

Southside: Testing to include field near school

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choose surface soil testing locations, probably in the bald spots and in a garden kept by resident Rodney VanGalder.

"We were not aware that people were using that area," Peachey said. "That was information we got last week. I'm not sure the current owner even knows about that."

VanGalder, 71, has grown flowers and vegetables in the field behind his home for at least 25 years. The Remington Rand and American LaFrance employee had prostate

cancer a decade ago. He has been in remission for eight years.

VanGalder said he does not believe there is a connection between his cancer and possible contamination in the field. "Maybe if you were right out there working in that spot, it would be bad," he said. "But I'm 500 or 600 feet away."



VANGALDER

Still, he can name nine people within a block of his home who had cancer or have died of cancer, one of whom is Scott Austin.

There is a fence between the Oakdale homes and the field, but at least five homeowners have put holes in the fence behind their houses to improve access, Ed Austin said. One neighbor mows a portion of the field to keep deer away.

It's also an area children have frequented over the years. "Every kid in the neighborhood has played there at one time or another," Van-

Galder said.

At one time, the Southport Recreation League approached Scott Technologies, the successor to American LaFrance, about using the area for new baseball fields, said Southport Recreation and Youth Services Director Dan Drake. The league was told the area was too contaminated to be used, Drake said.

"I'm fighting mad," Ed Austin said, struggling against tears as he recalled Scott Austin dying in his arms.

"I don't want other neighbors going through this, losing children. It's not just the high school, it's the whole area."

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