

# Students unplug lives

## Chittenango's Global Environment class spends weekend in 1979.

By Aaron Gifford  
Staff writer

A conflict in the Middle East drove up oil prices. The economy was in a recession the depth of which had not been seen since the Great Depression. And the Pittsburgh Steelers had just won the Super Bowl.

Familiar topics, yes, but they weren't discussed via e-mail, cell phone or text mes-

sage. There were no national cable television stations to provide news footage of those events. And popcorn was cooked on a stove, not in a microwave.

Welcome to "Unplugged 1979," an exercise that took a group of Chittenango High School students in Lisa Lowenberg's Global Environment class back in time last weekend. The students were required to live like their teacher did 30 years ago when she was their age.

And they all lived to tell about it.

"I literally played dominos this weekend," said Phil Pollock, a senior. "It got that bad."

"I was pacing around," said Adam Wayne, also a senior. "All I wanted to do was use my computer, listen to my music and play PS3."

CDs, DVDs, VCRs, MP3 players, cell phones and any kind of digital or satellite devices were off limits. The same went for microwave ovens. For at least a day, the U.S. Mail replaced e-mail.

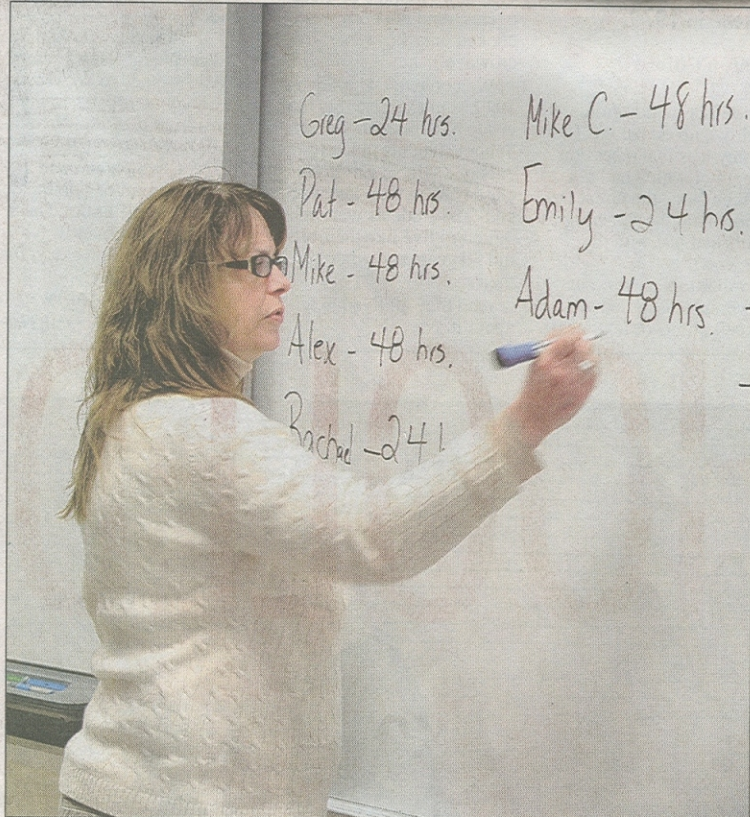
Television was allowed, but

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ADAM WAYNE, a senior at Chittenango High School, shows global environment teacher Lisa Lowenberg the cell phone calls he missed for the 48 hours he used only 1979 technology.

Amanda Loman / The Post-Standard



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**LISA LOWENBERG**, a Chittenango High School global environment teacher, records the hours students in her class used only technology available during 1979.

# Cell Phones Missed

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only the local stations. No remote controls, please.

The students received two points on their semester grades if they lasted 24 hours without the prohibited devices. They earned four points if they went 48 hours. Students chronicled their experiences in journals, and parents signed a contract with their children ahead of time and rated their behavior at the end of the exercise.

Most students said the hardest part was going without cell phones, mainly because they haven't memorized friends' numbers and couldn't call them on a landline.

The purpose of the exercise wasn't to make the kids suffer, but to show them how technology contributes to major changes in human behavior and society, said Neil Patterson, a SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry graduate student who assists Lowenberg with the class.

ESF oversees the curriculum and gives college credit to high school students enrolled in the class.

The students monitored the goods and services they consumed over the weekend and also thought about the environmental impact of their modern technologies. Some said they drove more because they were trying to resist the electronic temptations at home. Others said they ate more, out of boredom.

Lowenberg also participated in the exercise. Though she has fond memories of 1979, Lowenberg said it was difficult to go without a computer and e-mail for a weekend.

Students asked Lowenberg if she, as a high school student in 1979, could imagine doing the same exercise: Listening to 1949 dramas on the radio, watching black and white movies at the theater and going without fast food.

"There were cars — I'm not that old," she said after a student asked if maybe her parents could recall horse-drawn buggies. "I remember milk men and I do remember the Charles Chips truck. And I remember everything tasting better, but maybe that's because we were hungrier from walking everywhere."