



IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN

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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

SUNDAY

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IN MOST AREAS

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Israel to free inmates to spur talks

Other Palestinian demands unmet

By William Booth
The Washington Post

JERUSALEM — A top Israeli government minister said Saturday that Israel would release an unspecified number of Palestinian prisoners to help U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry launch peace talks but added that it would not accede to other key Palestinian demands, including a freeze on new construction in Jewish settlements.

Israel and the Palestinians have tentatively agreed to resume peace talks for the first time in three years, Mr. Kerry said Friday in Amman, Jordan, offering some hope that a conflict that has convulsed the region for decades could be settled at the negotiating table. He cautioned that key details must be worked out before the two sides' leaders sit down face to face.

Yuval Steinitz, Israel's minister of strategic and intelligence affairs, told Israel Radio on

SEE **ISRAEL**, PAGE A-4

Bringing Bibles to the battlefield

Churches give Word to 300,000 soldiers

By Ann Rodgers
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

To many American troops, the thumb-size stick is known as the "Godpod" or "chaplain-in-a-box."

The Military BibleStick, created by an organization known for producing audio Bibles in languages with no alphabet,

On the Web

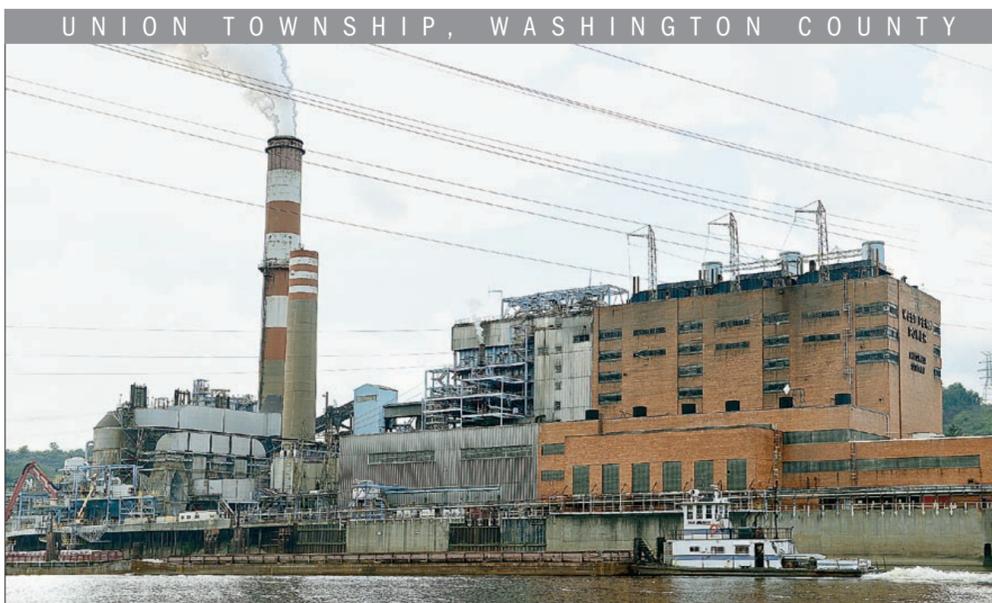
Visit **post-gazette.com** to listen to New Testament readings from a BibleStick.

temporarily trade everything you know — your family friends and home — for unknown challenges.

"You also have more time to

SEE **BIBLES**, PAGE A-8

Two plants, two towns, two uncertain futures



Top: Bob Donaldson/Post-Gazette; Bottom: handout

Top: The Mitchell power plant is in Union Township, Washington County. **Bottom:** The Hatfield's Ferry plant is in Greene County, though Masontown lies just across the Monongahela River in Fayette County. Both plants will close by Oct. 9.

MASONTOWN

Closures leave workers at a loss

By Jessica Contrera
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A job for life. That's what they were promised.

It wasn't in a contract, but to the 20 men who gathered for Bud Lights and commiseration Wednesday night in Greene County, working at a power plant was the equivalent.

"This was the job everybody wanted," said Ray Christner Jr. of Brownsville. "We had it. And now it's gone."

Nine days had passed since FirstEnergy announced it will shut down two power plants: Hatfield's Ferry, Greene County, across the Monongahela River from Masontown, Fayette County, and Mitchell in Union Township, Washington County, by Oct. 9 — leaving 380 people without work.

It was the second night in a row the group had gathered. First, at a bar; this time on the covered porch of technician Andy SinClaire,

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UNION TOWNSHIP

Ripple effect expected in region

By Gavan Gideon
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

When GenOn Energy's coal-fired power station on the Monongahela River closed last year, Joan Godzak, a clerk at a local Sunoco gasoline station, assumed the second plant in the 5,000-person Washington County township would be safe.

Yet this month, with no advance notice to the community, FirstEnergy announced it would deac-

tivate its Mitchell power station four miles down the river by Oct. 9.

"It just doesn't make any sense to me," said Ms. Godzak, 49, of Finleyville. "Everyone in the area is going to be affected."

A total of 380 FirstEnergy employees will lose their jobs because of the Akron, Ohio-based company's planned closures — 77 at the Mitchell station, 174 at the larger Hatfield's Ferry plant in Masontown,

SEE **UNION**, PAGE A-6

Inside Closures raise questions about FirstEnergy's business practices. **Page A-7**

A river runs through it

Allegheny River bridges are a showcase of engineering ingenuity.

Sunday Magazine, E-1



Viet hero has bridge renamed after him

Marine was awarded Medal of Honor in '70

By Mackenzie Carpenter
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Dozens of people who knew and loved a 20-year-old man who died in Vietnam 44 years ago protecting his fellow Marines stood together in solemn ceremony Saturday on the 31st Street Bridge, trying to find some closure.

Perhaps they did, now that the bridge has been renamed in honor of that young warrior, Lance Cpl. William Raymond Prom, who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for military valor, in 1970.

"I am so happy today," said his sister, Clara Prom Burns, 81, of Mount Troy in Reserve, where she and her brother grew up. "I will never get complete closure, but I have wanted this for so long."

Mrs. Burns joined a host of state and local officials on the dais for the hourlong dedication

SEE **BRIDGE**, PAGE A-8

HELEN THOMAS 1920-2013



Ms. Thomas, a trailblazer for women in journalism who became the dean of the White House press corps, died Saturday in Washington, D.C. **Obituary, Page A-10**



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Two uncertain futures

MASONTOWN, FROM PAGE A-1

just a few hundred yards from the entrance to Hatfield's Ferry. Three years ago, Mr. SinClaire bought the house so he could walk to work.

The gatherings started after a meeting with FirstEnergy personnel one week after the initial announcement yielded more frustration than answers. Can some of the employees be transferred to other jobs in the company? How much will they receive in severance pay? Will their pensions be cut? They are still waiting to hear.

"First, we were shocked. Then we were upset. Now, we're just angry," said Gregg Jerome of Uniontown, an electrician at the plant.

The employees are mainly from Greene, Fayette and Washington counties. Many started at the plants soon after high school and some have stayed for more than 30 years. Others were transferred to Hatfield's Ferry and Mitchell when FirstEnergy closed six coal-fired power plants in Ohio, Maryland and Pennsylvania last year.

Those at Hatfield thought the plant would surely be safe from closure, as Allegheny Energy invested \$650 million on scrubbers meant to eliminate sulfur and mercury emissions just four years ago.

If the workers lived somewhere else, losing a job in the power business might not be as stressful. But in Pennsylvania, where coal-fired power production has decreased 28 percent since 2005, there are few, if any, jobs that can replace what the workers at Hatfield's Ferry and Mitchell had: regular hours, salaries between \$22 and \$30 per hour, and good benefits, all without a college education.

"I understand the importance of regulations and clean air," said technician David Donaldson, 45. "But ask Obama this — what good is green energy to me if I can't support my family?"

It's the question that is asked over and over again by the men gathered on the porch, standing in the shadow of the plant itself.

Men like 29-year-old Mr. Jerome, who in the past year has bought a house and had his first child, a son named Dominic. "I'll do anything to support him. I just don't want to be a failure in his eyes," he said.

Jim Premoshis, 53, who is barely more than a year away from receiving his full pension. "I grew up inside that place. It's all I've ever known," Mr. Premoshis said.

And Eric Verbosky, 24, whose father and brother also will lose their jobs. "My mom has been crying for days. She knows this might break up our family."

But when the workers are asked what they are most worried about, all eyes glance to Mr. Christner.

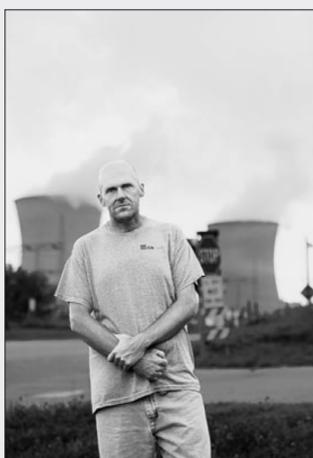
The 28-year-old's string of difficulties started on an afternoon in September, when he called home to check on his wife Michelle and his two children.

"Mommy is sleeping," Mr. Christner's then-6-year-old daughter Brianna told him. When he sent his sister-in-law to his house, she found Mrs. Christner dead. A brain aneurysm had taken her life, without a single warning sign.

174 people

That's how many workers at Hatfield's Ferry will lose their jobs when the plant shuts down by Oct. 9, but it's not just a number. Each one represents a name, a face, a family. Here's just a few of them:

Photos by Michael Henninger/Post-Gazette



Repair technician **David Donaldson**, 45



Electrician **Joe Tascione**, 56



Operator **Eric Verbosky**, 24



Maintenance worker **Ed Breltich**, 52



Chemical lab attendant **Ray Christner Jr.**, 28, and his children, Brianna, 7 and Connor, 4



Electrician **Gregg Jerome**, 29



Technician **Andy SinClaire**, 39



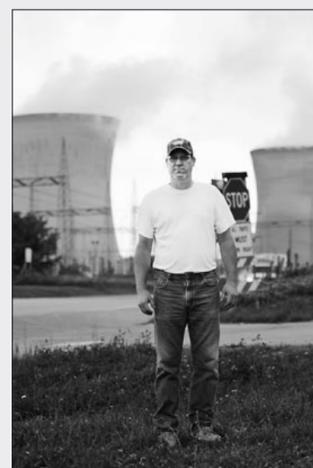
Operator **Matt Reese**, 29



Operations technician **Christian Nestor**, 37



Maintenance worker **Derek Santini**, 51



Mechanic **Bob Lyons**, 54

Today, Mr. Christner feels backed into a corner. If he leaves Brownsville with Brianna and Connor to take a new job, he moves away from the only family he has. If he stays, he doesn't know how he will support his

children. And he won't be receiving the pension promised to those who have worked at the plant for five years — it closes two weeks before his term was set to begin. "I never thought I could lose

my wife and my job in a year," Mr. Christner said. "I want to move forward, but I don't know where to." FirstEnergy will hold another meeting with Hatfield and Mitchell employees on Tuesday.

Until then, it's a waiting game for workers, politicians and community members. "I'm sick to my stomach over it," said state Rep. Pam Snyder, D-Jefferson. "We're getting an onslaught of visits, calls, emails

and even Facebook messages asking for help ... and asking how to file for unemployment." Jessica Contrera: jcontrera@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1458. Twitter: @mjcontrera.

UNION, FROM PAGE A-1

Greene County, and 129 serving as support personnel in the region.

But the impact likely will extend beyond the direct job cuts and spread throughout the surrounding business community.

Glen Pettitcord, mayor of New Eagle, a borough directly south of Union Township on the river, said the closures will affect all parts of the coal trade — from the mines that sell the coal to the local businesses such as gasoline stations and grocery stores that depend on the economic activity.

Mike Monahan, president of the Houston, Pa.-based marine service company Campbell Transportation, said every dollar spent at power plants like FirstEnergy's has a tremendous economic impact on other revenue streams in the region.

"There's a ripple effect to all of this," Mr. Monahan said.

Campbell Transportation contracts with FirstEnergy to bring tons of coal by barges to the two power plants along the Monongahela. Mr. Monahan said Campbell is currently working to determine how it will be able to reallocate its equipment to find replacement tonnage, potentially by moving other products or operating farther down the river.

He said it is too early to know what the direct effect of the closures will be on Campbell's employees, though he added that the company is looking for a way to minimize the impact.

Elrama Tavern in Union Township provides about 100



LEFT: Convenience store clerk Melissa Morse wonders about local business after First Energy's Mitchell Power Station closes by year's end. The station is almost directly across Route 837 from her store. **RIGHT:** Convenience store clerk Joan Godzak worries about the jobs that will be lost when the power plant in Union Township, Washington County, closes.



Bob Donaldson/Post-Gazette photos

miles south of Union Township, residents expect the closure of the 1,710-megawatt Hatfield's plant to leave the already deteriorating community in even worse shape. Melissa DiNunno, owner of Paesano Italian Cuisine and of Welby's gym in Masontown, said that over the past decade, the borough has lost a bakery, care homes, a flower shop, multiple restaurants, a pharmacy and a laundromat due to the depressed economy. "This is going to be a ghost town. All we're missing is the

tumbleweeds," Ms. DiNunno said. David Howard, owner of Howard's Market, opened by his grandfather in 1929 and up the street from Paesano, said the loss of revenue from men who work at the power plant and often buy his steaks can have a large impact on small businesses. "Back in the days of coal, when they first built Hatfield's, you couldn't find a corner to sleep in Masontown. This place was booming," Mr. Howard said.

"This area, southwestern Pennsylvania and West Virginia, we make power," he said. "If we don't need power anymore, you might as well just cut us out of the country." Some of the region's displaced workers and businesses might find new opportunities in an expanding natural gas industry in the years ahead. But residents of communities shaken by the pending plant closures remain concerned for the future. Valerie Nagel of Union Township, a firefighter, said she

watched steel mills close when she was growing up in Pittsburgh's South Side. It took a good 25 years for things to turn around there, she said, and she worries the region's coal communities could be on a similar trajectory. "I just really wish that the people who make these drastic decisions lived in our communities for a while," Ms. Nagel said.

Gavan Gideon: ggideon@post-gazette.com or 412-263-4910. Jessica Contrera contributed.