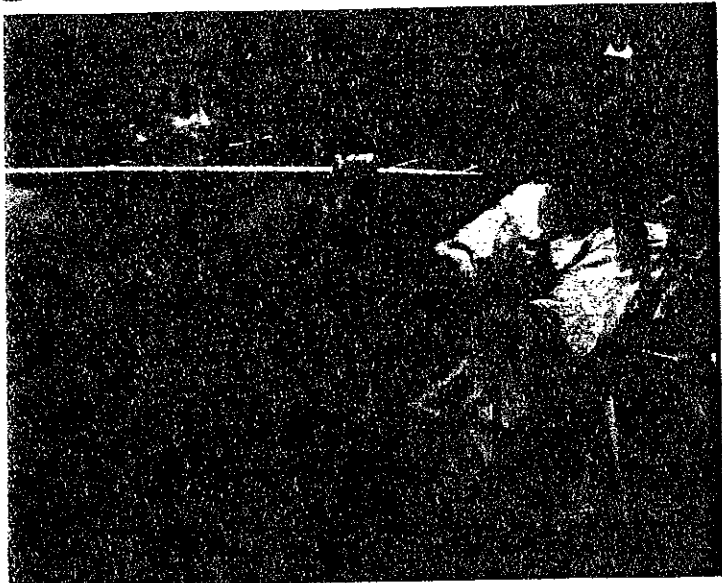


Quantum leap



eed Holden, 7, from left, and Kyle Mosher, 8, both second graders Rosebank Elementary School, Chula Vista, encourage Kirby the frog during a frog-jumping contest held at the school on May 17. See elementary school invites frogs to hop on page 5. Photo/Laura Mallgren

Flags remembered by Enduring Freedom service at Glen Abbey

sten Myers Marcum
ff Writer

A hundred American flags will soar at Glen Abbey Memorial Park this weekend. These flags draped the caskets deceased veterans. Now they are ed each year as part of the annual Memorial Day service which, year, will be called Enduring Freedom.

On Mon., May 27, at 11 a.m. residents of Chula Vista will be gathered at the Little Chapel of the Roses for the traditional Memorial Day program. This annual event is sponsored by Chula Vista Branch 61 of Fleet Reserve Association.

John Hermes is the current president of Branch 61. He said the event had always been held at Glen Abbey. While he has no records of the first service, he believes it was in 1970.

A large number of people buried at Glen Abbey are former military personnel and their families.

"We feel they represent the spirit of sacrifice that our military forces have given to ensure our country's lasting freedom," said Daniel

of them casket flags of veterans families donated in memory of their loved ones. They will join the 84 flags that fly each year for Memorial Day Weekend. More than 500 flags have been dedicated to the avenue since it began in 1977. They are not all flown

See FREEDOM page 7.

Assistant principal attacks purchasing deals at Sweetwater

Laura Mallgren
Staff Writer

In an effort to ensure consistency among graduating seniors, the Sweetwater Union High School District has entered an exclusive contract with a vendor to provide students with graduation caps and gowns, rings and announcements.

In the past, Associated Student Bodies, which are students' groups, contracted independently with vendors for the products.

"It's about service and the quality of the product," Superintendent Ed Brand said of consolidating vendor contracts for graduation products. "We think that it's important the opportunity and quality and service are the same."

At least one person objects to ASB's not being allowed to shop around for the best price for students.

ASBs will be paying more money for caps and gowns, and eventually the cost will be passed on to students, said Juhn Hinkle, assistant principal of activities at Sweetwater High School. Hinkle estimated the cost difference at \$7.

This year, seniors with ASB cards at the school will still pay \$30 and non-members will pay \$35, as they did last year, he said. "This year we're going to eat reserves. Next year, something will get cut out

increased."

Hinkle said Superintendent Ed Brand and other top administrators will benefit from the contract with Jostens because of the access fee given to the district fund. Brand has sole discretion over spending the money.

The district has a contract with Jostens, which paid a \$50,000 access fee as part of the contract.

"The fee would have been required of any vendor who made that bid," said Mark Cassutt, manager of corporate communications for Jostens. He said schools in California typically require an access fee as part of the contract package. Cassutt said the prices of caps and gowns will increase \$1.50 compared to last year, under the contract.

The student's and ASB's loss is Brand's gain, according to Hinkle, who called top administrator's acceptance of contributions from corporations unethical. "They have an insatiable hunger for soft money," he said.

Students are being shortchanged by similar contracts between other vendors and the district, some of which included hefty contributions, according to Hinkle.

The contracts were brokered by the district's Corporate Development Team, comprising a consultant and two district employees who each receive annual stipends. The Corporate Development Team, which the superintendent formed around 1998, was designed to increase and enhance students' activities and to provide scholarships, Brand said.

"Every dollar that the district receives is placed back in, for students' activities," Brand said. "How do you maximize student achievement? You gotta connect the kid to the school. One of the best ways to do that is student activities."

Gary Zarecky, a former district teacher and coach who lives in northern California, earns a \$25,000 stipend annually. Dave Miller, an ASB advisor at Castle Park Middle School, and Andy Sanchez, a teacher at Sweetwater High School each earn a \$20,000 stipend. The stipends are paid out of the

Tortoise taught us



Franklin the tortoise, usually known as Bill Coleman, and his wife Sharon helped Bob Langhorst instruct children how to plant and

Arreola said that Sweetwater,
Cont'd on p. 12

11/10/2003

Records show former superintendent dined frequently at district expense

By Gordon Siu
MANAGING EDITOR

Former Sweetwater Union High School District Superintendent Edward Brand spent more than \$15,000 last year on his district-issued credit card for meals and automobile expenses.

Brand, who ended his 10-year leadership of the district this summer to take a job as superintendent of the San Marcos Unified School District, was allowed the use of a district-issued credit card along with unrestricted use of an Infiniti G-35 as part of his contract with the school district. Some, however, question the enormous expenditures of the former superintendent at a time of increasing budget crunches and limited resources for students.

Some of the expenditures were identifiable through cross reference with Brand's appointment calendar obtained by the *Crusader* in a public records request. Most of the Brand's lunch appointments were not listed on his calendar or were illegibly recorded. Brand met frequently with former board member Bob Griego at Love's

on the Bay in 2003, \$627.55 for Jamba Juice provided to district administrators during a meeting in 2003, miscellaneous expenditures at Vons, The Sports Authority, and Toys 'R' Us, a \$69.80 purchase at Nelman Marcus, \$184.76 at Motel 6 in Chula Vista, and a \$275.21 "Thank you luncheon" at Bob's on the Bay in 2001.

Some of the expenditures were identifiable through cross reference with Brand's appointment calendar obtained by the *Crusader* in a public records request. Most of the Brand's lunch appointments were not listed on his calendar or were illegibly recorded. Brand met frequently with former board member Bob Griego at Love's

the Butcher Shop Steak House, averaging \$172.52 per visit.

Board of Trustees President Jim Cartmill defended Brand's expenditures as necessary for any executive of a large organization.

"When you are the leader of an organization, part of your job is to build relationships and develop ties with the community," Cartmill said. "From that perspective, it is important to break bread with people."

Cartmill said that Brand's mealtime meetings with board members were not numerous and were needed for the efficiency of the district. He also said that Brand's "a smile and a coke" after board meetings were not social in nature and were used to discuss goals and plans for

the district. "Board members have impacted schedules and very limited time to be together at the same time," said Cartmill.

Despite the stated purpose of these meetings, not every board member attended them. Jaime Mercado, a member of the Board of Trustees, declined invitations to go. Any decisions or collective agreements made by members of the Board of Trustees outside of an official board meeting would be a

violation of the Ralph M. Brown Open Meeting Act.

According to records, Brand often ate two and sometimes three meals in one day. He dined at upscale restaurants such as Bob's on the Bay, La Costa Azul, Peope's, and Benihana, according to the credit card statements.

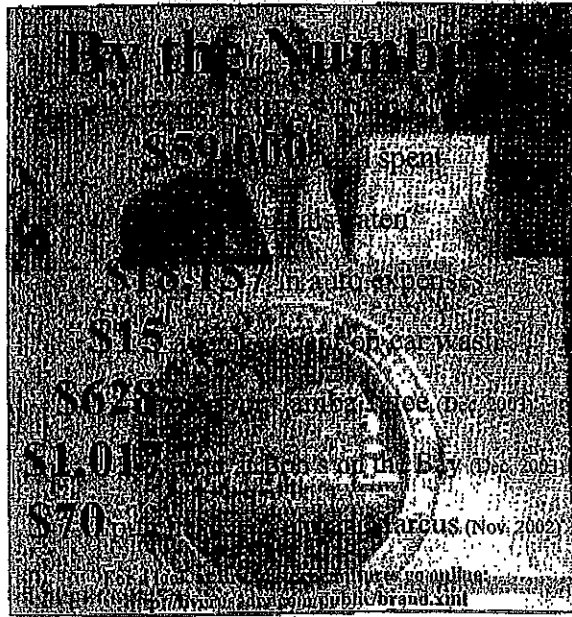
Anguiano said that he

Cont'd on p. 12

From July 2000 to March 2005, Brand charged the district more than \$59,000 in meals and automobile expenses, according to credit card statements obtained by the *Crusader* in a public records request. Among some of the questionable expenditures include a \$1,016.75 meal at Bob's

Wood Pit Barbeque and board member Pearl Quiñones at El Juan Café and Keith's Restaurant.

According to district insiders, the former superintendent also invited board members to the Butcher Shop Steak House after school board meetings for meals he dubbed "a smile and a coke." From July 2000 to March 2003, Brand made 22 expenditures at



Brand

Angulano said that he understands the need for individuals to meet professionally to work on work-related issues, but said that this need should be weighted by needs in other areas.

"We have a very unique profession where we are using the public's funds for providing a very important service to

students," Angulano said. "We have to be extremely cautious about how we use funds that are intended to be used in the classroom."

In addition, Angulano said that he does not believe the district should have paid for a vehicle for the superintendent to use. Cartmill, however, said that

such a benefit is standard for executives.

"I would be surprised if many other districts do not give vehicle allowances to their superintendents," Cartmill said.

Former Superintendent of the San Diego Unified School District Alan Bersin, whose salary was significantly less than

Brand's, was allowed a \$10,000 allowance for vehicle expenses, but did not receive a leased car or a credit card. After leaving the district, Brand was allowed to keep his district-leased vehicle.

Brand did not answer any request for comment from the *Crusader* regarding his purchases, but only stated that

he had a positive experience as superintendent of the SUHSD for the past 10 years and that the *Crusader* should write any article it feels necessary.

Interim Superintendent Bruce Husson stressed the need for business lunches with professionals as part of the superintendent's role overseeing

the district, but could not comment on the specific charges made by Brand.

"I don't know, but I will sure find out," Husson said.

Husson directed district staff to look into the expenditures pointed out by the *Crusader*, but the results were not available at press time.

Students gouged

UT EDITORIAL

Sweetwater's vendor contracts need scrutiny

Sweetwater Superintendent Ed Brand wants the school board to censure an assistant principal who has blown the whistle on questionable vendor contracts, particularly one that added about \$50 to the price of senior class rings in exchange for an "upfront" donation by the vendor to the district.

Brand wants trustees to give a vote of no-confidence to Sweetwater High School Assistant Principal Jauhn Hinkle and bust him back to teaching.

Instead, trustees should give Hinkle a medal and pay attention to his accusations. And the District Attorney's Office should investigate contracts that require a donation from the vendor to the school district.

In a federal lawsuit in Orange County against the same vendor that's now selling senior rings to Sweetwater, such donations as part of contracts are referred to as "kickbacks." That sounds right.

Associated Student Body groups at each Sweetwater district high school used to keep all the money they made from various sales and fund raising, and then decide among themselves how they would spend the money, on things ranging from new tables for the cafeteria to new helmets for the football team. And they negotiated their own contracts for things such as class rings and graduation caps and gowns.

In 1998, Brand instituted a new system in which he hired a paid corporate development team to negotiate contracts for all of the ASBs throughout the district, reasoning that the buying power of one of the state's largest and fastest-growing high school districts would be greater than the buying

power of each separate school.

It sounded good. But the negotiators focused on the upfront money, securing \$50,000 from Jostens, Inc., for the exclusive ring and cap and gown deal, and a whopping \$1 million upfront from Pepsi as part of a contract. While the district got a nice donation from Jostens, the price of rings went up, as much as \$50 per ring over past contracts. The price of caps and gowns went up \$7. This might not seem like a lot, but consider that Sweetwater has a lot of kids from low-income families.

Brand says the contracts and upfront money are worth it. He says the ASBs have more money than ever, and that the district has been able to spend the upfront money on a variety of student activities such as fine arts, clubs and athletics programs that wouldn't otherwise be possible. And he credits those new programs with helping to reduce the dropout rate and increasing overall student achievement in the district.

But do the ends justify the means? Are government contracts that require vendors to make an upfront donation to the government agency actually proper and legal? And what about Brand's taking a larger and larger chunk each year of upfront monies for his own spending priorities, and trustees even getting a slice for their own discretionary spending?

Frankly, we congratulate a public employee such as Hinkle for stepping forward at risk to his own career and questioning such practices. Sweetwater has done a good job in recent years of improving the quality of education, and we hope those improvements continue. But do questionable financial dealings really have to be the price paid for success?