



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

N. Baltimore site first in county to partner with OhioCheckbook.com
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By Peter Kuebeck
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PERRYSBURG — The finances of the North Baltimore Public Library will be getting a bit more legible.

At an event held Tuesday at the Hilton Garden Inn at Levis Commons, State Treasurer Josh Mandel announced the library as the latest to partner with the Ohiocheckbook.com website, which posts state spending information online.

North Baltimore is the first entity in Wood County — and the first library in Northwest Ohio, Mandel said — to partner with the site.

"My goal, my vision is to get every single university online," as well as every pension fund, local government and other such bodies, said Mandel. He spoke at a meeting of the Toledo Chapter of Financial Executives International.

In recent months, Mandel's office has made a number of announcements regarding partnerships with local governments, school districts and others to post their spending information to Ohiocheckbook.com. That site went live Dec. 2 after about 18 months in development and a cost of \$814,000.

During a demonstration of Ohiocheckbook.com during Tuesday's meeting, Mandel showed that the spending of the state's agencies can be searched down to the level of individual payments. Items like mileage reimbursement checks for individual state employees can also be searched.

According to the treasurer's office, Ohiocheckbook.com has earned the state "the number one ranking in the country for government transparency" from the U.S. Public Interest Research Group. The website has reportedly logged more than 303,000 searches in its first eight months of operation.

According to the treasurer's office, Mandel sent a letter in April to more than 18,000 local government and school officials representing almost 4,000 entities throughout the state regarding putting their information on the site. Currently, 272 local governments, school districts and libraries have volunteered to be part of the effort.

Partnerships announced in August included Erie County, the city of Sandusky, Sandusky City Schools, Cincinnati Public Schools, the city of Eastlake, Perry Township and Perry Public Library. The local governmental bodies' data are expected to be added to the site in the coming months.

North Baltimore library staff were on hand for Tuesday's announcement, including Director Connie Phillips, Assistant Director Lori Kaufman and Fiscal Officer Jody Karhoff.



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For entities like the North Baltimore library, having their own site full of spending information is free — the cost is borne by the treasurer's office, said Mandel. All they need to do is provide their files electronically.

He said he hopes the effort will be an antidote to voter cynicism, noting he has heard from Ohioans who have said: "This thing is giving me more confidence in the system again."

Mandel said during his remarks that the website is making state employees "think twice before making expenditures now." That's being seen most strongly in travel.

"I think it'll trickle down to all different types of expenses," he said.

He said some in the media have even begun using the data available on the site to write about financial matters.

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