

GRADUATES HONORED

AND ISLAND • LEW-PORT • NIAGARA CATHOLIC • NIAGARA FALLS
GARA-WHEATFIELD • NORTH-TONAWANDA • STARPOINT • WILSON



SPECIAL SECTION INSIDE

MOVING ON
'05 GRAD SAYS
GOOD-BYE

OPINIONS/10A



NIAGARA GAZETTE

SINCE 1854

SATURDAY, JUNE 25, 2005

NIAGARA FALLS, NEW YORK

NIAGARA
IN NEWS

ANDA:
winner
ose to
3A

ORT:
workers
against
er. 5A



more
an than
ll, hot dogs
essage
stern New
ports its

esidents are
that free tickets
le to Sunday's
ons baseball
rst Niagara
ches in Niagara
port and the
as, or at the
Bayer Authority

Safety of water in question

Two renowned scientists push for testing; LOOW site considered cause of problems

BY AARON BESECKER
besecker@nnews.com

Plutonium found three years ago on a radiological dump site in northwest Niagara County and 17 years ago near the mouth of the Niagara River poses a chance of contamination to drinking and ground water, according to a pair of renowned radiation experts.

"Buried radioactive debris, which the government considered significant enough to recover and place in drums for storage eventually in Texas, could certainly have been leaching into the wells, upper aquifers and the Nia-

gara River for a long time," said Rosalie Bertell, president of the International Institute for Concern for Public Health.

There is no known safe level of plutonium exposure.

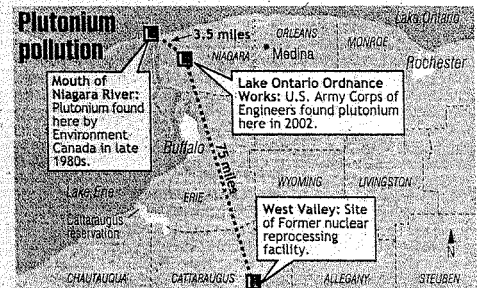
Still, Niagara County's top public health official said the situation warrants public concern, but would not conclude that potential health risks exist for any county residents.

Based on findings by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Environment Canada, the Canadian federal environmental agency, amounts of plutonium

found at two local sites create a serious health hazard. Water and air testing should be conducted, and possible evacuation and isolation of areas near the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works site should be considered, according to Bertell and Dr. Janette Sherman.

Sherman also believes plutonium in the river "more likely than not" leached from the LOOW property — the site used by the U.S. government to bury many types of radiological wastes,

SEE WATER ON PAGE 6A



NIAGARA GAZETTE

[NEW YORK LEGISLATURE]



GRAND JURY

Fatal shooting justified

COURTS: No charges will be filed against pizza

SBA ...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

The move may have delivered a blow to the most recent owner of the nine-story building named One Niagara after developer Frank Parlato Jr. foreclosed on the site in December.

"As it stands now, the building is effectively vacant," said Parlato, who is working to lease office space in the building.

Parlato said the SBA and a local office for the Environmental Protection Agency were two of the final tenants to move from the building. The Seneca Gaming Corp. moved training facilities from the building earlier this year.

The SBA announced in November it had awarded a lease to house the office at the Niagara Center on South Elmwood Avenue in Buffalo. The private office building houses a handful of other federal offices.

The local SBA office, which serves northeastern and mid-Atlantic states, as well as Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, is one of four disaster assistance offices in the country. The other three are based in Atlanta, Sacramento, Calif., and Fort Worth, Texas, said area director William E. Leggiero Jr.

Parlato said he learned of SBA's plans to move only two days before he closed on the building last winter.

"The building's expenses do not cease — for example, taxes, insurance, even electricity and so forth, and so it is incumbent on me to generate tenants who will commercially profit by being in this superb location overlooking the falls," Parlato said.

Still, Parlato remains optimistic about the future of the property. He is currently working to fill a gaping hole left by the failed AquaFalls development project to build an underground aquarium and plans to use the building for tourism and office space.

"This is a new day. This building is going to succeed," Parlato said. "There is no doubt this building is going to be a tremendous success story."

Some are anxious for the building's new history

with the AquaFalls pit to end. "It really is a cool looking building, but it was so neglected," said Amini, who worked at the site during the last two years.

Christopher Glynn, president of the Maid of the Mist Corp., pointed to the site as a disappointment in the city's downtown tourist area during a Niagara USA Chamber breakfast Wednesday.

Glynn said was disappointed at progress to fill the gaping hole and pointed to cars he saw parked in the submerged site as an example of slow progress.

"It's just shocking to us that people aren't outraged by this," Glynn said.

Parlato confirmed he had used the underground hole to park employee vehicles during a busy weekend in which parking lots open to tourists were full. He has since resumed the project to fill the AquaFalls pit.

"The real problem is that we don't have parking sufficient to accommodate the people, and I can't even begin to guess how many people leave Niagara Falls because they've got to spend \$10 to see if for a parking fee," Parlato said. "He points to me as a symptom, but the real problem is we don't have enough parking."

Guy Bax, the city's director of inspections, said the Falls sent a letter June 3 to Parlato in response to a complaint about parking that advised Parlato that he would need Planning Board approval to develop a lot on the site.

"He's not supposed to establish any parking lot without the Planning Board's review," Bax said.

Parlato said he is more than a third of the way toward filling the 40-foot pit. He said contractors have been using clean fill, including stone, concrete and a small amount of milling, to fill the site.

Parlato will also use fill from the Town of Niagara.

"I'm not doing this at breakneck speed because I realized that it couldn't be done before the tourism season started," Parlato said. "It's much more economical for me to just take my time with it and just finish it up in the fall."

Contact Denise Jewell at (716) 282-2311, Ext. 2245.

WATER...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

including those from the Manhattan Project during the WW II-era federal atomic weapons program.

"Consideration should be given to declaring the site and some of the surrounding area as off limits and closing it to all public access," Sherman wrote, in an e-mail to local environmental group Residents for Responsible Government. "Wells to measure ground water contamination, monitoring at the outfall of Four Mile Creek and air monitoring for chemical and radiological emissions should be put in place."

Sherman worked in radiation and biologic research at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory at Hunter's Point in San Francisco, and at the University of California nuclear facility. She served on the advisory board for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Toxic Substances Control Act from 1976 to 1982. She also worked as an advisor to the National Cancer Institute and the EPA.

Bertell also founded the International Medical Commission Chernobyl and was a founding member of the International Commission of Health Professionals.

Both scientists eliminated other potential sources of the plutonium in the river, including weapons testing done in the 1960s and the general proximity of the West Valley nuclear facility in Cattaraugus County.

The 1988 Environment Canada report concluded the plutonium in the Niagara River must have come from West Valley. At the time the report was written, however, plutonium in LOOW had not yet been discovered by the Army Corps.

Environment Canada was investigating water quality in the Great Lakes for its 1988 report.

In 2002, the Army Corps investigated a part of the LOOW site known as the Rochester Burial Site, and found quantities of plutonium in an animal bone, buried laboratory debris and sub-

Plutonium facts

■ **What is plutonium?** A radioactive metal discovered by nuclear chemists at the University of California at Berkeley in 1941. Wartime secrecy prevented the announcement until 1946.

■ **Where is it created?** Plutonium is created from uranium in nuclear reactors and as a by-product in commercial nuclear power reactors. The majority of plutonium was produced in government reactors designed to produce nuclear weapons. Plutonium does not normally occur in nature.

■ **How much is safe?** There is no safe level of exposure to plutonium.

■ **What are the effects of plutonium exposure?** External exposure to plutonium poses very little health risk. Internal exposure, however, is extremely hazardous. It usually stays in the body for decades, exposing the body's tissues and organs to radiation and increasing the risk of cancer. It also causes kidney damage.

Source: U.S. EPA Web site

surface soils.

Niagara County Public Health Director Paulette Kline, who was unaware of Environment Canada's 17-year-old report, said the scientists have no proof of any local water contamination.

"They are valid concerns based on the type of site (the LOOW) ... but I believe it's premature to make any kind of conclusions," she said.

Water and soil samples tested by the county in the past have never come up with any plutonium, Kline said. However, annual water tests conducted by the county health department do not test for plutonium.

Kline dismissed the scientists' claims because they are based on "incomplete scientific evidence."

Sherman, who recently appeared on "Dialogue," a radio show on WLVL, with local environmentalist Lou Ricciuti to discuss their concerns about the plutonium, is a very respected scientist but is unnecessarily alarming the public, Kline said.

"I just don't feel that she's been a part of that ongoing dialogue," Kline said. "I wouldn't make assumptions for another community."

A state health department representative said the agency is aware of tests conducted by

the U.S. Army Corps at the LOOW site. Based on those tests, the "trace amounts" of plutonium found are isolated to the site and have had no impact on the local drinking water supply, said Jeffrey W. Hammond, spokesman for the state Department of Health.

An Army Corps spokesman did not return a call seeking comment.

Army Corps reports have indicated that ground water in the region flows northwest from the LOOW site toward Lake Ontario.

Meanwhile, the county health department is moving forward with its "LOOW initiative" to gather together all existing data on the site. Officials are also currently more than one year into the planning of a well testing program, Kline said.

The initiative is based on residents' general health concerns about living near the LOOW site, and is not an outgrowth of a specific concern about plutonium.

The tests, to be done by a certified hydrogeologist, will look for 11 different categories of radioactive and chemical contaminants in both active and inactive wells in the county. Standards for the upcoming tests were developed since January of this year. Actual sampling of well water is scheduled

"They are valid concerns based on the type of site (the LOOW) ... but I believe it's premature to make any kind of conclusions."

— Niagara County Public Health Director Paulette Kline

to begin next month.

Results of the tests will help assuage residents' concerns about contamination.

"What we need to do is have some time," Kline said.

County health officials have already had plenty of time to deal with the situation, according to Ricciuti, the local environmentalist who has consistently pushed for awareness of health issues related to the LOOW site.

He was the person responsible for Sherman and Bertell's involvement in the plutonium issue locally and has been personally researching the topic for five years, tracking down various obscure documents that tell the LOOW story.

"There's a great chance that these materials have spread and created more widespread contamination," Ricciuti said.

Further contamination could have been prevented had a 1972 order from the state Health Department been enforced locally, according to Ricciuti.

Such action may have stopped "a cleanup of perhaps unprecedented scale."

"Our own health department did not follow a state health department edict," Ricciuti said. "It's been a downward slide from there."

Contact Aaron Besecker at (716) 282-2311, Ext. 2263.

CHURCH WORSHIP DIRECTORY		
PRESBYTERIAN	NON-DENOMINATIONAL	CATHOLIC
BACON MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN 166-59th St., Niag. Falls • 283-5744 Wednesday 10:00-11:30am	FORESTVIEW CHURCH OF GOD 1250 Saunders Settlement Rd., NE NY 297-6584 Wednesday 10:00-11:30am	 Welcome to St. FRANCIS OF ASSISI CHURCH