

### Schools: New leader denies conflict of interest

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ple will see a conflict in his two roles in the Southside investigation.

"But I think those who are willing to observe and listen will see there's not a conflict," Kump said, pointing out that the county Health Department, not the school district, has been the lead agency in the investigation for some time.

The county and state health departments are collecting information on current and former Southside students who contracted cancer. The school is built on a former industrial site next to a former hazardous waste site.

Kump acknowledged that the school board has a watchdog role, but he said that as board president,

he is still only one member of that board.

"I'm the leader, but no individual has any more say than another," he said. "We have nothing to hide. I'm eager to hear the newest test results."

The issue of conflict of interest came up during the board meeting, but not in relation to the Southside

investigation. Donahue expressed concern that as school board president, Kump's relationship with the superintendent might be compromised on union and personnel issues because Kump's wife is a teacher in the district.

"There was a question about that when I first ran for the board," Kump said. "But I feel that in the last three years, there hasn't been a conflict. I have always stuck to confidentiality."

After the election, Kump expressed excitement about working with new Superintendent Laura Sherwood, who attended her first school board meeting Wednesday. He added that he hopes to be instrumental in continuing the board's efforts to create more open communication between the district and the public.

After the election, the board discussed the Southside investigation. Pierce read a letter from the state Health Department that explained why air tests in the school were conducted with students and staff present.

At the request of a community member, the school board had

recently discussed conducting air tests inside the school while it was empty.

The letter from the state Health Department explained that tests beneath the basement floor and at the foundations of the school showed that oil gas was not being drawn into the building, and stated, "We see no reason for tests to be conducted inside a building that has been closed 10 to 14 days" because they would not represent realistic exposure conditions at the school.

"I believe it's in our best interest to follow the department of health's recommendations," Sherwood told the board. But she plans to discuss it with state health officials.

"I agree that there might be community support for more tests, but if there's no scientific evidence to support them, then we lose some credibility," said board member Paul Sartori.

In other business, district superintendents reported that construction of sixth-grade classrooms at Ernie Davis Middle School is on schedule, and a team of parents has been established to monitor the progress of the sixth-grade transition.

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