

School safety divides hopefuls

By HEATHER DUNCAN
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The four candidates for three school board seats in Elmira say they believe the board should be diligent in pushing for answers about a possible high cancer rate at Southside High School. But they differ in how large a role they would play as board members.

The high school, which opened in 1979 after being built on a former industrial property and next to a former hazardous waste site, has been the subject of investigation since parents and City Council members asked the school board to examine a possible high cancer rate there.

The school board asked the Chemung County Health Department to become the lead investigator, and now the New York State Health Department is involved. State health and environmental agencies this week began more intensive testing of the campus.

Thomas Kump, director of environmental health for Chemung County and a school board member, has been in charge of collecting information about more former students who had cancer.

Kump and Robert Donahue, another incumbent, are up for re-election Tuesday. Challengers are

former teacher Paul Vincent and Patrick Gilboy, a state correction officer.

Kump said he does not believe the school board has a major role in the investigation at Southside.

"All the preliminary information shows that it's not really a problem with the school site," he said. "I think the search for the cause is expanding to the community, and the county health department would handle that."

As environmental health director, Kump organized a panel of experts for a public meeting last week about the cancer cases.

Although he has two leadership roles in the investigation, Kump does not believe they create a conflict of interest. "I acknowledged up front it could be perceived as a conflict," he said. "But I have been very careful to let people know which role I am playing, and I haven't heard it as an issue."

Donahue, the board vice president, agrees with Kump that the school is probably not linked to the cancer cases.

"I am comfortable that the school is safe now," he said. "(The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the health department) are going the extra mile to see that no stone is

ever going to alleviate everyone's

concerns."

Donahue said he would like to find out more about what was done, and what was known, by school officials and contractors when Southside was built.

Patrick Gilboy, who has two daughters at Riverside Elementary School who eventually will attend Southside, thinks those who were around when those decisions were made may be covering up their mistakes.

"It seems like maybe they are hiding something," he said. "If I'm elected, I won't try to hide anything. I'll try not to whitewash it. I think that if the school board made a mistake in the past, it ought to own up to it."

Gilboy said that after the results of this week's soil and air tests at the school are ready, the board should hold another community forum. Gilboy did not attend the first one.

"And if the tests come back positive and the statute of limitations isn't up, we should go after the previous landowners," Remington Rand and American LaFrance, Gilboy said.

Candidate Paul Vincent, a former fifth-grade teacher at Hendy Avenue Elementary School, said he believes the school board should leave the problem in the hands of health and environmental officials for now. He remains skeptical of the con-

nection between cancer and the school. "Teachers have been there 20 years and they aren't sick," he said. "If something is there, why aren't they getting it?"

And the board should continue to seek information about where former petroleum tanks and contaminated soil were taken, if they were removed during construction of the school. "Somebody had the blueprints," he said. "Somebody knew where that was dumped."

The candidates say other issues, not the Southside problem, are driving their interest in running for the school board. Vincent said he wants to help close the gap between different levels of management, building trust between teachers, administrators and the school board.

Gilboy said he would like to create greater consistency among the schools, so that children have access to the same programs and textbooks. He also supports creating a "gifted and talented" program for advanced students.

Donahue looks forward to overseeing the district's massive construction and renovation he helped bring about, with the new superintendent, Laura Sherwood, whom he helped choose. He also wants to be sure the district is properly implementing the new tougher state standards.

Candidate information

Robert Donahue

- Age: 50.
- Home: Smith Street, Elmira.
- Job: U.S. Postal Service employee.
- Family: Wife, Kathleen, and two grown sons.
- Political experience: Seven years on the school board; current school board vice president.



Patrick Gilboy

- Age: 36.
- Home: Candidate asked that his address not be released.
- Job: A correction officer at Elmira Correctional Facility and driver for Coach USA.
- Family: Wife and three daughters: a first-grader, second-grader and a daughter who will be in kindergarten next year.
- Political experience: Ran for Elmira City Council seat in 1995 and lost.



Thomas Kump

- Age: 37.
- Home: Lovell Avenue, Elmira.
- Job: Director of environmental health for Chemung County Health Department; Chemung County code enforcement officer.
- Family: Wife, Elaine, a teacher at Elmira Free Academy, and two grown step-children.
- Political experience: Three years on the school board.



Paul Vincent

- Age: 56.
- Home: Hendy Creek Road, Pine City.
- Job: Fifth-grade teacher at Hendy Avenue Elementary School, taught in the district 33 years.
- Family: Wife, Helen, a teacher at Ridge Road Elementary School in Horseheads; two grown children, Mark and Julie.
- Political experience: None.



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