

Site given clean bill of health

Southside High School sits on former industrial site



Sutton St.



Southside High School was built on part of an 83-acre property formerly owned by Remington Rand. Portions of the property have been used for industrial manufacturing since the turn of the century.

KEY:
Factory buildings in 1931

Super St.

S. Main St.

Southside High School building outline

Allen St.

SOURCE: Sanborn Fire Insurance maps

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■ Former factory clear of toxins, is no longer a safety risk.

CONCERN on the SOUTHSIDE

Meeting planned

By JIM PFIFFER AND HEATHER DUNCAN
Star-Gazette

Representatives from the state and Chemung County health departments, the state Department of Environmental Conservation, and city of Elmira and school officials will hold a meeting to address the public's concerns at 7 p.m. May 2 in the Southside High School auditorium.

The cleanup of industrial wastes at the former American LaFrance facility on Elmira's Southside is done, and the property is not a health hazard, say state health officials.

The cleanup included the removal of tons of contaminated soil, electrical equipment and tanks containing small amounts of oils, gasoline and solvents.

The property, used for industrial manufacturing since 1887, is next to Southside High School.

The contamination and cleanup concern nearby residents, students and parents, who recently requested a school district investigation because, since 1987, at least 13 students have been found to have cancer.

Six of those students are currently enrolled at the 1,100-student school.

The four-month cleanup was completed in March and paid for by Scott Technologies Inc., the Mayfield, Ohio, company that owns the 48-acre property. Work was done under the supervision of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Scott Technologies bought the American LaFrance property in 1997. American LaFrance, which built fire engines, was the last manufacturing business on the property, before it closed in 1985. The school was built in 1978-79 on land once owned by American LaFrance.

In another project, the conservation department is treating soil contaminated with oil on the school property.

In the meantime, the state Health Department is conducting an investigation into the apparent high incidence of cancer. However, there has been no evidence or information released by anyone or any agency to connect the cancer

with contaminants found on either property.

But the contaminated soil on the American LaFrance site did contain hazardous wastes, some in levels 1,000 times higher than allowed by the conservation department.

Those high concentrations of wastes included the metals, arsenic and beryllium, as well as polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs — all of which can be health hazards in high concentrations.

PAHs are produced when fossil fuels, garbage, wood and other organic materials are burned. They usually exist as ash, cinders, charcoal and other burned materials.

"The levels of beryllium and arsenic were not considered a concern at the site, since the levels that were found are consistent with typical background concentrations," said Kris Smith, a spokeswoman with the state Health Department.

Additionally, state health officials say they are not aware of anyone coming in contact with the contaminants.

"Since the areas that reservation department is treating within a fenced portion of the property, these areas were not, and are not readily accessible to students and staff of the high school," Smith said.

However, breathing air contaminated with PAHs and arsenic could be harmful, according to the Agency for

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Sun, Mar 24, 2019