

Youthful Oxy engineer guides NO LOOW 'fight to the finish'

By DON DEPERRO
Gazette Staff Writer

LEWISTON — The nondescript sign on Pletcher Road offers a name but little clue of what actually lies at the Niagara Falls Storage Site.

Behind the seemingly endless chain-link fence are tons of radioactive residues left from the development of the first atomic bomb during World War II and other wastes shipped from Belgium and other parts of the world.

The former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works is a testimonial to man's lack of foresight.

Some 40 years after the atomic bomb's development, "We are still trying to find out what to do with the stuff," as Town Councilman Alvin Ogg once put it.

Further, the federal Department of Energy (DOE) is caught in bind following a much publicized report. On the one hand, Town Board members were told of plans to secure the 191-acre site. Then a report done

under DOE contract by Bechtel National Inc. revealed plans to turn the site into a regional repository for radioactive wastes — permanently.

Steven Nathanson, an environmental engineer for the Occidental Chemical Corp. and the designated spokesman for NO LOOW, has helped organize a group of citizens who have offered a "fight to the finish" against the DOE.

Says Nathanson: "We are a town that offers a variety of age groups. The seniors have seen this town flourish into the beautiful residential and rural area it is. The middle-aged have strived for a comfortable way of life.

"And the younger residents were taught the values of their elders and want to share in their future."

It is that future for which NO LOOW is fighting.

NO LOOW, according to Nathanson, has no limits to its membership. "The group is not only the Town of Lewiston but also the entire county of Niagara."

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He explains, "The day that one of those waste-hauling trucks turns over on the North Grand Island Bridge I think would cancel the entire tourist season for the year."

Nathanson, 27, of Curtis Court, operates with polish.

"People have stopped and realized that we are the government — the DOE is only a group of federal employees. But we are the government.

"Those people, (Bechtel and DOE officials in Oak Ridge, Tenn.) just because of the geographical displacement, have not realized what the people in Niagara County have been subjected to in terms of waste disposal.

"They don't live near it. They don't drive by it. They don't read about it every day in their newspapers.

"We do."

The Ohio native also expresses concern for the elderly residents of the area.

"There's no reason in the world why they should have to live in fear. You don't live in fear in East Amherst, why should it be any different in Lewiston? For that matter, they don't live in fear in Washington, D.C."

The residents fear what is planned for the LOOW site for a number of reasons, Nathanson says.

- The health of their children.

- The quality of life. ("It would no longer be present because they no longer have control over it.")

- The imminent decrease in property values.

- The ultimate fear of no longer having control of not only their lives, but of their environment.

"I've learned the environment is very cherished in people's minds. And I feel they ought to have a say about its future," Nathanson said.

Nathanson openly admits the irony of being an environmental engineer for Occidental, the company held liable for the environmental disasters perpetrated by its predecessor, the Hooker Chemical & Plastics Corp.

"That's an irony. But I think there's a different distinction here. I'm acting with NO LOOW as a citizen — not as an employee. Obviously my expertise in the area benefits the group. But I think it (the irony) pretty much stops there."

Nathanson maintains he is an environmentalist first.

"NO LOOW is the people of this county." And NO LOOW will persist, he said, "until the DOE closes up that site and moves on."