

District eyes wider scope to find alums

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The Elmira school district likely will recruit help from a company that publishes alumni directories in its effort to notify Southside High School alums about a state cancer cluster investigation.

The district and members of the Southside Advisory Committee have talked with representatives from Harris Publishing in White Plains, N.Y., about locating roughly 7,000 students who have attended the school since it opened in 1978.

The district, with the help of medical professionals and state Department of Health officials, has written a letter to inform Southside alumni

CONCERN TO THE SOUTHSIDE

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of the state's cancer cluster investigation and has drafted a survey to solicit medical information from the former students on behalf of the state. Alumni will be told to mail the medical information directly to the state.

Representatives from the state Department of Health will present information

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State officials open doors to talk with residents

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Anyone with concerns regarding the environmental cleanup at the former American LaFrance can meet Dec. 5 with representatives from the state Department of Environmental Conservation and Department of Health.

The informal question-and-answer period will be held from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. Dec. 5 at the Southport Fire Department, 1001 Carl St.

State officials set up the public meeting in response to questions asked by community members during an Aug. 23 meeting about the state's investigation of environmental contamination and a possible cancer cluster at Southside High School.

At the August meeting, some Southside alumni and residents who live near the school asked the conservation department what contamination was found from 1981 to 1987 and what was cleaned up at the former American LaFrance site, an industrial property adjacent to Southside.

Tests conducted by the state this summer show two additional areas at the industrial site that will require cleanup. Since 1987, the 48-acre site has been home heavy industrial use. Similar activities occurred on the school property before Southside was built in 1978.

The state has found contamination in the dirt buried beneath the school's athletic fields and recreation areas, but the contamination is at such low levels that it does not require cleanup, unlike the former LaFrance property that was cleaned up in 1989.

In 1998, the state required that Scott Technologies Inc., the owner of the former LaFrance site, remove about 1,000 cubic yards of contaminated dirt. That soil contained high levels of metals and some petroleum-related contaminants called polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs, according to the conservation department.

Scott Technologies also removed 11 tanks of waste oil and 85 capacitors that contained polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, a synthetic chemical compound used to lubricate electrical equipment. PCBs are no longer made, the conservation department reports.

PCBs and PAHs have been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals and are considered possible carcinogens to humans as well, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

In response to neighbors' concerns about the former LaFrance property, the state did additional tests this summer on a recreation area on the southeast portion of the industrial site. Those tests showed high levels of metals that will require cleanup.

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