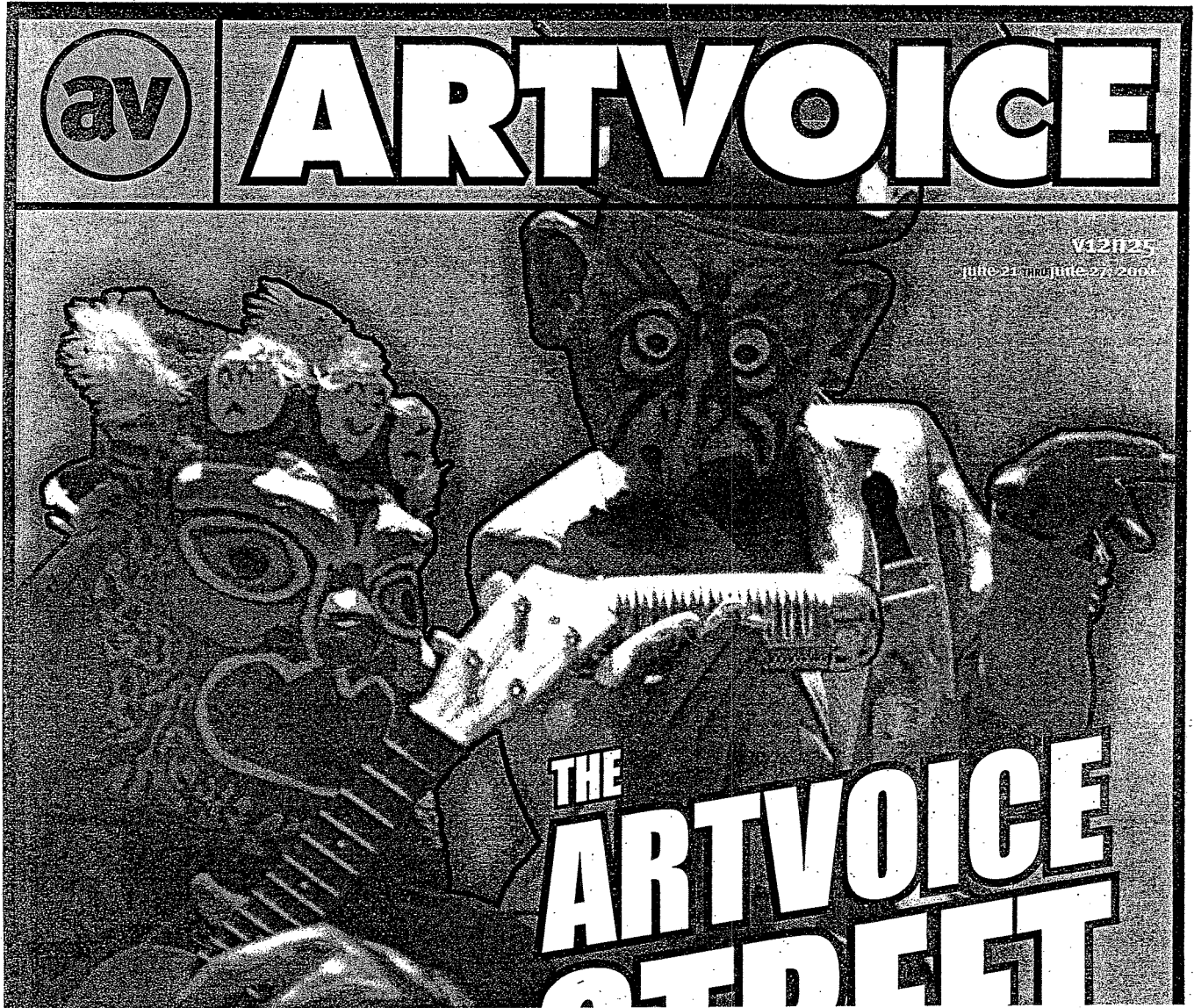


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LETTERS TO AV

THE BOMB THAT FELL ON NIAGARA

I really must express my gratitude for the enlightenment that you have provided me with through your article series concerning the Manhattan Project (AVv12n21 and v12n23).

Though fully aware of the Lewiston landfill and that many local manufacturing industries were part of the wartime effort, I was completely unaware that my former employer, TAM Ceramics, also played a role in the Manhattan Project. My shock is more stemmed from the fact that I worked within the engineering department for seven years. I literally pored over every drawing and equipment file and never once stumbled across any reference to the Manhattan Project materials being manufactured or stored on site.

To make matters worse, I was aware of barium being buried out in the area commonly referred to as "the back 40" and was on site when we uncovered such drums during an excavation—and I must state they were removed under the supervision of the DEC. However, it is disturbing to read that this same area, that I have literally walked over and through at least a thousand times,

is 50 times background level. I was totally unaware of the uranium-238, radium-226 and thorium-232.

The final kick in the head is that the environmental engineer must have been aware of this contamination and never bother to mention this fact to me.

Perhaps this explains why my name was "randomly" selected for drug testing three times in a three-year period!

Mark Williams Olcott Beach

Excellent story on "The Bomb That Fell on Niagara."

As a young soldier in the Army over 13 years ago, I trained on part of the former LOOW (Lake Ontario Ordnance Works). One corner of the site was on Balmer and I believe Lutz Road was converted into a military training site, with rifle ranges and helicopter landing areas. To us, it was referred to as "Project 38" and it was rumored to be quite toxic.

Ken Bak

I was so pleased to read your fascinating story on the legacy of nuclear weapons production on our area. Ever since I moved here in the early 1990s I have been wondering about why we

THE BOMB THAT FELL ON NIAGARA

UPPING THE STAKES IN REDEVELOPING NIAGARA FALLS

BY GEOFF KELLY • LOUIS RICCIUTI

ON Wednesday, June 13, the Restoration Advisory Board for the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works (LOOW) held a public hearing at the Lewiston-Porter School District. Ostensibly the purpose of the LOOW Restoration Advisory Board—and of any advisory board—is to offer advice to the organization that convenes the board. At least, that is the understanding of Tim Henderson, an environmental activist and a member of the LOOW Restoration Advisory Board, or RAB as it is sometimes called.

"The initial purpose of the RAB meetings," says Henderson, "as was explained to me by Congressman LaFalce in his office in the presence of a colonel from the Corps of Engineers, was to open up dialog with the residents and address their concerns. One of their biggest concerns was that they were being left out of the loop and questions were going unanswered."

In this case, the LOOW Restoration Advisory Board is intended to advise the Army Corps of Engineers concerning its efforts to investigate and hopefully remediate toxic chemical and radioactive contamination on the former LOOW site. The former LOOW site is a huge tract of mostly swampy land that straddles the towns of Lewiston and Porter in Niagara County. First purchased by the US Army in 1942 for a TNT factory, it later was used by numerous Defense Department agencies for a variety of purposes. Radioactive and chemical waste generated by local industries involved in producing materials for the first atomic bomb were—and continue to be—stored there. The Navy and Air Force experimented with high-energy jet fuels on the site. Other companies experimented with lasers and high-energy particle beams in the surrounding woods.

Though there is only circumstantial evidence to suggest this, some community residents suspect that chemical and biological warfare agents were stored and perhaps generated there during the Cold War. Incendiary bombs of the type used to annihilate the German town of Dresden in a maelstrom of fire were stored for a time at LOOW upon return shipment from Europe.

Much of that huge parcel has since been sold by the government to private buyers. Some have built homes and businesses there. There is a fish hatchery, a wetlands restoration project, and two waste management companies, Modern Landfill and Chemical Waste Management. The latter is the only dump in the Northeast that is still actively accepting hazardous chemical wastes.

The federal government still owns some of the former LOOW site, including the Niagara Falls Storage Site, a 191-acre plot on which is stored a tremendous amount of what the Army Corps of Engineers calls "low-level" radioactive waste. It is the world's largest repository of radium-226, and it is just 2,000 yards from the Lewiston-Porter Schools, which serve over 2,500 students.

The members of the LOOW Restoration Advisory Board include local residents, activists like Tim Henderson, and representatives of agencies, such as Mike Basile of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).



with plutonium and other radioactive isotopes as well as the equipment—syringes, test tubes, etc.—that were used in the experiments, all buried in decomposable wooden crates 50 years ago. But those at the meeting familiar with the history of the site felt certain that the Corps had misidentified the location of the Rochester Burial Site. And the location the Corps had pegged seemed far too small—21 feet by 21 feet—to handle the amount of waste supposedly buried there.

When asked by a board member (board members were allowed to ask questions at the end of each segment of the meeting) what “normal background” radiation levels were supposed to be, Dr. Judith Leithner of the Corps stated that “normal” would be in the range of 13,000-15,000 counts per minute (CPM); far above what others feel is the “naturally” occurring, pre-atomic bomb levels of 1,000 CPM or below. Either Leithner mis-spoke or the Corpsman who established that “normal” background level with a Geiger counter was standing on top of a reactor pile when he took his readings.

Then, a fellow named William Librizzi was introduced and allowed to make a presentation. In the Corps’ agenda handed out to all the people who came to the meeting, Librizzi was identified as a representative of the EPA. In fact, Librizzi represents a commercial vendor, the New Jersey Institute of Technology—a service provider and not an academic institution, as one might believe from its name. Librizzi was there to pitch his company’s services as a consultant on the LOOW project.

No one on the board had been told they would be hearing a sales pitch from a vendor, and no other vendors were there to make competing pitches. The board was going to be asked to vote on whether to hire Librizzi’s company that night. In other words, the Corps had set up a situation where it would be difficult for the the LOOW Restoration Advisory

There are well over 250 Superfund sites identified in Niagara and Erie Counties. That is to say nothing of dump sites which haven't made the list and which never will. There was always money to be made for someone who didn't mind hauling a few barrels of God-knows-what and dumping it into a nearby creek. And if you knew the Army was dumping haphazardly at the LOOW or at Love Canal, why shouldn't you do it too?

Niagara Falls City Councilmember John Accardo remembers his father and friends dumping barrels in Gill Creek for Hooker Chemical. A lot of people took that work, and justified it by pointing out the number of livelihoods that depended on the companies producing toxic waste. But Accardo sees the impacts—past, present and future—of environmental degradation on the physical and economic health of the community.

Accardo points out that some day in the near future the City of Niagara Falls will have to replace its aging water systems and other infrastructure. The prospect of upsetting long-buried, unaccounted-for waste materials has him worried.

"There are things buried in that soil that should never be disturbed," says Accardo.

WHAT'S NIAGARA FALLS TO DO?

Recently the City of Niagara Falls announced that it had received a \$790,000 grant to repave three seldom used streets. They are not even streets, really—they're more like unpaved alleys, rife with potholes and mud. Not many people drive on them.

One of them, Delaware Avenue, runs between Witmer Road and Hyde Park Boulevard. On one side is a junkyard full of cars piled atop one another, and on the other side is Ferro Electronics, formerly TAM Ceramics, and before that Titanium Alloy Manufacturing. The back

lot of TAM, which is separated from Delaware Avenue by a chain link fence, has been the site of much dumping. According to a DEC report, there are radium, thorium and uranium residues buried there, and radiation levels are 50 times background level. Readings taken along the road itself have yielded five to six times background levels of radiation.

There are also test wells alongside Delaware Avenue—pipes sticking out of the ground with probes on wire cable that drop deep down into holding tanks that contain some potent mixture of toxic chemicals.

This is the sort of road the City of Niagara Falls wants to repave? If radiation levels are six times background on the surface, what might they be just below the ground? What happens when the machines roll in and the dust starts flying? Will the workers be told of the potential hazard? Will neighbors? How about students at nearby Niagara University, whose athletic fields are less than a mile downwind?

A representative of the city's environmental department insists that every public project is preceded by an environmental review that takes into account site history, and that each review is designed to meet standards handed down by the DEC and the EPA. But much of Niagara Falls' environmental history is missing—events occurred and were gone, never recorded. Right now the city only performs environmental assessment of sites

that are on deck for development, moving from one to the next with blinders on. There are no plans for a comprehensive evaluation and remediation of toxic chemical and radioactive contamination in and around the city.