



Arenas, Josabyn Sadural, Kati Fotiadi, and Michael Arbuthnot are this year's seniors.

Some question value of Hall of Fame gala

The Sweetwater Union High School District's fourth-annual Alumni Hall of Fame, first held in 2001, will honor a dozen Sweetwater district graduates on Feb. 4 who have made their mark on society on local and national levels, but raises questions about the district's financial priorities.

Gordon Siu
News Editor

Sweetwater Director of Grants and Communications Lillian Leopold promotes the event as something that will inspire students with "real-life" success stories from their very own communities and schools. "These Hall of Famers have come from the same humble beginnings as many of our students," she said. "They have been inspired by many of the same teachers as today's youth. And they are worthy role models for our students."

Inductees from previous years have included an Olympic gold

medalist, former U.S. Congressmen, the physician who served two U.S. presidents, innovative business people, and "extraordinary military personnel."

Some members of the community question the cost of this event. This year, as in previous years, the district is requiring its high schools to purchase 10 tickets for the event at the cost of \$650 per school, and five tickets for middle schools, at the cost of \$325 per school. ASB adviser Jill Gonzalez, who is on maternity leave, said last year that Bonita Vista paid for its obligations for the 2004 gala with money from parking ticket fines. Principal Ramon Leyba said that he does not know as of yet how he will be paying for this year's tickets.

"Sometimes I ask each administrator to purchase two tickets. They may use them or may give them to someone else to use."

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discrimination by local stores

es not of adult shoplifters say they began to steal when they were younger, according to the NASP.

ly age Ralph's gave up a more restrictive policy two years ago. The market allowed only two teenagers in the store at a time because it was too difficult for employees to watch out for many young people at the same time.

Earlier this month, some of the Crusader staff tested the Ralph's backpack policy that O'Neill said applies to all shoppers. Crusader adviser Nancy Clifford shopped in the store with a backpack on, however, no one asked her to leave it in the front. That same day, several students also shopped at Ralph's and were not asked to leave their backpacks by the door either. Evidently, the policy is not enforced as strictly as the store

managers said.

A popular Bonita Point Plaza store for athletes, Play It Again Sports, says they also apply the backpack policy to every age group. The manager declined to comment about whether students cause problems in the store.

Rite Aid manager Jesse Venezuela explained why he thinks their backpack policy is fair.

"All customers are required to leave their backpacks at the door," he said. "My job is to produce a clean and friendly environment. Teenagers steal things that are not necessary for them, such as make-up, condoms, pregnancy testers, and accessories. It would be understandable if it was an essential situation."

The managers at Rite Aid, Ralph's and Play It Again Sports all say,

however, that they are not responsible for stolen backpacks.

"Taking off backpacks is a waste of my valuable shopping time," junior Kayla McIntyre said. "Leaving my personal items in an unprotected public area makes me feel uncomfortable. It is a hassle." Other students agree.

"Whenever I go shopping with my buddies, we always get followed and watched," a junior boy said. "It ruins the atmosphere because I feel like I am doing something wrong."

A few students, though, defended the local stores' policies. "The policy of leaving backpacks in the front is understandable," a senior girl said. "They are just trying to assure the safety of their products. If that is the only way to protect the merchandise, then the policy should be enforced."

substances on campus

because you have to find a new approach to do things and think outside the box because that's how real science is," said senior Dana

Hall of Fame

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Leyba said. "I try not to use student funds."

Last year, around 350 people attended the event, at a cost of \$65 each, according to former Castle Park Middle School Principal Jerry La Russa. Leopold said that the total cost of last year's gala, held at the U.S. Grant Hotel in downtown San Diego, cost a total of \$25,299.67.

"All revenue to cover the cost of the event came from ticket sales, plus corporate and past recipient sponsorships," Leopold said. "No general funds were used last year, and we expect no general funds to be used again this year."

Leopold continued, saying that "each school uses a portion of their ticket purchases to allow students (and sometimes parents) to attend the dinner free of charge." Leyba said that he gives the tickets to "whoever I want," usually administrators and some classified staff.

Leopold also wrote that the ASB president (or representative) from every school attends the event free of charge to escort the Hall of Famers throughout the evening.

"I think that it is a good idea to recognize these people's accomplishments, as long as the ticket sales cancel out the cost of the event," said Bonita ASB president Jackie Gonzalez.

Jacqueline Le, sophomore, former ASB

president at Bonita Vista Middle School, attended the gala two years ago. "The speeches were boring," she said of the event, which as ASB president she was required to attend. "I did not get the impression that they were trying to motivate me."

Hall of Fame inductees are chosen annually by a committee that includes some Sweetwater principals and district office staff. La Russa, who is also a member of that committee, emphasized that the Hall of Fame not only serves to inspire students but also to recognize former students who

have the motivation to do as well on it," he said.

Dunn defends the experiments as an all-class project. "Students

have made improvements in society.

"I don't know if it has caught on," he said. La Russa said that a traveling display is sent to district schools for students to view. The Hall of Fame was also advertised in the district's *Blurb Magazine* and inductees are commemorated on the walls of the district's board room. In a survey of 185 Barons, none knew what the Alumni Hall of Fame was.

In a phone interview last year, Jim Cartmill, current board president, told the *Crusader* that the Alumni Hall of Fame inspires students to reach their full potentials by honoring former students with Sweetwater success stories. Cartmill, however, alluded that these inductees might serve to financially benefit the district at a later point in time.

"These are the kind of people that might donate to the district," Cartmill said.

In an e-mail to the *Crusader*, San Diego County Supervisor Greg Cox, a 2003 Alumni Hall of Fame inductee, wrote that "it was an honor to be selected for induction into the Sweetwater

Union High School District's Alumni Hall of Fame." Cox further wrote that he was not familiar with the costs associated with the gala, nor was he aware of the district's funding plan for the event. Cox continued, however, that "there is great value in recognizing the achievements of district alumni to inspire current students to achieve." E-mails to three other current and former inductees were not returned.

In addition to the costs associated with the Hall of Fame gala, the quality of the Hall of Fame inductees as role

models comes into question. In 1989, Bonita Vista graduate Michael Ellis, class of 1971, was charged with conspiracy to manufacture and distribute methamphetamine. After cutting a plea bargain with federal agents, Ellis pleaded guilty to a charge

of using a telephone to facilitate drug trafficking and was given probation. He founded the diet-pill company Metabolife International in 1997.

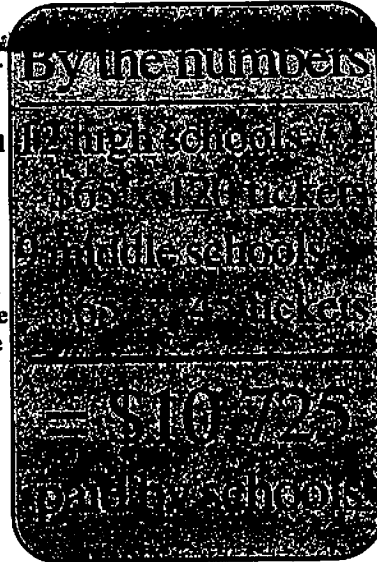
In Nov. 2001, Ellis donated \$500,000 to the Sweetwater Union High School District's Compact for Success program. A month later, he was inducted to

the district's first Hall of Fame. Seven months after, according to the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, the Internal Revenue Service raided Metabolife's headquarters. The *Union-Tribune* reported that according to an affidavit, the IRS alleged that Ellis, along with other company executives, skimmed millions of dollars in cash from Metabolife and hid money in offshore accounts.

Last summer, Ellis was indicted on eight charges of making false statements to the Food and Drug Administration and trying to obstruct the agency's efforts to investigate the herbal supplement, ephedra—a key ingredient in Metabolife's pills that many experts believe may cause serious health problems and even death. The FDA eventually banned ephedra early last year.

La Russa, who oversaw the selection of the inductees for the first Hall of Fame, defended the selection of Ellis. "We thought that Ellis was a good role model," La Russa said.

In an interview with the *Union-Tribune* in 2001 about what he thought of the Hall of Fame, La Russa was quoted as saying, "What I hope is kids (will be) saying, 'Oh my, this could be me.'"



his group didn't yield the results, but said that he the scientific process in the project.

Newy

When students scream "New Year!" they also see a load of new laws. The target of new laws as of

From now on, **Jacques Copy** can ride a motorized scooter

without a license or learner's permit who own a motor scooter. License holders are still affected, now illegal to buy engine modifications to increase power for these vehicles. This was made as a response to traffic accidents, deaths, and injuries from Californians.

Teenage drivers have more rules and regulations in 2004. It will be a little harder to buy a car on the Internet. Insurers have to post their price on their website and telephone number. Classes after 1976 are now required to be smog checked. Those with battery-electric hybrids will be able to ride in the carpool lane even if they're driving

For old tire disposal, added to new tire prices, registration fees are up that speed over 100 mph subject to a fine of \$1.00 increase from last year, now required during an inspection.

Riding in school or public buses is also safer, since not allowed to use a cell phone while driving unless it's an emergency work-related. In addition, after July will have seat belts.

Punishment for drunk driving increased from seven to 30 days in prison and street racing now include 40 hours of mandatory

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Hall of Fame 'arm-twisting' banned

By Gordon Siu
MANAGING EDITOR

Sweetwater Union High School District Interim Superintendent Bruce Husson ordered an end last month to compulsory attendance by district employees to gala dinners put on by the district, such as its annual Hall of Fame dinner. In an e-mail to the district's Board of Trustees and top administrators, Husson wrote that he has "directed staff that there shall be no 'arm-twisting' for ticket sales, and no 'minimum requirements' for schools or departments to purchase. We shall not be suggesting that schools use ASB funds or other school funds to buy tickets."

"In my judgment," Husson continued, "if an event can't cover its costs based on the genuine interest of enough attendees and donors, the event shouldn't be forced on anyone; it should simply not take place."

The annual Hall of Fame dinner, which will be held next Feb. 24 at the San Diego Marriott

Hotel and Marina, serves to honor district graduates who achieved fame, in hopes of both recognizing them and inspiring current students. In previous years, however, each of the district's 12 high schools have been required to purchase 10 of the \$65 tickets, and each of the nine middle schools have been required to buy five.

"We need to stop using funds and forcing our employees to support this event," wrote board member Jaime Mercado in an email to Husson and the rest of the board. "I think that it is a good idea but we need to find a cheaper way to honor successful alumni."

Sweetwater spokeswoman Lillian Leopold refused to answer questions regarding the costs of this year's gala and how the district is weighing the benefits of the dinner with those costs, referring the *Crusader* to comments she made earlier this year regarding last year's gala. In a letter to the *Crusader* earlier

this year, Leopold said that the event will inspire students with "real-life" success stories from their very own communities and schools.

In a survey of 185 Barons earlier this year, none knew what the Hall of Fame was.

"If that is the case," Husson said in an interview when presented with the prospect that the event may not be reaching the students whom the district wants to inspire, "then maybe we could do a better job reaching out to students." Husson said, however, that the event not only serves to inspire students but is also a tool to honor outstanding alumni who have achieved success after leaving the district.

According to Leopold earlier this year, the cost for the 2004 gala held at the U.S. Grant Hotel in downtown San Diego was \$25,299.67 - all paid for with ticket sales, both school-bought and voluntary, in addition to corporate and past recipient sponsorships.