

Publishing gun permits: Invasion of privacy or public information?

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Overview of The *Journal News*

- Gannett, Co.-owned paper
- Readers in Rockland, Westchester and Putnam counties; located in the lower Hudson Valley, NY (about 30 miles outside of NYC)

Controversy arises

- In response to the Sandy Hook shootings on Dec. 14, the Journal News published an article on Dec. 26.

The screenshot shows the top portion of a news article on the Journal News website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the text "powered by The Journal News" and a search bar. Below this is a featured section with links to "Gun debate", "All Star", "All County", "Living Here", "Tax Watch", and "DealChipsan". A search bar contains the text "Find what you are looking for ..." and a "SEARCH" button. Below the navigation bar is a large advertisement for Bilotta Kitchens & Baths, featuring several images of kitchen interiors and the text "This winter, invest in your dream kitchen. Enjoy 15% to 50% off custom & semi-custom cabinetry, now through February 13th, 2013." Below the advertisement is the article title "The gun owner next door: What you don't know about the weapons in your neighborhood" and the date "Dec 23, 2012". Below the title is a video player showing a man in a green jacket speaking. To the right of the video player is a sidebar advertisement for Mercy College, which reads "MERCY COLLEGE INTRODUCES 1-YEAR MBA DEGREE" and lists features such as "GMATs optional", "Business and Non-Business undergraduates welcome", and "Nights/Weekend/Distance classes". Below the sidebar advertisement is a "Click here to learn more" link and the text "1-877-MERCY-GO • WWW.MERCY.EDU/MBAYR".

Controversy arises (cont.)

- It included an interactive map that listed the names and addresses of people who had gun permits.

WESTCHESTER COUNTY

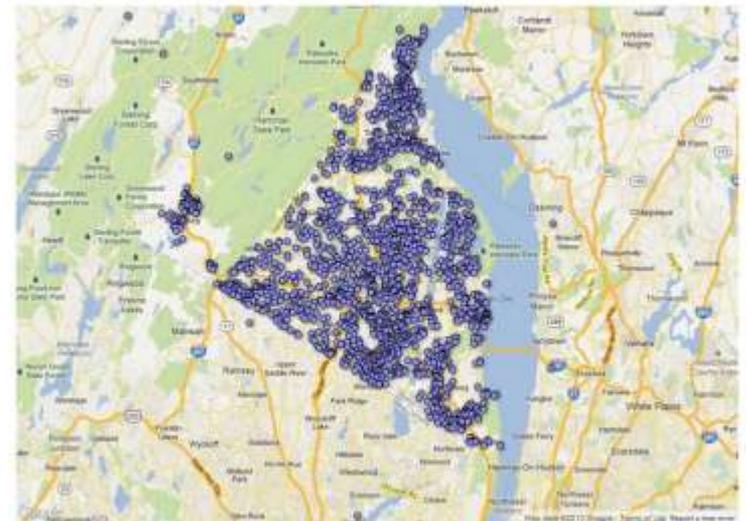
This map shows pistol permits registered with the Westchester County Clerk's Office. Residents are required to renew the permit every five years.



ROCKLAND COUNTY

This map shows pistol permits registered in Rockland County, which are issued for life and do not need to be renewed. Rockland County splits permit holders into two categories:

Active: Permit holders that have purchased a firearm or updated the information on a permit in the past five years. Map includes all permit holders and those whose applications have cleared the approval process and are waiting to be signed by the supervising judge.



Historic: Permit holders with no activity in the past five years. Permit holders who have died or moved out of the area may not have updated their permit records, so some locations marked with a dot on this map may not represent a current permit holder.

Systemic Moral Analysis (SMA)

In a nutshell...

Step One: My Values

- To present information to the public that is accurate and newsworthy
 - What would be the newsworthy about this piece?
- To cause the least harm to the public
 - Gun owners are at risk of burglaries
 - Controversial topic to be linked to
 - Private rights are in danger (2nd Amendment rights)
- Promotes relationship with readers
 - No, because we risk ostracizing a sector of the community that are also readers of the paper.

Steps Two and Three

▣ **Will you cause harm? YES**

- ▣ There are possible criminals that could access the map and try to steal the guns from legal gun owners; further harming non-gun owners
- ▣ Could list an address that was listed as the home of a gun owner, but now isn't; causing potential harm
- ▣ Risking shunning of gun owners within the community

▣ **Is the harm justified? NO**

- ▣ “The independent community newspaper has two incentives: To promote the general welfare and to make money. Like the physician, it must be more concerned with the good that it does.” ~ Frank E. Gannett
- ▣ Again, what is the news value of such a map?

Step Four: What type of action is this?

- Ethically prohibited: The rights of the private citizens, especially those of whole counties outweigh the general public's right to know about such a controversial topic.

What happened?

- Gun owners were furious – threatened the publisher and editors; published the names, addresses and phone numbers of employees of the paper online; harassment ensued
- Journal News in New City hired armed guards
- Two homes with guns were robbed; names and addresses reportedly to have been published on the map
- SAFE gun law – intended to only concern guns; passed with added provision to have gun owners be able to request their names taken out of public information
- Journal News finally removes map from site.

Questions??

