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Key players

Joseph Farinola

FARINOLA

Position: Interim superintendent of Elmira City School District.

Education: Bachelor's degree in industrial arts from Oswego State College; master of science in elementary education Oswego State College; doctorate in educational administration from SUNY Albany.

Experience: Superintendent of Monroe 1 Board of Cooperative Educational Services for 14 years; superintendent of Lawrence Township public schools for four years; assistant superintendent Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga BOCES for seven years; special education and industrial arts teacher.

Thomas Kump

KUMP

Position: Director of environmental health at the Chemung County Health Department.

Education: Bachelor's degree in petroleum engineering; licensed professional engineer.

Experience: Four years as assistant engineer at Chemung County Health Department; 2½ years as supervisor of facility planning and safety compliance for the Elmira City School District; seven years in current position.

Tony LaSorte Jr.

LaSORTE

Position: Health and safety hygienist for the Schuyler-Chemung-Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services.

Education: Bachelor's degree in chemistry, minor in mathematics; five years of post-graduate work in medicine and chemistry; one of about 6,000 certified industrial hygienists in the country.

Experience: 15 years as an industrial hygienist, the last almost seven years with BOCES.

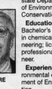
Gerry McDonald

Position: Investigator, Bureau of Toxic Substance Assessment, New York state Department of Health.

Education: Information not provided by state Department of Health.

Experience: McDonald has conducted many investigations concerning chemical impacts on indoor and outdoor air quality from petroleum spills, hazardous waste sites and chemical spills. He also helps determine how air-flow patterns and building dynamics affect air quality. McDonald is often called upon to help evaluate environmental quality and recommend ways to reduce exposure.

Dr. Ralph Moore



MOORE

Position: Elmira City School District school physician.

Education: University of Rochester Medical School with residencies at universities of Rochester and Colorado.

Experience: 30 years in general pediatrics.

Robert Page

PAGE

Position: Health Center director/public health director for Chemung County Health Department.

Education: Bachelor of arts degree in liberal arts from Grove City College; bachelor of science in business administration from Elmira College.

Experience: 28 years of experience in hospital and health care administration.

Scott Rodabaugh

RODABAUGH

Position: Environmental engineer with the New York state Department of Environmental Conservation.

Education: Bachelor's degree in chemical engineering; licensed professional engineer.

Experience: 13 years as an environmental engineer with the Department of Environmental Conservation.

Mike Smith

SMITH

Position: Chemung County Fire and Emergency Management director.

Education: Graduated from old Southside High School; attended St. John Fisher College, Rochester.

Experience: 30 years in fire service.

School: Few questioned Southside site when school was built in 1970s

Continued from Page 1A

ruled out. No one said there was contaminated soil there."

Many others involved in the decision to build the new Southside High on South Main Street can't be located, aren't talking or are dead.

Choosing the site

The old Southside school on Pennsylvania Avenue — now home to the Chemung County Human Resources Building — was landlocked, surrounded by homes and streets.

Although 20 to 26 neighboring homes, mostly behind the old school, were purchased and demolished, the school still didn't have sufficient room to expand and build athletic fields large enough to qualify for state financial aid, Zaccarine said.

In addition, the old brick building had been damaged in 1972 by storms from Hurricane Agnes, which inflicted $290 million in damage to Chemung County alone — especially on Elmira's Southside. Meanwhile, the county's population had grown slightly from 1960 to 1970, to 101,537 from 98,706.

School officials learned of a federal grant that would finance 80 percent of the cost of building an entirely new school.

"We built an $18 million new school with $15 million from federal and state funds," Zaccarine said. "That saved the local taxpayers a lot of money. It would have cost us more to renovate the existing school."

The district considered building the new school where Southport Correctional Facility is today, south of Cedar Street in Southport. Then the Remington Rand gift horse opened its mouth.

The project ran into problems when test wells drilled for construction purposes in 1977 showed widespread fuel oil contamination underground. Later, workers uncovered thick concrete foundations and buried storage tanks that would be costly to remove, Zaccarine said.

The test-well contamination report was received by Streeter Associates of Elmira, the construction manager for the $18 million project.

> "Hindsight is always 20-20, but certainly it should have raised some red flags back then. It seems to me that somebody was not seeing those flags."
>
> James Hare, Elmira council member, 6th District

"I haven't a clue on how we dealt with that," said Charlie Streeter, president of Streeter, the company that oversaw the scores of subcontractors who worked on the school. "I was here at the time, but not directly connected with the project. And none of our employees who were involved with the project are here now."

Ronald Kintz of Pine City, who served on the school board from 1969 to 1979, at times as president and vice president, said, "It seemed like a good deal for both of us" — the district and Remington Rand. The company had closed its plant in 1972.

Kintz said he did not remember any concerns about contaminated land or any reasons to suspect that the property was polluted.

It is not known if factories like the ones on the 83-acre Southside industrial site commonly used metals such as tungsten, chrome steel, beryllium and mercury — some of which are toxic and others that, in high concentrations, can cause cancer.

In the mid-1970s, however, there were neither Superfund laws nor the myriad state environmental safety regulations and mandatory tests in place now.

Contamination wasn't big issue

"Back in the 1960s and '70s nobody was required to make reasonable inquiries about underground storage tanks or possible contamination," said David Munro, an assistant New York state attorney general who works in the attorney general's environmental protection bureau.

"Today you can't stick your head in the sand. You have a duty to make a reasonable inquiry as to if the site's contaminated," Munro said.

Today, a new school requires scores of environmental tests, public hearings, archaeological studies, inspections and approval by state officials, said Barbara Boardman, project manager of the office of facilities planning for the New York State Education Department.

"We tell people today that if they want to build a new school, they have to work on it for two to three years before they can expect to break ground," Boardman said.

The ground the new Southside was built on was almost surrounded by manufacturing companies, said John Keefe, an Elmira City Council member from 1979 to 1980 who opposed construction of a new school and favored expanding the old school to preserve the local tax base.

When Southside High School was built, Keefe said, a number of industrial facilities had been located or were in operation within six blocks of the high school site. These facilities were Chemung Foundry, the Pennsylvania Railroad car shops, American LaFrance and Remington Rand.

"It's inexplicable to me as to why they would build there," said Elmira City Council member James Hare, whose council district encompasses Southside High School. Hare is a teacher at the school.

"Hindsight is always 20-20, but certainly it should have raised some red flags back then," Hare said. "It seems to me that somebody was not seeing those flags."

Hare was among a group of officials and parents who three weeks ago asked the Elmira school board to investigate the possible link of 13 known cancer cases among current or former students to the campus' environmental past.

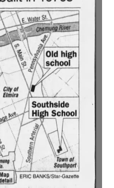
Hare said that he doesn't want to point fingers.

"Building a school is a collective process involving lots of people," Hare said. "And consciousness of the environment today is lot different than it was 20 years ago."

Meanwhile, state environmental regulators say the oil that was found several years ago to be seeping from the campus into local waterways is being cleaned up and isn't a health hazard.

No one to date has attributed any contamination to the cancer cases.

The industrial property next to the school was cleaned of industrial wastes contaminated with various metals, solvents and burned organic wastes. Old storage tanks containing paint cleaners, oils and gasoline also were removed from the former American LaFrance plant site. The four-month cleanup there was completed in March.



ERIC BANKS/Star-Gazette

Community can learn more at meeting

Star-Gazette

A panel of Chemung County and New York state health and environmental experts and school officials will answer questions about the safety of Southside High School, built on a former industrial site, at a public meeting at 7 p.m. today in the school's auditorium.

Concerns about the school and the health of its students surfaced last month after several parents and two Elmira City Council members asked the Elmira school board to examine why 13 current and former students at the school of 1,100 have been found to have cancer since 1997.

The school, at 777 S. Main St., is built on an 83-acre industrial site that was home to a number of factories making everything from typewriters to bomb parts and fire engines.

State officials conducted tests at and around the site in 1996, after residents noticed an oil sheen on Miller's Pond, about 500 yards east of the school. While earlier tests focused on petroleum products, which are present at the site, a new battery of tests is slated to begin next week to identify any metal and chemical contaminants there.

Tuesday's meeting will be moderated by Thomas Kump, director of environmental health at the Chemung County Health Department. The meeting provides an opportunity for the community to ask questions about the site, past and future tests, and what is likely to happen next.

School board members, City Council members and county legislators also plan to attend the meeting.

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ELMIRA CINEMAS 10
Arnot Mall 739-3533
BARGAIN MATINEES BEFORE 6 P.M.
visit us at www.twane.com
FLINTSTONES IN VIVA ROCK VEGAS (PG) 11:50; 2:05; 4:20; 6:50; 9:00
WHERE THE HEART IS (PG-13) 11:30; 2:00; 4:30; 7:00; 9:35
FREQUENCY (PG-13) 11:45; 2:15; 4:45; 7:15; 9:50
U-571 (PG-13) 11:40; 2:10; 4:40; 7:10; 9:45
GOSSIP (R) 2:40; 5:00; 10:00
28 DAYS (PG-13) 12:00; 2:20; 4:50; 7:20; 9:40
KEEPING THE FAITH (PG-13) 12:40; 3:30; 6:30; 9:20
RULES OF ENGAGEMENT (R) 12:30; 3:20; 6:45; 9:30
RETURN TO ME (PG) 12:15; 7:30
ROAD TO EL DORADO (PG) 12:10; 2:30; 4:35; 7:05
SKULLS (PG-13) 9:10
ERIN BROCKOVICH (R) 12:20; 3:10; 6:40; 9:25

ARCADIA THEATRE
Showtimes for May 2, Tuesday
U-571 (PG-13) 6:50; 9:15
RULES OF ENGAGEMENT (R) 7:00; 9:30
THE FLINTSTONES: VIVA ROCK VEGAS (PG) 6:40; 8:45
THE SKULLS (PG-13) 6:50; 9:15
Tuesday - All Seats - $3.50
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Family donates $22M for college

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Fri, Mar 29, 2019

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