

SPECIAL BOARD MEETING ON BUDGET

The Sweetwater Board of Trustees will hold a special meeting on Monday, March 2 in the new gymnasium at Sweetwater High School, 2900 Highland Ave., National City. The meeting will focus on proposals to balance the 2009-2010 budget. The public session will begin at 6:30 pm.

ADELANTE MUJER SOUTH BAY CONFERENCE

Latina students are invited to get a window on the work world at the 16th Annual Adelante Mujer South Bay Conference. Professional Latinas working in law, business, engineering and other fields will present career workshops at the event Saturday, March 7 from 8 am to 1:50 pm at EastLake Middle School, 900 Duncan Ranch Road, Chula Vista. Girls in 6th through 10th grade are invited to attend with their mothers or guardians. Transportation will be available from school sites. Sweetwater students may register by calling Maria Rojas Batista at 476-3382.

FAMILY HEALTH FAIR COMING TO NATIONAL CITY

The American Diabetes Association and 40 other community health groups will be on hand for the 4th Annual *Feria de Salud: Por Tu Familia* health fair on Saturday, March 7 in Kimball Park at 12th and D Streets in National City. Entertainment, health screenings, children's activities and demonstrations of healthy food and exercise will be available free of charge from 10 am to 2 pm. For more information, contact Ana Gonzalez at agonzalez@diabetes.org or call her at 619-234-9897 ext. 7513.

PROP O CONSTRUCTION KICK-OFF

Phase I of construction projects to be built with Proposition O funds will be launched with a groundbreaking ceremony on Friday, March 27. The first shovel of dirt will be turned at Chula Vista High School, 820 Fourth Ave., at 11 am. Renovation of Sweetwater schools under Prop O will focus on upgrading school classrooms, restrooms, science labs; updating technology; improving handicap accessibility; removing asbestos/lead paint; and upgrading fire and life safety systems.

CVH HEALTH PROGRAM WINS NATIONAL AWARD

The Blue Apple Health Education Award was awarded to the Chula Vista High Comprehensive Health Program. Presented by the American Association for Health Education, the award recognizes programs that demonstrate best practices in promoting healthy behaviors. The CVH program builds student resiliency to drug and alcohol use and also offers nutrition and sex education.

Chula Vista High staff members will receive a paid trip to the American Association for Health Education Conference in Tampa, Florida; and one-year memberships to the American Association for Health Education and Health Teacher online, and a recognition plaque and banner for the school.

HELP SHAPE THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The district is accepting employee volunteers to participate on the action team that will work on specific action steps needed to implement Strategy II of the District Strategic Plan. Strategy II states: We will develop the character of each student with emphasis on creating a sense of empowerment and a commitment to participation in society. To volunteer, contact Nancy Stubbs on First Class or at 691-5840.

HILLTOP HIGH WINS COUNTY ACADEMIC DECATHLON

Competing against students from 17 local high schools, students from Hilltop High won the San Diego County Academic Decathlon, reclaiming the crown after a 6-year hiatus. This year, Sweetwater schools dominated the competition, earning six of the top 10 slots. Hilltop edged out the team from Academy of Our Lady of Peace for the title.

SWC NEEDS INSTRUCTORS

Teachers looking for summer work may want to look into opportunities with Southwestern College. Instructors are needed for the *College for Kids* program in a variety of subject areas from art, automotive and biology to foreign languages, math and reading. Go to www.swccd.edu and navigate to human resources, employment, short-term, non-academic. *College for Kids* Summer 2009 for more information or call (619)482-6395.

HELP PREVENT UNWANTED PETS

The Neuter Scooter, a mobile veterinarian bus, is coming to Sweetwater High on Sunday, March 8. Appointments are available for low-cost spaying or neutering of cats and dogs. The service includes a free nail clipping and anti-flea treatment for pets and free rabies vaccine for dogs. Sweetwater High students receive a \$10 discount. Visit www.snap-sandiego.org online for more information or call 1-866-SPAY-BUS (1-866-772-9287) to schedule an appointment.

SAVE THE DATE FOR MARIACHI GALA

The 13th Annual Mariachi Scholarship Foundation gala and dinner will be held Friday, May 1 at the San Diego Marriott Hotel and Marina on the downtown San Diego waterfront. Sweetwater student mariachis and ballet folklórico students will provide entertainment. Special guest performance will be by Mariachi Campanas de America from San Antonio, Texas. Tickets are \$50 per person with a 15% discount for "Amigos de Mariachi" members. Call Sandi Smith at 585-4405 for reservations.

RECOGNITION OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE MONTH

March = National Woman's History Month
 March 12 = Employee Day
 March 17 = St. Patrick's Day
 March 31 = Cesar Chavez Day

MARCH

Special Board Meeting.....2
 Daylight Savings (move clocks ahead 1 hour).....8
 Board Meeting.....9



SEEKING COMPROMISE FOR THE COMMON GOOD

In a world of uncertainty, one thing is certain: on any issue of importance, there will always be differences of opinion.

Like any other big organization, Sweetwater has plenty of smart people who sometimes disagree. But challenges and debate are part of the process of arriving at solutions for complex issues.

No doubt many of you are asking questions about what will happen now that the district has declared an impasse on negotiations with the teachers' union.

Let me clarify the district's position. Just because we've declared an impasse, it doesn't mean we've stopped trying to find a solution for the common good. It does mean that a third-party mediator will now step in to help us move beyond our differences.

At the same time, the clock doesn't stop. The budget crisis will not wait. We still face the challenges of closing a multi-million dollar district budget deficit. And we still face the pressure of the March 15 deadline for issuing precautionary layoff notices, as state law dictates.

As President Obama told the nation in his Feb. 24 address, "... while the cost of action will be great, I can assure you that the cost of inaction will be far greater."

That's why, even as we seek ways to restart talks, we must move forward with our budget planning. In the absence of a contract, it is only prudent for the district to prepare for a worst-case scenario and continue to work for a more positive outcome.

After anticipating an \$18 million shortfall, we received some relief with the signing of a new state budget which helped shrink our deficit. The latest calculations project the Sweetwater District deficit at \$11.6 million for 2009-2010.

Although we will need to make deep cuts to cover the shortfall, I am committed to working hard to protect the classroom and preserve jobs. That's why I pulled the reduction in force item from the board meeting on Feb. 23 in favor of a special meeting March 2. With our revised deficit figure, we have also dropped the number of precautionary pink slips we'll need to issue on March 15 from 169 to 109.

My intention is to try to limit the anxiety these notices cause by issuing as few as possible. And, I want to emphasize that receiving a notice does not signal a certain layoff. In the years since I arrived as superintendent, our district has been able to pare down the budget by \$8.1 million with no layoffs of any permanent employees. My strongest hope is that through the Early Retirement Incentive, resignations and reorganization, we will again be able to preserve jobs.

Throughout the weeks of negotiation, we were hopeful that the SEA would accept a district offer or put forth a counter offer. After the anticipated deficit shrank, the district made major changes in the offer to the union. Among the revisions, we moved from a 32:1 staff allocation to 30:1. We also lowered the number of years of service to qualify for the ERI from 15 to 10. However, the union rejected that last offer without making a counter offer on wages, benefits, staffing allocations and adult stipends.

In our final meeting, SEA negotiators made it clear they would not respond with a counter offer until after the March 31 deadline for employees to accept the Early Retirement Incentive.

Unfortunately, we cannot wait to address the pressures of the budget crisis. Now the issue is: how can we, as an organization, come together to weather the crisis?

I believe that we can get through difficult times, by pulling together. Each of us must do our part. Rather than balance the budget on the backs of a few, we can share and divide the burden.

I applaud management employees for taking the lead in voting overwhelmingly to accept at two percent pay cut—representing an annual savings for the district of \$472,000. That alone won't cover the deficit, other sacrifices must be made, but it is an important step in the right direction.

While we continue to grapple with the budget crisis, we need to be aware that this is a problem not just of a few, belonging only to management, or to teachers or to any one group of employees. It is a challenge facing all of us.

As educators entrusted with leading and teaching our youth, I find it useful to consider the words of President Obama who said, "... in a time of crisis, we cannot afford to govern out of anger, or yield to the politics of the moment. My job—our job—is to solve the problem. Our job is to govern with a sense of responsibility."

Disagreements and challenges aside, I want to assure every employee of this district that, like you, I remain wholly committed to our primary mission of giving our students the education they deserve and need to succeed in life. I know that each of you shares this dedication to our young people. That is why we're here.

And that should be uppermost in our minds as we keep working together to craft solutions for the common good.

Board of Trustees

Jim Cartmill • Bertha J. López • Pearl Quiñones • Arlie N. Ricasa • Greg R. Sandoval
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KUDOS

Ben Cassel, SUH Teacher, will receive a human rights award from the California Teachers Association for his work aiding desert-crossing illegal immigrants.

Maria Catalina, MVM Teacher, was one of 29 outstanding teachers and the only one from California selected by the Space Foundation as its 2009 Flight of Teacher Liaisons.

Charlene Lemons, Director of Alternative Education, has been nominated by the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. to receive "A Tribute to Mothers" award.

Carol Shaw, Teacher on Special Assignment, has been recognized for being a member of the California Health Education Standards Advisory Panel and for her work in developing and recommending the health education content standards to the State Board of Education.

