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# Sentinel

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## Lew-Port Board updated on campus environmental issues

by Terry Duffy

The Lewiston-Porter School Board and interested residents heard more on the environmental health status of the district's Creek Road campus from two leading experts at last Tuesday's board session in the Community Resource Center.

Appearing before the board to further review details of earlier campus testing were Dr. Joseph Gardella Jr., professor of Chemistry and associate dean for External Affairs at the University at Buffalo, and director of UB's Environment and Society Institute; along with Niagara County Health Department Director Paulette Kline, who is currently spearheading the Community LOOW data collection effort.

What attendees heard Tuesday, however wasn't all that new. Much of it involved testing performed last year and earlier on the Lew-Port campus which revealed varying concentrations of arsenic in a 200- by 300-foot area on the northwest area of the campus -- which the district is continuing to address.

### Another Look

So why Tuesday's visit?

Coming off last May's elections that brought new faces to the Lew-Port Board and coupled

with questions from press coverage in a local paper over the summer on Lewiston and Porter's environmental legacies, School Board President Dave Schaubert opted to take yet another look.

"...There has been a lot of press surrounding the issue of chemical and radiological waste storage in the towns of Lewiston and Porter and its impact on the safety of the campus for the students and employees," Schaubert remarked in a recent Sentinel issue. "Much of the supposed 'information' presented consisted of supposition and innuendo rather than real data."

So Tuesday's regular board meeting opened with Gardella, who recalled the most recent soil testing targeting the arsenic residues on the northeast campus corner, and in isolated areas near Creek Road, along with suggestions to the board for re-testing.

### Past Radioactive Studies

Members also heard of past studies addressing the suspected radiological contamination on the campus.

Those studies stem from concerns over the years of radioactivity at Lew-Port due to the

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## \$30,000 grant will help coordinate LOOW data

A \$30,000 grant has provided a boost to the effort "see the big picture" and coordinate data about the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works site.

The LOOW site, said to be contaminated by radioactive waste from the Manhattan Project, has been the subject of many studies. But its impact on environmental health is not fully understood.

Until the risk to public health can be properly evaluated, many believe the mere threat of problems stifles economic development.

Niagara County Legislator Lee Simonson said in addition to concerns over public health, the LOOW site presents a particular obstacle to tourism in the region.

"This project comes not a moment too soon as we attempt to wrap our minds around the complexities associated with this wasteland," Simonson said.

He said the LOOW site is the epitome of a brownfield,

but it's a much bigger problem than can be addressed with local resources, alone.

"Our future physical and economic health will depend heavily on the results of this project and will help us immeasurably in focusing on the real issues we're confronting," Simonson said.

The Niagara County Health Department received the grant for the Community LOOW Project. It was awarded by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo.

The grant will be used to help create a database of different investigations of the LOOW site and provide evaluation of that data by independent experts.

The \$200,000 Community LOOW Project was created to address a complex history of LOOW contamination with equally complicated government supervision.

"A consolidation of data is the first step to overcoming jurisdictional fragmentation at the LOOW site," said Public

Health Director Paulette Kline. She said the initiative to coordinate data is intended to address concerns about the site and high rates of unexplained areal illnesses.

"This is the first time in decades that one project has attempted to consolidate relevant data from the entire LOOW site for all chemical and radiological investigations in combination with geological evaluations," she said.

Niagara County Legislature Vice Chair Clyde Burmaster of Porter welcomed news of the latest grant. He thanked the Niagara County Health Department, the Western New York State Legislature delegation and the University at Buffalo for help in securing the grant. "Now it's time for the federal government to step up and provide its share," Burmaster said, referring to a \$95,000 appropriation request.

Ann Roberts, co-founder of the Niagara Health Science Report, said risk assessments on isolated parts of the LOOW site have been uncoordinated among the various state and federal agencies that have had jurisdiction over the site. This has led to "millions of dollars of federal, state and private monies spent on areas that may not have reflected the highest risk to public health," she said.

"Looking at the big picture will give the community confidence in the effectiveness of cleanup efforts at the LOOW site," Roberts said.

## Bootz named VP of human resources

Cynthia Bootz has recently been promoted to vice president of human resources at Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara.

Bootz has been with the agency since 1983, serving first with Rides Unlimited of Niagara, a former subsidiary of Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara. Her most recent position was as human resource director for Opportunities Unlimited.

In her new position, she will oversee the Human Resources Department and assume a leadership role in support of all of the agency's goals and challenges, while upholding its values, vision, and mission.

Bootz has an associate's degree in business administration from Niagara County Community College and has completed extensive coursework through the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations in conjunction with the Society for Human Resource Management.

## Board to re-test samples

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varied war-time production and research activities decades ago on the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works lands. These included TNT production, and later on, radioactive waste storage in certain LOOW areas to the east and north of the Lew-Port campus. At present much of what remains lies in remediated temporary storage at the Niagara Falls Storage Site to the east of Lew-Port, as well as in still-to-be-addressed cells at NFFS and in areas of Chemical Waste Management to the north.

With respect to any Lew-Port radiation concerns, Gardella and Kline reported that campus-wide soil samples were done, first in 1987 and again in 2003, in an effort to detect any problem. Surveys involved detailed gamma walk-over testing targeting such compounds as lithium, cesium and boron, to detect any radioactive contamination on the campus.

### No Contaminants

Those tests found very little if any radiological contaminants on the Lew-Port property other than the normal background levels associated with building construction materials, both said.

The findings also support statements by the Army Corps of Engineers, overseers of the NFFS property, who maintain that earlier LOOW activities had never extended to the Lew-Port campus. Recent Corps documents detailing radiation remediation activities at LOOW and NFFS dated July 2005, identify the Lew-Port campus as an "Undeveloped Area" with no peripheral radioactive problems from LOOW activities.

### Arsenic Problem

However district concerns over the aforementioned arsenic contamination remain.

Gardella, whose UB students performed the 2003 walkovers of 40 sites at Lew-Port, told the board they had uncovered arsenic contaminants in a 200-foot by 300-foot area far behind the Community Resource Center. He then discussed the Phase II 2004 arsenic findings.

Conducted by a certified independent lab contracted by Panamerican Consultants Inc. of Buffalo, these consisted of boring four feet into the ground in a 500-foot radius from the earlier 200 by 300 foot study area which had dug down six inches in 2003, Gardella said.

But he described those lab

results as "muddled," telling the board they didn't gel with his own determinations. He then proposed the board to consider additional re-testing of the samples. "The issue remains the depth of the clean-up to be performed," said Gardella.

### Wants Re-test

In specifics Gardella said he felt the independent lab's analytical procedures were not sufficient enough to address any interference from metals in the campus soils that might conflict with the arsenic findings. Thus he suggested a re-test of the area would be in order.

In response to a question by F. Warren Kahn, district counsel, on why the boring was only limited to four feet, Gardella replied, "It's impossible to come up with the right depth to test," adding he was seeking the best way to examine the arsenic exposures.

Kline told the board the arsenic contaminants at Lew-Port stemmed not from the war time LOOW activities, but from a "very heavy concentration of apple orchards" in the area dating from 1938.

"I feel currently there are no red flags here," said Kline of any perceived arsenic link to LOOW activities.

### 'High Range' Results

Still she pressed on with calls for further testing. Kline reported arsenic levels at the Lew-Port site to be in the 31.4 to 150.0 Parts Per Million area, which she said were in the "high range."

Concurring with Gardella on the need to re-test, Kline informed the board the federal EPA trigger for action is 30 PPM. "Arsenic is one of those elements where New York State is behind the bail in establishing an acceptable background level," said Kline.

She and Gardella closed their presentation with a call for a re-test of the existing arsenic samples by an alternative certified lab selected by the Panamerican group.

Soon after, the board in its regular meeting by a unanimous vote approved a measure to pursue further testing.

Interim Superintendent Don Rappold reported yesterday the district is now moving on a Request for Proposals to determine its cost as well as targeted date to start.

"We'll be moving fast on this," said Rappold, adding that he expected the work to commence over coming months.

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