

Southside High School property history

This 83-acre property, straddling the city of Elmira/town of Southport border, has been used for manufacturing since 1887.

• **1887-1909:** E.W. Payne & Sons produces high-speed steam engines.
 • **1909-1935:** Morrow Manufacturing Co. makes drill-chucks, machine parts and tools for machine trade.
 • **1935:** Elmira Industries Inc. buys idle Morrow factory, offers it free to Remington Rand if the company will locate in Elmira.
 • **1936:** Remington Rand begins manufacturing typewriter parts.
 • **1942:** Under government order, Building 88

("N Plant") is built on south portion of property to manufacture World War II bomb sights designed by Carl L. Norden. This is currently the primary building left on the site.
 • **1946:** Norden bomb sight production ends; Remington Rand moves some operations from northern part of property into N Plant.
 • **Late 1948:** Remington Rand moves its adding machine assembly department to the N Plant.
 • **1963:** Sperry Rand Corp. buys \$1 million in equipment to modernize, redesign

plant. Sperry Rand operations include cleaning, heat-treating, polishing, plating, stripping and metal blackening.
 • **1972:** Sperry Rand closes plant.
 • **1973:** Sperry Rand deeds site to Chemung County Industrial Development Agency for \$1.
 • **1974:** Chemung County IDA leases site to Westinghouse Corp., which uses property primarily for warehousing.
 • **1977:** IDA sells north portion of site to Elmira City School District. Construction

begins on new Southside High School.
 • **1979:** Southside High opens.
 • **1980:** American LaFrance purchases Westinghouse's lease of the remaining 47.7 acres.
 • **1982-85:** American LaFrance manufactures, assembles fire engines at plant.
 • **1985:** Figgie International, owner of American LaFrance, obtains title to its portion of property from the Chemung County IDA.

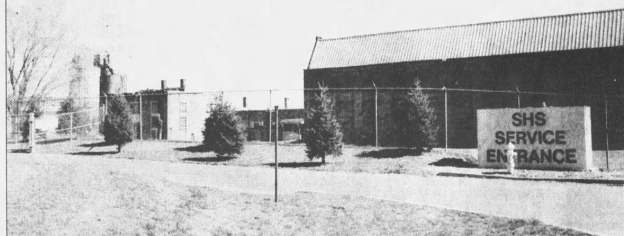
• **1985-present:** No major industrial use of site. Currently, property partially occupied by a wood pallet construction and reconditioning company, a bridge manufacturing company, a firm warehousing old rail cars and parts, and a business recycling computers.
 • **1987:** U.S. Environmental Protection Agency lists the 83-acre parcel on its low-priority cleanup list after concluding it's a potential hazardous waste site. New York state Department of Environmental Conservation has listed site as potential candidate for inclusion on state's registry of inactive hazardous waste disposal sites.

Source: New York state Department of Environmental Conservation

Star-Gazette graphic



This undated photo shows the Remington Rand plant, which was razed in 1977 to build Southside High School in Elmira.



MARIA STRINNI/Star-Gazette

Southside: Poisons under school

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There are five to seven abandoned petroleum tanks buried 15 to 25 feet beneath the school's gymnasium and indoor swimming pool, said Tony LaSorte Jr., a health and safety hygienist for the Schuyler-Chemung-Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services. School officials knew about the tanks when they built the school in 1978. LaSorte said Friday while explaining documents detailing air quality and groundwater studies conducted on the property in the mid-1970s. The Star-Gazette filed a Freedom of Information request to obtain the documents. The school district has known since 1987 about oil leaking from the tanks after a neighbor, in 1986, noticed an oil sheen on Miller's Pond, located about 600 yards southeast of the school, LaSorte said. The oil pollution in Miller's Pond led to testing in 1988 of the school property and an adjacent 26 acres southeast of the school around the pond. Test results released in 1987 noted high concentrations of fuel oil in groundwater and soil. The oil is scheduled to be cleaned up, beginning in three to six weeks, said Scott Rodabaugh, an environmental engineer with the New York state Department of Environmental Conservation who is overseeing the cleanup.

However, pond water is still being pumped into the school for use in a closed-loop system that never comes in contact with students and staff, LaSorte said. Both Rodabaugh and LaSorte said there is no proof that the contaminants are linked to the cancer in the 13 students. School and county health officials also want to calm fears that the school's drinking water is unsafe. They noted that the drinking water is separate from the pond and groundwater, and is safe and clear of pollutants. In about two months, the conservation department will pump oxygen deep into the ground to activate bacteria that will eat the oil, LaSorte said. It will take about a year to clean the oil from the school property and probably two or three years to remove the oil from the property southeast of the school, Rodabaugh added. The oil still leaches into the pond from surrounding soil, Rodabaugh and LaSorte said. Small amounts of an industrial solvent — trichloroethane — were found in a test well drilled in the mid-'70s near the school's running track, according to a report filed by the conservation department. But that solvent is 15 to 16 feet below ground and is not a health hazard, LaSorte said. Nothing is being done to remove the solvents because they're in small

concentrations in isolated locations, Rodabaugh said. The chemicals are expected to naturally dilute in the groundwater and soil, he said. "It's real important that the public know that no oil or solvents were found on the surface soil," LaSorte said. That explanation doesn't ease Julie Patros' concerns. She is a registered nurse at St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira, and her son, Thomas, a 1997 graduate of Southside, was told he had cancer while a student there. "I don't believe that they won't have contact with it," Patros said. "This stuff has been in the ground for 50 years or better. It will work its way up. When we have floods, the water table will rise. When the kids, the athletes, are out there touching the ground and breathing the air, they're bound to have contact with it." The school's air, inside and out, also was tested for contaminants on Nov. 4, 1997, LaSorte said. Trace amounts of various solvents and chemicals, from benzene to tetrachloroethene, were found in the air, according to the test report. But those amounts could have come from other sources, such as per-

fumes or marker pens, LaSorte said. "They could be the result of so many sources, like the cleaning solutions we use or the paints and varnishes," LaSorte said. "You could find those chemicals in the air at any school in the nation." But that is not a comfort to Patros. "If it's going to take two years to clean it up, what are they going to do to protect the students for the next two years?" Patros said. "I'm sorry, but we pay taxes, and they have a responsibility for our children's health and welfare." The Chemung County Health Department, after learning about Southside students who have cancer, has begun gathering informa-

tion to try to persuade the state Health Department to investigate. In addition, a public meeting will be held at 7 p.m. May 2 in the Southside High School auditorium with parents, City Council members and state environmental and health officials to discuss the problem.

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