

Ohioan first woman killed in mine

LEXINGTON, Ky. (AP) — A year-end report released this week by the state says an Ohio woman has become the first female killed in a coal mining accident in Kentucky.

The report by the Department of Mines and Minerals said Sherry LaGace, 31, mother of four, was among the 45 persons who died in Kentucky coal-mining accidents last year.

C.C. Smith, business manager of the Mines and Minerals office in Lexington, said the death of Ms. LaGace was "the first of record" for a woman in a coal-mine mishap in the state.

"She wasn't a women's liberationist, far from it," Mrs. Ruby Legg, her mother, said Thursday. "She just loved the outdoors and

she didn't care for housework."

Ms. LaGace was the first woman hired as a bus driver in Lorain, Ohio. And she traveled to Pike County, Ky., in 1973, with the idea of becoming one of the first women in coal mining.

"She wanted to be first and she wanted to be tops," said a brother, Roy Legg. "That is why she became the first woman bus driver in Lorain."

When she arrived in Kentucky, Ms. LaGace was the only woman among 20 to pass a test for operators of heavy coal-mining equipment, her mother said.

The Mines and Minerals report said she was killed Oct. 25 when a heavy duty scraper

she was operating stalled and overturned on a steep hill at a Hol-Acc Corp. strip mine near Pikeville.

She died Dec. 26 in the Cleveland (Ohio) Clinic, where she was taken after treatment at Pikeville.

Harold Plummer, project manager for Hol-Acc said Ms. LaGace was "very good at her work. She kept up with the men and she had the same production record as the men in her crew."

He said she also was paid the same as the men — \$8.05 an hour — for operating heavy equipment.

Plummer said Hol-Acc employs two other women as "flag people" at its Belfry mine.

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