

# A struggle to unearth firm links

■ Environment one risk of many when pinpointing cancer.

**CONCERN** Non the  
**SOUTHSIDE**

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Imagine confetti falling to the floor. Watch where it lands. In some places, it's in clumps. In others, the bits are spread far and wide.

That's how cancer affects communities, some experts say. Others say cancer cases aren't as random as that — they're statistically significant.

But linking clusters of cancer with an outside influence, such as the environment, has never been easy. In fact, there are only a handful of cases in which cancer has been scientifically tied to an environmental contaminant.

Yet many residents on Elmira's Southside want to know: Are there dangerous chemicals around Southside High School, and if so, are the chemicals to blame for cancers found in at least 40 current and former students?

In May, the state Department of Health and Department of Environmental Conservation launched an investi-

"If something isn't known for sure, I'm not going to feel confident in sending my kids back to school. ... My daughter watched her friend die of cancer. They're very concerned about this."

Linda Walton, whose two kids attend Southside High

gation into possible contamination of the Elmira school at 777 S. Main St., which was built on a former industrial site.

Officials from both agencies expect to present their preliminary findings during a public meeting next month. No date has been set, but officials expect to hold the meeting before school opens in September, said Claire Pospisil,

See **CANCER/10A**

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