

The Bonita Vista High School CRUSADER

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751 Otay Lakes Road Chula Vista, California

Records show former superintendent dined frequently at district expense

By Gordon Slu
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.

"At a time when my bargaining unit members have been asked to make cuts in the classroom . . . it is disturbing to see that the former superintendent was spending funds in such a fashion," said Alex Anguiano, president of the teacher's union.

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

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 Neiman Marcus, \$184.76 at Motel 6 in Chula Vista, and a \$275.21 "Thank you lunch" 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, Peohe's, and Benihana, according to the credit card statements.

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

In addition, Anguiano 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.

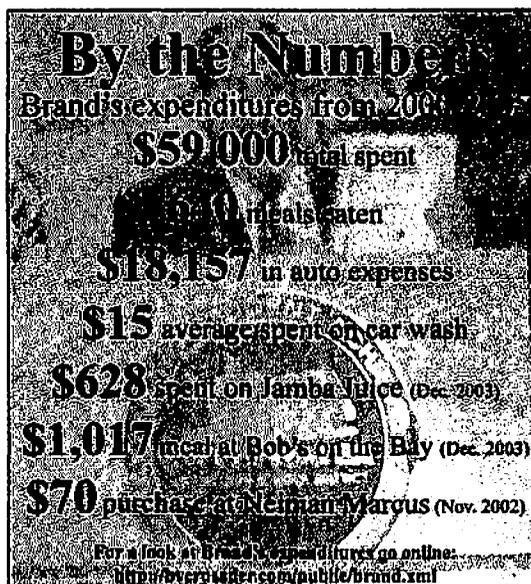
Former Superintendent of the San Diego Unified School District Alan Bersin, whose salary was significantly less than Brand's, was allowed a \$10,000 allowance for vehicle expenses, but did not receive a leased car or a credit card. After leaving the district, Brand was allowed to keep his district-leased 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.



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 2005, Brand made 22 expenditures at

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Volume XXXIX No. 3

751 Day Lakes Road Chula Vista, California

District Verifies Former Superintendent's Expenditures

By Gordon Siu

The Sweetwater Union High School District responded last month to an article in the November issue of the *Crusader*, which highlighted former Superintendent Edward Brand's expenditures on his district-issued credit card. Interim Superintendent Bruce Husson ordered an accounting of some of Brand's expenditures, at the *Crusader's* request. The results are as follows:

A \$184.76 purchase made at Motel 6 in Chula Vista in 2001 that the *Crusader* reported was for a speaker for a professional development event. In 2002, \$71.05 at Toys 'R Us went to purchase Jenga for a management training class at San Diego State University. A \$69.80 purchase at Neiman Marcus in 2002 was for a lunch the former superintendent had with then-Area Superintendent Larry Perdoni, Southwestern College music instructor Keith Ballard, and others.

A \$170.90 purchase at Shell in 2003 was for service on a Ford

F-150 pickup truck—Brand's district-issued car prior to receiving the Infiniti G-25 which he kept after leaving the district. The district's response did not explain a \$34.40 expenditure at Vons made by the former superintendent in April, which was reported by the *Crusader*, but said that Brand did reimburse the district for the purchase.

"I think that it's selfish," said senior Irene Vallar.

A \$12.91 purchase that the *Crusader* reported Brand making in 2003 was, according to the district's response, for a Champ X-duty (tennis balls) for management training at SDSU.

A \$1,007.88 purchase at Greenwald's Auto Body in September 2003, and another one for \$603.52 four months later was for accident repair on the superintendent's vehicle. No accident reports were filed.

The response also lists a \$1,1016.75 purchase at Bob's on the Bay in December 2003 as being for a meal for 12 high school

football coaches, three principals, and "other attendees."

Finally, a \$1,071.78 purchase at Discover Infiniti in 2004 is listed as being for 15,000 mile service and tires for the superintendent's vehicle.