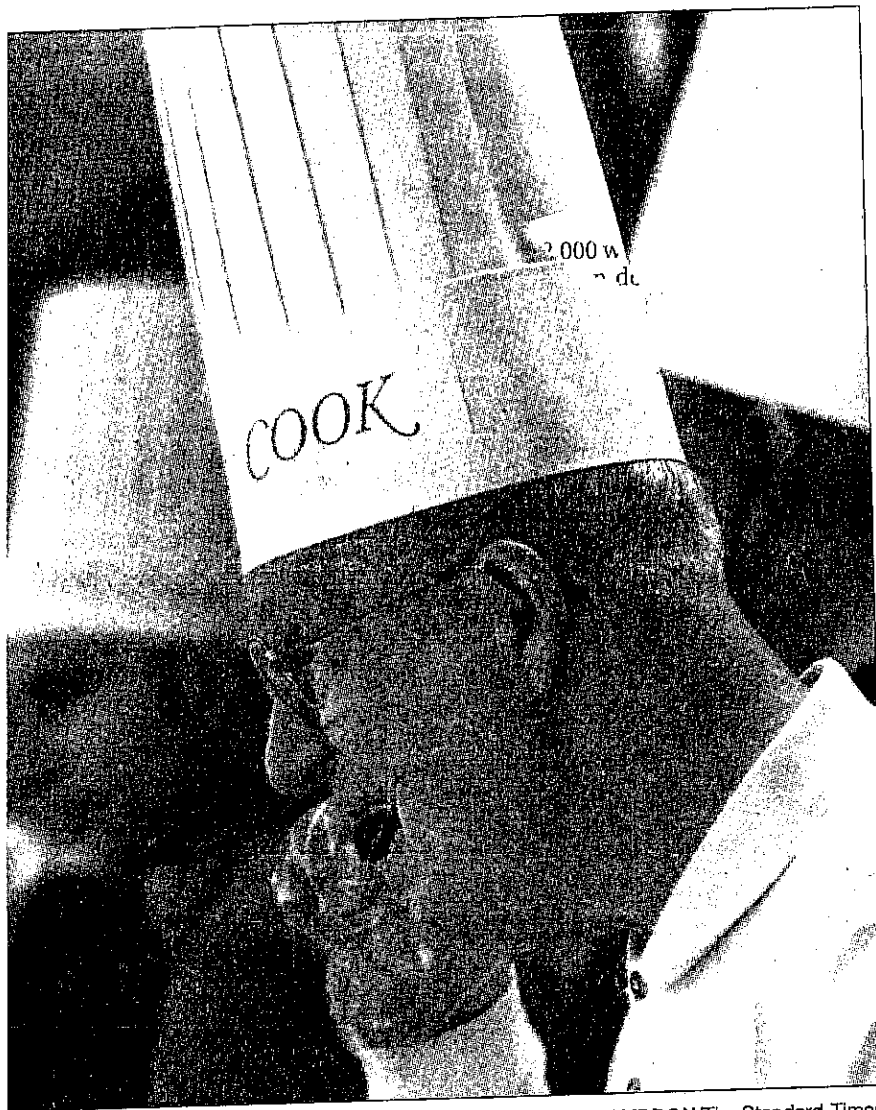


F SOUTHCOAST



JACK IDDON/The Standard-Times

peppers — while getting ready to serve the meal. Mr. Fernandes celebrated birthday at Greater New Bedford Vocational-Technical High School. Story on A5.

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shaped by it," she said.

During the luncheon, Shirley Ramos-Magnett, a longtime community activist in New Bedford and a member of the Martha Briggs Educational Club since 1967, received a lifetime achievement award.

Temistocles Ferreira, also a New Bedford activist, received a community service award for his work with local youngsters.

The theme of the lunch was "Our Youth in the Valley, How Do We Lift Them?"

Explaining her message to a reporter prior to her speech, Sheriff Cabral, 45, who is of Cape Verdean and African American descent, said young people are often told how to behave but frequently not why they should behave that way.

History is the key, she said.

"By understanding history, by understanding where we've come from and how difficult it was to achieve what we have, it provides a greater impetus

See CABRAL A9

PCB plan divides officials, activists

Critics say Keith project needs more precautions

By AARON NICODEMUS
Standard-Times staff writer

NEW BEDFORD — There are two sides to the debate over constructing a new Keith Middle School on a contaminated former dump site on Hathaway Boulevard.

On one side are city officials as well as environmental bureaucrats from the state and the feder-

al government who say that the former McCoy Field site can be made safe by removing the most contaminated soil, capping the rest and building the school on top.

"We're basing what we're doing on scientific and regulatory principals of the state and federal government," said Mayor Frederick M. Kalisz Jr. "We're looking to clean up the wrongs of the past by remediating the site to standards that have been proven to be safe. We're not leaving this to be cleaned up by future generations." The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have been reviewing the cleanup plan at every point. Representatives of those agencies have said that a proper cap can contain the polychlorinated biphenyls and make the site safe for a school.

On the other side is an increasingly outspoken group of neighbors, community activists, environmentalists and, increasingly, city officials who are sounding the alarm over safety issues and

"We're not leaving this to be cleaned up by future generations."

MAYOR FREDERICK M. KALISZ JR.

INSIDE

- The EPA says PCBs have been known to cause cancer in laboratory animals. A4
- Keith Middle School is not the only school to be built on former industrial sites or landfills. A4

See KEITH A4

4/10/05

Keith: Critics say school project needs more precautions

CONTINUED FROM A1

rising costs. They say nothing short of removing all the contaminated soil will make that site safe enough for a school.

"The project needs to be stopped until they get a handle on how much contamination is there and how much it costs to clean it up," said Brian Woolley, a neighbor to the Keith project who has founded an activist group called Wasted Away.

Mr. Woolley has brought in environmental consultant and former state Rep. Mark Howland of Freeborn to review the technical aspects of the project for Wasted Away. Mr. Howland said he is "not real comfortable" with the city's plan for the site. He said the city is not taking out enough of the contaminated material.

"I hear them say they've tested every inch of the site, and then at another meeting, they say they haven't got a handle on it," he said. "In their capping plan, they propose a single layer of fabric. Yet when they capped the former Shawmut Avenue landfill, they used a two-layer cap with a layer of clay woven in. Why not use the same one here?" He estimates that the two-layer cap would cost five times as much per square foot compared with a single layer cap.

Mr. Woolley's demands are potentially even more expensive. He has advocated that the city dig 12 feet and remove all contaminated soil from the site before building the school. He also wants the project to be halted until all test results and cost estimates are in. City officials estimate that removing all the contaminated soil would cost \$30 million, or three times what they estimate their plan will cost.

City Solicitor Matthew J. Thomas said the attacks on the plan are based in emotion, not science. "We can create a situation where that site is safe enough to reuse," he said. "I'm concerned that people are getting scared out there. We are acting in a fashion that is preserving the public health, addressing our industrial past and creating a safe environment for our children. If you're always asked to prove a negative, Columbus would have stayed in Portugal. This is an attack on the entire concept of brownfields redevelopment."

In the course of testing for contaminants on the former McCoy Field, PCBs have also been found in low levels on the grounds of New Bedford High School, on an unbuilt section of Nemaskeet Street and along sections of Ruggles and Greenwood streets. There is strong evidence that PCBs will be found on a piece of property directly adjacent to the Keith site, now owned by AME Bethel Church, on the Heiland Memorial Skating Rink property and in the front or back yards of 14 private homeowners who live along Ruggles and Greenwood streets.

The city has already announced plans to cap sections of the high school property in summer 2006, and it has been requesting largely without success, permission to test private properties in the area for PCBs.

For now, the next major hurdle for the Keith project is state and federal approval of the city's plan. The city has submitted its plans to cap the site, which are under review. Representatives of the DEP and EPA will be at a public information session at 7 p.m. Wednesday in the current Keith Junior High School library.

THE HISTORY OF THE SITE
The Keith Middle School site has officially been known to be contaminated since 2000, when the first tests conducted there

found elevated levels of PCBs.

City officials say the soil got there from the former Parker Street dump, located across Hathaway Boulevard. When New Bedford High School was built in the 1970s, soil excavated from the construction site was trucked across the street and dumped.

This was done in an era before the Environmental Protection Agency. Testing for contaminants was unknown and PCBs had yet to be declared toxic. In the neighborhood, the parcel was known as "the swamp" before the soil was dumped there, and "the dump" afterwards. For years, illegal dumping continued in the area.

The site remained vacant and unnamed until 1994, when then-Mayor Rosemary Tierney asked the Army Corps of Engineers and the National Guard to build soccer fields on the site. In 1996 the two groups obliged. Without any testing for contaminants, soldiers brought in heavy equipment and spread the existing soil now known to be heavily contaminated. The soldiers put clean fill on top and seeded three soccer fields.

The field was dedicated as McCoy Field in 1997, in honor of Andrea McCoy, an Olympic hopeful boxer from New Bedford who died in a 1980 plane crash.

In February 2000, the School Committee officially chose McCoy Field as the site of the new Keith Middle School after rejecting Walsh Field, the current Keith Junior High School site and the Carter-Brooks School site. School business manager Larry Oliveira said Walsh Field was rejected because it would have meant losing all the high school's playing fields. The Carter-Brooks site was too small.

The current Keith Junior High site had a number of logistical problems, Mr. Oliveira said, including where to put its students if the school were demolished and rebuilt. A plan to bus students to the old Normandin school for three years at a cost of \$4.5 million was deemed too expensive. And so McCoy Field, contaminated though it was, became the only choice.

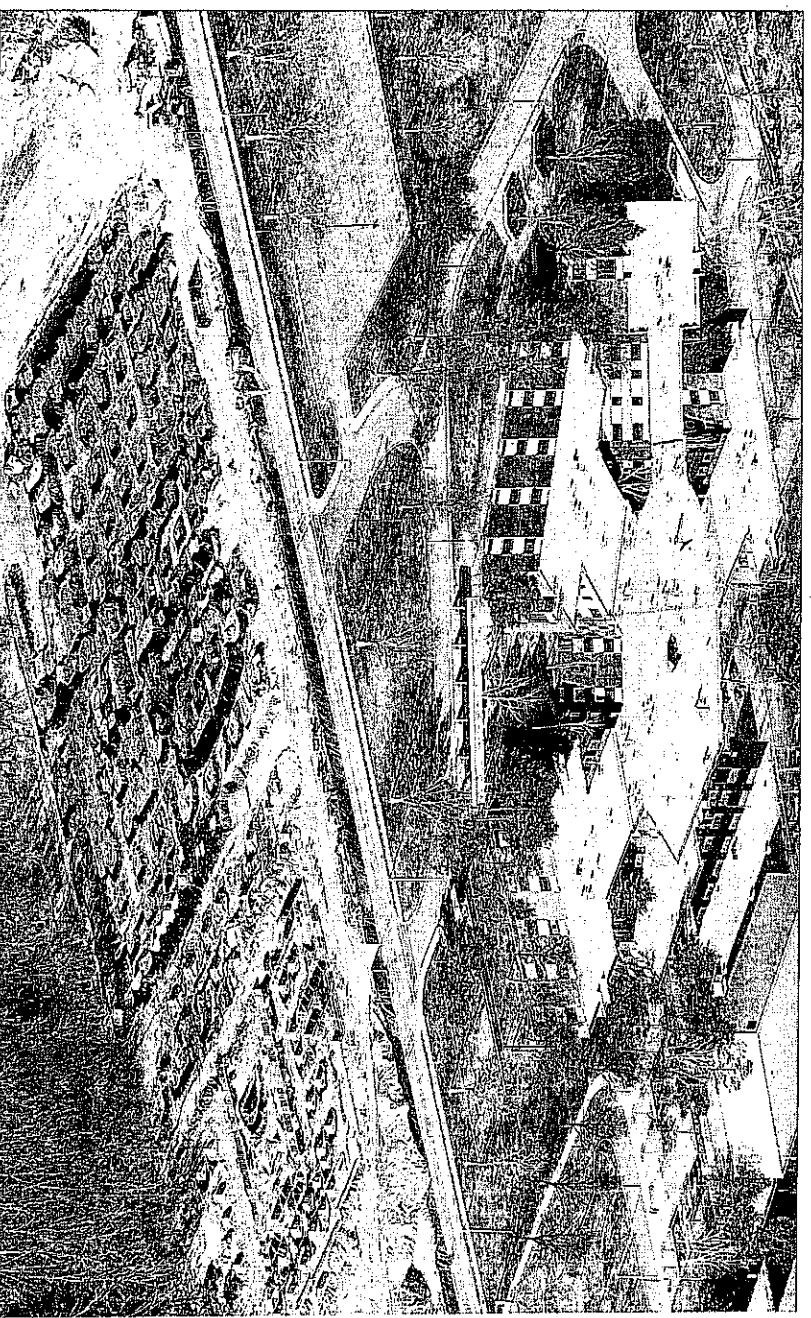
Some testing had revealed elevated levels of PCBs along the slope that led from the playing fields down into a wetlands area at the rear of the site.

In a letter dated Aug. 29, 2000, from Doug Burgess of the engineering firm Vanasse Hangen Brustlin to Richard F. Packard, the DEP's chief of emergency response, Mr. Burgess said of the McCoy Field site, "The sample which constitutes an imminent hazard was collected in a wooded area adjacent to the playing field, in a location where ash fill was visible at the toe of the slope that leads up to the playing field."

In October 2000, two testing samples at McCoy Field found PCBs at 18 parts per million, considered to be an elevated level. (Two parts per million of PCBs or less is considered safe by the EPA.) The state DEP gave the site Special Project Designation and also gave the city a mandate: The contamination must be removed or contained by 2007. At that point, the city was on the hook for the full costs of the cleanup.

Ash fill is the material contaminated with PCBs and other pollutants, the residue of burning trash from years ago. To remedy the problem, Mr. Burgess told the DEP that bright orange snow fencing would be placed around the contaminated area. The contaminated soil was not covered at the time.

Although additional tests in 2000 and 2001 on the surface of McCoy Field turned up only trace



An aerial view shows the construction site of the new Keith Middle School. Across the street is New Bedford High School.

amounts of PCBs on the surface of the field, play continued until 2003.

At a City Council meeting in March 2005, Kim Tisa of the BPA, whose specialty with the agency is PCBs, was asked whether youths should have been allowed to play soccer on McCoy Field over those years. She replied, "No, that was not advisable."

Thousands of youngsters have played soccer on that field, potentially with direct exposure to PCBs through the soil along the contaminated slope. And much more contamination was eventually unearthed as the site preparation for the new Keith began.

In April 2004, after excavation of the site was under way, testing revealed hot spots of PCBs above 50 parts per million. Those test results put the site under the purview of the Toxic Substance Control Act, or TOSCA, which meant more government regulation and bolstered the EPA into oversight of the sites cleanup. TOSCA was established in 1976 specifically to address PCB contamination. The EPA fined the city \$27,500 for spreading around contaminated soil in 1994 — work that was actually done by the Army Corps of Engineers and the National Guard. The city paid the fine.

A MAJOR PROJECT
The cleanup at Keith has so far involved removing 40,000 tons of contaminated soil from the site, according to Alan Hanscom of Beta Engineering, the company that is overseeing the cleanup for the city. Only 3 percent of that soil, about 1,200 tons, was contaminated with more than 50 parts per million of PCBs that warrant sending it to a special toxic waste landfill in Michigan. The majority of the soil, contaminated with less than 50 parts per million PCBs, was shipped to a less expensive, regular landfill in Rochester, N.H.

Even though the vast majority of soil removed from the site has contained less than 50 parts per million of PCBs, the cost of cleaning the site has skyrocketed. When the state initially approved 90 percent reimbursement for this project in 2000, site preparation costs were capped at about \$3.8 million.

The city already has spent about \$7 million and estimates that it will cost \$10 million before the site is capped and ready for construction. None of these additional costs have been approved by the School Building Authority, a subagency of the Massachusetts Department of the Treasury.

Keith not the only a contaminated site

Cleanup costs will contribute to Keith being far and away the most expensive of the city's three new middle schools.

With escalating costs for construction materials like steel and concrete, city officials estimate that the new Keith will cost \$66 million — \$26 million more than it cost to build a new Normandin Middle School in 2003 and \$30 million more than a new Roosevelt Middle School, built in 2001. Keith, which will be slightly larger than both of those other middle schools thanks to a separate auditorium, was originally pegged to cost \$53.7 million.

Despite the cost overruns, Mr. Thomas is convinced that the state will reimburse 90 percent of all cleanup costs at Keith Middle School, even though the higher amounts have not yet been approved. Both previous middle school construction projects received 90 percent state reimbursement.

Mr. Thomas recently told the City Council that the state originally approved a plan to spend \$14.3 million to build three middle schools, even with the overruns at Keith; the city is still \$2 million under that cap.

Mr. Thomas said the city plans to roll over bonding authorization from the Roosevelt and Normandin middle school construction projects to pay for cost overruns at Keith. Roosevelt's construction costs came in \$3 million under its bonding authorization of \$39 million, while Normandin came in \$10.6 million under its bonding authorization.

Despite the controversy the Keith project has engendered in a segment of the community, Mayor Kalisz has remained steadfast that cleaning it up — and building a school over it — is the right thing to do.

"This is not New Bedford trying to get away with something," he said. "The brownfields movement nationwide recognizes the value of cleaning up these sites. For too long, people have raised the accusation that nothing is being done to address the sins of the past. We want to clean it up and make it safe."

The school project was part of a larger cleanup of the entire area, and the community was actively involved in the process of redeveloping the land.

Unlike in New Bedford, where one engineer working for the city is conducting environmental tests and submitting them to

"There are a large number of schools being built on sites like this. The DEP monitored it every step of the way, they knew all the bases to touch. We haven't had any problems with either school."

FREDERICK FORESTIERE, Everett school superintendent

state and federal regulators, Stockton Middle School had no fewer than four.

One represented the city of Lowell, another was from the EPA, a third represented the attorney general's brownfields unit. A fourth engineer was hired by the neighborhood group to monitor the site as well.

Cleanup costs at Stockton topped \$2 million, with the city agreeing to pay \$1.5 million, money that was not subject to state school building reimbursement.

In Springfield, a former school site that had been contaminated with PCBs from an electrical transformer was privately developed into a Head Start day care facility.

The \$1 million project was privately financed, and the city's cleanup costs amounted to about \$75,000 to demolish the former school and assess the site.

The city of Providence has built two middle schools and an elementary school on the former Springfield Street dump, which opened in 1999 and 2000. The soil contained a number of contaminants, including lead, arsenic and volatile organic compounds.

A legal action filed by a neighborhood group against the city is still working its way through the courts.