheet for covering tax-exempt organizations shows where to find information for particular organizations and how to compare them as a sector of the economy. It also outlines disclosure procedures.

Tipsheet #1022 from 1999 IRE national conference. This provides a list of government offices to contact for information regarding charities that solicit within your state as well as a charity and nonprofit organization source list.

Tipsheet #1021, also from 1999, provides an index of charity regulators in every state as well as a sample 990 form filled out from a nonprofit in Hawaii.

The tipsheets can be downloaded from the IRE and NICAR Web site at *www.ire.org/resourcecenter.* Search the tipsheet database, and then follow the directions below the abstract for downloading a PDF file.

Disciplinary records

Web links

Meggen Lindsay's investigation is available online at *www.mustudent.muohio.edu/2000/042500/front1.html.*

Student Press Law Center, *www.splc.org.*

Freedom of Information Center, *http://web.missouri.edu/~foiwww/index.html.*

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, *www.rcfp.org.*

By Meggen Lindsay
Miami University, Ohio

The pursuit of open disciplinary records at colleges and universities has become a constant and often embittered battle between student press and school administrators.

I experienced this conflict first-hand last year when I worked on a three-month project to create and analyze a database of Miami University's disciplinary records.

College disciplinary records are considered "academic" records and are protected under the Family Educational Rights to Privacy Act. *The Miami Student*, Miami University's student paper, argued in 1996 that the records are not academic and should not be covered by FERPA. *The Student* sued the school for access to them under the Ohio Public Records law.

Because the struggle for disciplinary records has been an issue for so long at Miami, I experienced a great deal of intimidation at the university.

The Ohio courts sided with the students, and although the university appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which refused to hear the case, full disciplinary records were to be released. But when the university began releasing records in 1998, the U.S. Department of Education asserted that Miami was in violation of FERPA, and sued the school in federal court to prevent the records' release.

The Department won its case last April, and the decision is being appealed by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, one of the papers that initially requested Miami's records.

The records

As editor of *The Student* last year, I became interested not only in the court cases, but also in the records themselves. There were close to 300 records in a box on my office floor — throughout the lawsuit, no one had even looked at the actual records.

Because *The Students'* request failed, the disciplinary records the paper received (from the university) were devoid of all personally identifiable information such as the students' names, ages and Social Security Numbers.

They consisted of two letters sent to the charged student: one initial citation informing the student of what he or she was being charged with, and one final letter explaining the case's outcome. A description of the incident, the violation with which the student was charged, and the outcome of the case were all provided in the records.

Because the records we received contained just two letters, we were missing information for each case, such as hearing records and the students' prior disciplinary history. However, we had enough of the basics for each case that creating a database still made sense. At the least, an analysis of the records could provide a sense of what crimes were being committed on campus and how the university handled them.

The investigation revealed that Miami University's judicial system is filled with inconsistencies — from students who committed the same offense being charged with different violations to sentencing discrepancies among the different judicial avenues.

The database

As Miami's journalism department does not offer a CAR class, I had no previous database experience. However, I was lucky enough to know experienced journalists willing to help and support me in the project. Dave Gulliver, the CAR specialist for the nearby *Dayton Daily News*, offered to help me create and analyze a database of the records. Also, a faculty member, Cheryl Heckler-Feltz, oversaw the project as an independent study she had created for students interested in computer-assisted reporting.

We entered the records in Microsoft Excel, mainly because it was the easiest for me to learn and pass down to students who will be updating it in the future. We then imported the Excel file into Microsoft Access.

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Records

I found the most important part of creating the database was having a working knowledge of the judicial system before we began its construction. I interviewed the director of the system and essentially memorized Miami's Code of Conduct so I knew all the possible avenues, sanctions and offenses that we would be looking at.

Understanding the ins-and-outs of the system proved invaluable for creating the fields, spotting inconsistencies, recognizing patterns and sifting out the insignificant information.

Students could choose three different avenues from which to pursue their case if they did not initially plead responsible. We set up fields to show students' pleas at each avenue, which officers heard their case and the avenue they selected.

Many students were charged with more than one violation, so we turned every violation's code number into a separate field, along with a corresponding description of the code. The verdicts and sanctions were also split into separate fields to match each code.

Once we assigned codes for the different fields and standardized how the records were being entered, the data entry was a fairly simple but time-consuming process.

The analysis

We ran queries in Microsoft Access for our analysis — we tried to answer basic questions such as how many students were found guilty, whether or not one avenue within the system was harsher and whether identical violations were handled similarly.

The most striking figures to come out of the database involved sentencing discrepancies between the three governing bodies of Miami's judicial system.

The student-run body, Student Court, was far more lenient than the other two bodies. When reviewing students accused of the same offense, Student Court was three times more likely to find them "not responsible" than the Disciplinary Board, a panel of faculty and students. Student Court was twice as likely to reach a "not responsible" finding than an administrative hearing, a one-on-one hearing with an administrator in Judicial Affairs.

The analysis also found that the college's administrative hearing officers were unusually effective in getting students to, in effect, change their pleas from "not guilty" to "guilty."

While there was no gender disparity in sanctions or the number of "responsible" findings, there was significant case-by-case incongruity — especially for drug use.

The reporting

The most difficult aspect of this story was talking to those involved. Because the struggle for disciplinary records has been an issue for so long at Miami, I experienced a great deal of intimidation at the university.

It was extremely difficult to find students who were willing to talk about their experiences in Judicial Affairs. Also, simply finding students was a challenge, because all names were redacted from the records. I ended up going to the campus police station, manually searching through the public records of students who had been arrested at the time covered by our records. I tried to get in touch with close to 40 students, and attempted to match their police records with the university records.

Although the university was given a chance to respond formally to the story, it never did. They released no statement or letter to the editor, but made many heated phone calls.

But the faculty in the English department supported the story, as did the student body. Students stopped me on the way to class wanting to talk about the article and others called me at home to chip in with their stories.

The Student's new editor is planning to update and further analyze the existing database as the next batch of disciplinary records come in, but this does not look promising. Currently, she is not receiving the redacted records that the school agreed to release. Miami University is now a year behind in providing the records that it previously was releasing on a monthly basis.

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Student discipline stories:

The Daily Eastern News, a student paper at Eastern Illinois University, looks at date rape on campus, finding the authorities reluctant to make police reports public. (Resource Center story #10573.)

Columbus Monthly examines a series of riots at Ohio State University in the mid-1990s. (Story #14207).

Tipsheets:

Tipsheet #572 (1996) provides journalists with information for overcoming the obstacles in covering campus crime.

Tipsheet #241 (1994) includes a booklet from the Student Press Law Center on accessing campus crime reports.

IRE Resource Center stories and tipsheets can be obtained at *www.ire.org/resourcecenter* or by calling (573) 884-7332.

Several Web sites can help begin philanthropy research. Some of the information is available only for group members or subscribers, but all these sites offer useful information for free:

Internal Revenue Service tax-exempt statistics
www.irs.treas.gov/tax_stats/exempt.html

The Foundation Center
www.fdncenter.org

Council of Foundations
www.cof.org

GuideStar
www.guidestar.org

National Center for Charitable Statistics
http://nccs.urban.org

The Chronicle of Philanthropy
http://philanthropy.com

Independent Sector
www.indepsec.org

NICAR
www.nicar.org

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Foundations

private foundations, though, have even more information available. They file a form called the 990-PF, much more detailed than the 990. Unlike the typical nonprofit, which might call itself a "foundation," a private foundation has a very specific source for its original funding, such as a family or a corporation.

Electronic data, too, is available in a fair amount of detail. IRS return transaction files for private foundations contain such information as expenses, revenue, gifts, both book and fair market value of assets and investments. We obtained several years worth of data through the National Center for Charitable Statistics, a New York nonprofit.

Online sources

But the information goes further.

First, go online from your own desktop. There's a large collection of Web sites devoted to the nonprofit world in general and foundations in particular. One information gold mine is the Foundation Center in New York, which keeps tabs on foundations. The organization's Web site and its publications are invaluable. The Council of Foundations in Washington — a trade organization — and a series of regional councils all have helpful Web sites.

Another site to visit is GuideStar. There you can look up at least some financial information on a nonprofit and in many cases, you can download an Acrobat image of its latest tax return.

The IRS itself has a plethora of nonprofit-related information online, including data files with all nonprofits, plus reports and studies on the nonprofit world. You can also download and read the IRS instructions and regulations for nonprofits.

The Web research can lead you to even more detailed resources.

At the Foundation Center's Web site, you can find a list of the center's regional libraries and cooperating collections. If your city is of any size, your local public library might house a cooperating collection. There, more vital pieces of information are available: a copy of the center's proprietary database listing not only basic financial information but also specific gift recipients, foundation officers and more. The center's software includes an interactive search allowing you, for example, to find all gift recipients dealing with education in your particular state. The information is slightly outdated, but it's a good starting point. Also at the cooperating collections: microfiche copies of the 990-PF tax returns of your state's private foundations, possibly several years' worth.

IRS regulations require private foundations to send copies of their tax returns to their state's attorney general, so there's another possible source for tax returns.

Back to the data

The IRS return transaction files can supply both general and specific foundation information. Using your software of choice, you can show timelines of total foundations, grant making, assets, even investment income; you can compare states, cities, counties in a snapshot or in a timeline. Then, you can discover details on specific foundations in your state, county, city or nationwide — which are the largest, which ones hand out more money than required, which ones are doing well on the stock market.

Some of the information — in fact, some of the most interesting — is only on paper.

After the data help you pinpoint patterns, trends and specific foundations of interest, the next step is to review tax returns and the Foundation Center data if available. Some of the information — in fact, some of the most interesting — is only on paper. For example, 990-PF returns include information on where the foundation gets its money and who gets the grants. A comparison might be interesting. One Arkansas private foundation funded a tobacco-fighting health organization. But the same tax return shows that the foundation made some of its money by investing in tobacco.

The point of all this homework: generating intelligent questions, finding good sources with expertise on the topic and de-

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Foundations

ciding which numbers actually deserve to be included in your story.

Our first story, published in November 1999, included some key statistics on the overall picture, then snapshots of some of Arkansas' largest private foundations. Accompanying the article was a half-page listing of Arkansas' private foundations, including assets, gifts and purposes.

For the next story, we focused on private foundation money flowing to the Mississippi River Delta, primarily using Foundation Center data, paper copies of 990-PFs and online research — many of the large private foundations have substantial Web sites — to find details. We visited Delta town Pine Bluff, Ark., interviewing successful small business owners who received their start through a nonprofit's loan program. That nonprofit began its life through a large private foundation investment.

Then in January, we used an even tighter focus. It became clear that the Walton Family Foundation, even with its large assets, was still in its early stage of development. We attempted look into the future wealth of the Walton foundation. The story laid out in detail the foundation's increasing income from the family itself and Sam and Helen Walton's charitable remainder trusts, a common and powerful weapon in both tax saving and philanthropy.

For months, we received phone calls from Arkansas grant seekers requesting information about specific foundations. Thanks to the Web information available, we could simply point them in the right direction.

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Doctors

you still haven't positively identified the doctor, your odds of success go downhill.

The majority of the entries in the NPDB are impossible to find on the public record. Most come from lawsuits settled out of court with a confidentiality agreement. Even if you know who the doctor is, and find a lawsuit withdrawn in the same year as a payment listed in the databank, in most states you'll find no record confirming the amount. The victim risks losing everything won in the settlement if he, or his attorney, talks about the case publicly.

On the rare occasions when a medical malpractice suit is decided by a jury, you might find the verdict information on Lexis-Nexis, if you're lucky enough to work for a news operation that subscribes. Otherwise, try the jury verdict reports published by the local chapter of the Trial Lawyers Association. We found these pretty useful. Even details of particularly large confidential settlements sometimes leak into the reports when the attorney who won the case can't resist crowing to his peers.

Another way to track down lawsuits is to get a complete database of cases filed with your civil court system. We've had trouble wrangling this data away from the Connecticut courts, but the *New York Daily News* did a great series about the most-sued doctors in New York by comparing a ten-year slice of state civil court data to the NPDB.

Disciplinary actions taken against doctors by hospitals, which make up a tiny percentage of the entries in the data bank, are protected by the fire-proof "peer review" privilege. Designed to let hospitals investigate their own mistakes without worrying that their findings will end up in the hands of a hungry plaintiff's attorney, we found this obstacle the toughest to overcome.

When trying to localize this story, a strong case can be made for writing about doctors with fewer entries and a lower total payout than we used for the national story. If the doctor is among the handful of most frequently sued or disciplined doctors in the region, where presumably everyone is subject to the same courts, the AMA's point about some parts of the country being less doctor friendly than others becomes moot.

If you are careful to compare doctors of the same specialty, in the same region of the country, the argument against printing the doctor's names gets weaker still.

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The story

Porter's story is available from the IRE Resource Center, Story #16770. Go to *www.ire.org/resourcecenter* and search for "foundations."

New data

The latest set of IRS 990 data will soon be available from the NICAR Data Library. The National Practitioners Data Bank is now available. Check out *www.nicar.org* for the latest news or call (573) 884-7711.

International tipsheets:

Tipsheet #541 (1996) lists several places to check out in international business reporting.

Tipsheet #1271 (2000) offers tips, Web sites and data to use in international investigative reporting.

Tipsheet #1164 (2000) gives hints and information on finding international data in beats such as health, business, immigration and politics.

Tipsheet #853 (1998) lists useful Web sites, including international reporting organizations and newspapers around the world.

Tipsheets are available by calling the IRE Resource Center at (573) 884-7332 or on the Web at www.ire.org/resourcecenter.

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Russia

a friend at the central railway data processing center... It's a function of time and money. But what will you do with it?"

With Russian databases, finding and accessing them proved to be of little mystery. But figuring out how to use them was the trick.

Computers

Computers are dirt cheap in Russia, and most Russian federal and local agencies in economically thriving regions use them. Some systems run as far back as the early 1990s, although the first years of Russian capitalism left little trace in electronic databases.

Knowing the nature of Soviet totalitarianism, I am sure there is a wealth of old Soviet computer systems out there.

I stumbled onto my first Russian database when I was tracking business interests of Moscow's ambitious, and by many accounts almighty, mayor, Yury Luzhkov.

The mayor was positioning himself to run for the Russian presidency, and rumors of corruption in the top ranks of Moscow bureaucracy were abundant. The mayor's wife was a shrewd businesswoman and I wanted to profile her — and the mayor's — business interests.

I plugged the Russian word for database into *www.aport.ru*, a versatile Russian Web search engine.

The first discovery was a 1996 version of a Moscow business registration database, probably hacked, and posted on the Web site (*www.molot.ru*) as a promo for newer, more up-to-date versions of governmental databases. It listed business registration numbers, addresses, phone numbers, dates of registration, names of main officers, bank account numbers and tax IDs. It also provided names of owners, both individuals and companies, along with their shares.

The database went as far back as 1989 and 1991, the first years when Russian businesses emerged.

Following my American-bred CAR instincts, I made my way to the city Business Registration Chamber that maintained the database. After a long wait, I got into a large office where clerks looked up business registrations and printed their copies for exhausted and desperate clients. I wanted to confirm information from the Web site. It took tons of cajoling and nudging. In the end, a department manager told me I could set up a dial-in connection to search the database. The charges sounded exorbitant, and after a long, unsuccessful hunt for the right basement computer office, I gave up. I was back to my hacked Web-based database.

The first lady

Hours of searching and days of interviews later, Moscow's first lady turned out to be a monopolist in outfitting Russian sports arenas with new plastic seats. She discovered the niche when her husband oversaw a $230 million overhaul of Moscow main sports arena, Luzhniki.

His wife's tiny firm underbid major foreign competitors. Moscow's first lady went on to give the rest of Russia's sport arenas a facelift. Last I checked, she was working on one on Cyprus, a haven of offshore Russian money laundering.

With Russian databases, finding and accessing them proved to be of little mystery. But figuring out how to use them was the trick.

I also found the people who posted the database on the Web site. They were an enterprising bunch of former KGB analysts who fetched and repackaged governmental databases for banks, businesses and private security firms.

Many of these databases eventually found their way to Moscow's sprawling electronic flea markets where aspiring hackers and anarchists bought them for $3 a pop.

The Moscow business registration database proved indispensable for tracking business relationships and interests. And time and time again, even after I bought an up-to-date

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Russia

copy of the Moscow business registration database, I went back to the online version. It listed old records that disappeared from the newer slice of the database.

The old records helped tremendously, especially when I was profiling another business marvel, a businesswoman who runs a charity personally founded by the head of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Under the umbrella of charity, the businesswoman runs an airline company that shuttles consumer goods between China and Russia.

The database helped nail down connections and find names of other people who were behind the rise of the businesswoman amidst Moscow's cutthroat market rush. Interviews with her and other magnates involved with the church fleshed-out creative ways in which church made and helped others make money.

For my part, I quickly learned that the fastest way to get data in Moscow is to pay cash. And don't bother asking how exactly the people who got the data ferreted it out.

But it was Russia's customs records, electronic copies of every export-import declaration, which turned into a real hit.

When a multi-million dollar scandal involving payoffs to the family of then – Russian President Boris Yeltsin surfaced, I convinced *The Moscow Times*, Russia's leading English-language newspaper — where I worked at the time — to buy $1,600 worth of databases.

Export-import records illuminated how a company was importing nails and linens to Russia. It charged Russia's bleeding budget top dollar for goods that cost mere rubles a few steps away from the Kremlin itself.

When *The Orange County Register* asked me to join in on the "Body Brokers" project and track the trade in human body parts in Russia, I looked to the export-import database for clues. The database, although spotty and compromised by proverbial bribes and corruption, runs as far back as 1994. Starting from 1997, the records can be considered consistent.

The database as well as multiple interviews helped track major players in exporting human bones, brain lining and other tissues from Russia for implants in the West.

It turned out Russia and the United States use the same international code scheme to track commodities, including products made of human flesh and blood.

Money talks

But have I tried to negotiate for Russian databases in a good American way, citing sunshine laws and freedom of information?

No.

At times, officials give me information on disks and even sent me electronic attachments. Most of them did it in a way all good sources do: following their judgment of what was the right thing to do and stomping out their better bureaucratic instincts.

For my part, I quickly learned that the fastest way to get data in Moscow is to pay cash. And don't bother asking how exactly the people who got the data ferreted it out. It could be an exclusive agreement. It could be a bribe. Most of the time, they won't tell. And most of the time, you don't really want to know.

There was yet another tough issue: figuring out how to use hacked databases and manage to walk the thin line separating acceptable use of data and electronic espionage.

So knowing that the data have passed through many hands before landing on my computer, I found one way to keep my peace of mind: I treated every hint from databases as a tip and backed it up with additional interviews and legwork.

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Racial health gap

By Dave Davis
and Elizabeth Marchak
The Plain Dealer

They call them "The Lost Ones."

Drug-addicted, homeless, forgotten, they wander the streets of Newark and the other northern New Jersey cities that lie in the shadow of Manhattan, whose brightly lit skyscrapers seem to taunt this boarded up city from across the Hudson River.

The women sell themselves for $15. The men run heroin. Using dirty needless, they shoot up behind abandoned buildings, in cemeteries or in public bathrooms. They are spreading HIV, which causes AIDS, at a pace that rivals some Third World nations.

The idea was to publish a geography-based analysis of the racial health disparity, the first-ever county-by-county look at the problem.

They are overwhelmingly black. And they are called "The Lost Ones" because, despite being desperately ill from AIDS, they have not sought medical treatment. They have no addresses. They have no telephones. They have no hope.

Here, in Essex County, N.J., where black residents die from AIDS at a rate nearly nine times whites, poverty and affluence live side by side, creating one of the widest racial health gaps of any county in the nation.

"When I was out on the street, I had lost all my moral value, my self-respect," we were told by Harold Moore, who was partially paralyzed from a drug overdose and lay dying from AIDS in a bed at the Broadway House, a home for indigent AIDS patients. "All that flies out the window when you use drugs."

Moore's story was sad, compelling, and uplifting, all at the same time. He now passed his days speaking to groups about "living with the virus." For the first time, he was a real son to his mother, and recognized the importance of family and friends. "I wouldn't change these last seven years for nothing," he told us through his tears.

Our deathbed interview with Moore became the foundation upon which we built the fourth day of our five-day series examining the nation's growing racial health gap. It was the payoff for the more than 100 hours we spent querying the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's online mortality database.

The idea was to publish a geography-based analysis of the racial health disparity, the first-ever county-by-county look at the problem.

Our hard work online and the hours we spent in Excel compiling death rates by county, race and gender also led us to Bacon County, Ga., where black residents were dying in epidemic numbers from heart disease and diabetes, and Mahoning County, Ohio, where black women were being murdered so often that public officials appeared to have grown used to it.

Mortality data

When we teamed up to find out where the biggest gap in death rates between blacks and whites in the United States, we knew we had to have standardized mortality data for every county in the entire country.

We turned to the mortality file at *http://wonder.cdc.gov.*

A clunky front end at the CDC's Wonder data site gave us what we needed, but it was time consuming to use. The deaths are current through 1997. We decided to use records from the last 10 years.

One of the benefits of the data is that CDC provides population numbers for the geographical area you're searching. When the database is queried for the number of deaths caused by heart disease for each state, for example, it gives raw number of deaths, the population for each state and the death rate per 100,000 persons.

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Web links

Check out the CDC's mortality file at *http://wonder.cdc.gov.*

The National Center for Health Statistics is at *www.cdc.gov/nchs.*

For a reprint of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer's* series, call Dave Davis at (800) 688-4802 or e-mail him at ddavis@plaind.com. This story is also available from the IRE Resource Center, Story #16484. Call the center at (573) 882-3364.

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Health gap

There must be at least 20 deaths for the rate to be valid. Wonder will let you know if the data are "UNRELIABLE."

You can search for death figures by state, county, age range, year and ICD-9 code, the worldwide numeric system for cause of death.

Searching Wonder by county proved to be the most fruitful for us. It's a level of geography that is large enough to calculate valid death rates, but small enough to make the reporting end of the project, the search for human beings who can talk about what's causing the numbers, manageable.

Since we compared black men to white men, and black women against white women, we had to do four searches for each state. Each time, we saved the search results as a text file, instructed Wonder to e-mail it to us, then cleaned it up in Word 97 and appended it to our master Excel file. With four records for each county, we grew the spreadsheet to more than 12,000 lines.

Mapping results

We were able to map the results in MapInfo, which produced editor-pleasing color graphics and helped us with the reporting because we were able to visualize the mass of data.

We also scrutinized particular causes of death that appeared to be widening the racial disparity in certain places. For example, Marchak isolated the murder of women, considered a public health problem, doing separate runs for just this cause of death, ICD-9 codes 060.0-069.9.

She searched each county for age breakdown of women who had been murdered, the year, and the exact type of homicide.

Mahoning County, Ohio, had the biggest gap in homicide rates between black and white women. All of the black women in the county were killed in Youngstown, and our questioning about why became day three of the series.

When Marchak started interviewing sociologists about the homicides of black women, her suspicions were confirmed: the murders of black women had never been studied as a group. Only now, one sociologist told her, were people beginning to realize the vast cultural differences between black women and those of other races.

Death Records

We used Ohio death certificate records, available in a data file from the department of vital statistics for $100 per year, and county coroner reports to learn more about the murdered women.

The FBI's Supplemental Homicide data also played a key role, yielding information about the 70 black women who were murdered in Youngstown between 1988 and 1997, the 10-year period upon which we based our analysis.

Using the ZIP codes, Marchak produced a simple map of Mahoning County that showed where the homicides occurred. Then she turned to the 1990 STF-3 Census data to learn all she could about the neighborhoods.

The numbers told a depressing story of the collapse of the steel mills, the failure of the school system, and the loss of hope among those affected. But the information was helpful in targeting people to interview and asking pointed questions about city services, especially how police have responded to the tragedy.

As we got deeper into the story, it became obvious that the health disparities between blacks and whites had become accepted in many parts of the country. Often we found that the people making a difference were those who decided to work outside the system, ignoring the seemingly endless studying of the problems, bureaucratic meetings and bypassing federal money.

In Youngstown, we were able to tell the story of a group of Ursuline nuns who bought old homes for single mothers and their children. Their presence in the community was well known, but until *The Plain Dealer* started looking at homicides, no one realized they were actually saving lives.

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Below are some recent stories involving race and public health. They are available from the IRE Resource Center at *www.ire.org/resourcecenter*.

Story #15510, Life Cut Short for City's Minorities, *Chicago Reporter*, April 1999. Natalie Pardo's investigation shows that life expectancy in Chicago is affected by race, economic status and neighborhood.

Story #13828. In a 1996 investigation, the *Chicago Reporter* examines Chicago Health Department records and finds "unintentional violence" is killing African-American children at a far greater rate than whites or Latinos.

Bits, Bytes and Barks

New additions

The NICAR Database Library has updated several datasets: OSHA Workplace Safety, Home Mortgage Disclosure Act Data (HMDA), SBA 7A Loans and SBA Disaster Loans.

Also, IRE and NICAR has released "**Home Mortgage Lending: How to Detect Disparities**," an IRE beat book by Pulitzer Prize winner Jo Craven McGinty. The book is available from the IRE Resource Center for $15 for IRE members and $20 for non-members.

The **1999 HMDA** data can be used to analyze mortgage-lending practices, including discrimination, in your community. It contains demographic information about loan applicants, the purpose and type of the loan, and whether it was approved or denied.

The **OSHA database**, which includes inspections of workplaces through March 2000, can be used to look at a specific company's safety violations over time, or to look for trends across regions or occupations.

The **Disaster Loans database** includes loans that have been approved, although not necessarily fully distributed, for businesses and individuals in the wake of emergencies. Data ranges from 1980 through the first quarter of 2000.

The **7A loans database** consists of loans approved by the U.S. Small Business Administration under its main lending program, known as 7A. The program provides loans to small-business borrowers who can't obtain financing through traditional channels. Data ranges from 1953 through the first quarter of 2000.

More information, including sample slices and record layouts, is available at *www.ire.org/datalibrary/databases*. To order, call (573) 884-7332.

Useful Web sites

Here are a few interesting Web sites that journalists might find useful — or just plain fun.

Search Systems: *www.pac-info.com.* This site has links to more than 1,614 searchable public records databases, including national and state. You can pick a state and see all the online searchable databases available for that state, or pick from a list of topics at the national level.

Annual Report Gallery: *www.reportgallery.com.* This site includes more than 2,200 annual reports and other financial reports.

Roller coaster database, *www.rcdb.com*, a searchable online database that allows you to find information such as height, length, speed, year constructed and location for roller coasters in North America.

NICAR in Lexington

Tipsheets and audio tapes of panels from the National CAR Conference that was held Sept. 14-17 in Lexington, Ky., are available from the IRE Resource Center.

Search the tipsheet database at *www.ire.org/resourcecenter.* Most of the tipsheets can be downloaded as PDF files directly from the Web site.

Information about ordering audio tapes is available at *www.ire.org/training/audio.html*

Next year's National CAR conference will be held in Philadelphia in the fall. A date had not been set as of press time. Stay tuned to the IRE and NICAR Web site for an exact date and details.

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