

METRO

Dropouts Decreased, Attendance Rate Increased in SLUSD

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enforce daily education because there were ultimately no consequences, she added.

Board member and clinical therapist Carol Righton says many parents are cavalier about the importance of attendance and don't understand the real significance of arriving to school chronically late, which she says is why it's important to catch the problem at an early age.

"[We try] to nip problems early on in their education, because if the kid misses too much school then they start off behind," said Righton. Adolescents have not yet affiliated with gangs or began using illegal substances, so it's not yet a chronic problem, she added.

"Recent studies have shown that chronic absenteeism that starts in kindergarten can cause students to have major reading problems by the third grade. Studies of the dropout

rate also trace many of students' academic struggles to early attendance problems," according to the California Department of Education.

Righton, who has served on the board for nearly 10 years, has seen the program progress significantly since Lawrence implemented the strategic campaign designed to tackle the student absence problem.

"[Before], we seemed to have people that didn't care much. It was something they just did because it was required," said Righton. "When Sheila came on board, it was the first time I saw someone really take the job seriously."

Lawrence said it was the continuous encouragement from her board members that pushed her to apply for the award.

"[The Award process] was pretty intense. You have to include all of the data supporting the significant gains that [the district] has had," incorporated in a 10-page paper, said Lawrence.

Applications from local review boards statewide were evaluated by members of the California SARB in specific content areas ranging from program design and content to measuring and reporting outcomes, according to a recent press release from the California Department of Education.

Lawrence journeyed to Los Angeles to receive the award from Torlakson on the district's behalf last week, guessing that the accomplishment would start to really sink in after the award was in her hands.

"For us, it's knowing that we went into it with the right heart a few years ago and we've been really working to improve our program and to get this recognition," said Lawrence. "It feels good."



The San Leandro school district is the only one in the Bay Area to be named a model district.

PHOTO / Cherie Vargas, The Pioneer

HEADLINES: Around the Bay

By JOSEPH GEHA
Assistant Metro Editor

BAY AREA: BART Agent Jim Stanek was fired Tuesday on his 66th birthday for handing out \$300 worth of unused BART tickets to a young boy who needed assistance in paying for transportation to school. Stanek was a BART employee for seven years and says he was devastated by the decision. BART has a strict policy on unused tickets and makes use of the leftover funds for train operations and salaries.

FREMONT: Prosecutors on Tuesday charged 18-year-old Fremont man Abraham Hade with murder, with gang and deadly weapon enhancements, in the stabbing and killing of 18-year-old Newark Memorial High football star Osana Futi. The incident happened over the weekend at a party in Fremont. Futi was named the Rob Johnson Defensive Player of the Year in 2011 in the Mission Valley Athletic League and was a two-time, all-league first-team selection as linebacker.

SAN LEANDRO: San Leandro High's student newspaper, The Cargo, has won the "Best Service to the Community" award from the American Scholastic Press Association (ASPA). This award is presented to only one school in the United States each year. The Cargo has received this national recognition in 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008 and now 2012.

Life in Bay Area's Only Ghost Town

By JOSEPH GEHA
Assistant Metro Editor

Buried amongst the pickleweed, flowering bushes and switchgrass in south Fremont, out past the mud sloughs and salt ponds, lies the remnants of the Bay Area's only ghost town.

The town of Drawbridge, formed in 1876 and abandoned since 1979, was created out of the need for an operator to mind the two drawbridges over the mud sloughs that allowed shipping vessels to pass through.

At its high point, the railroad that ran through it made five train stops daily, dropping off visitors to enjoy the local offerings; during the Prohibition era, its remote location made it perfect for housing speakeasies and

even brothels.

During the late 1920s, neighboring communities began pumping fresh water out of the sloughs, mostly to water the orchards of the South Bay but also caused the entire town to sink. Raw, untreated sewage was dumped in the area as well, contaminating much of the remaining water sources.

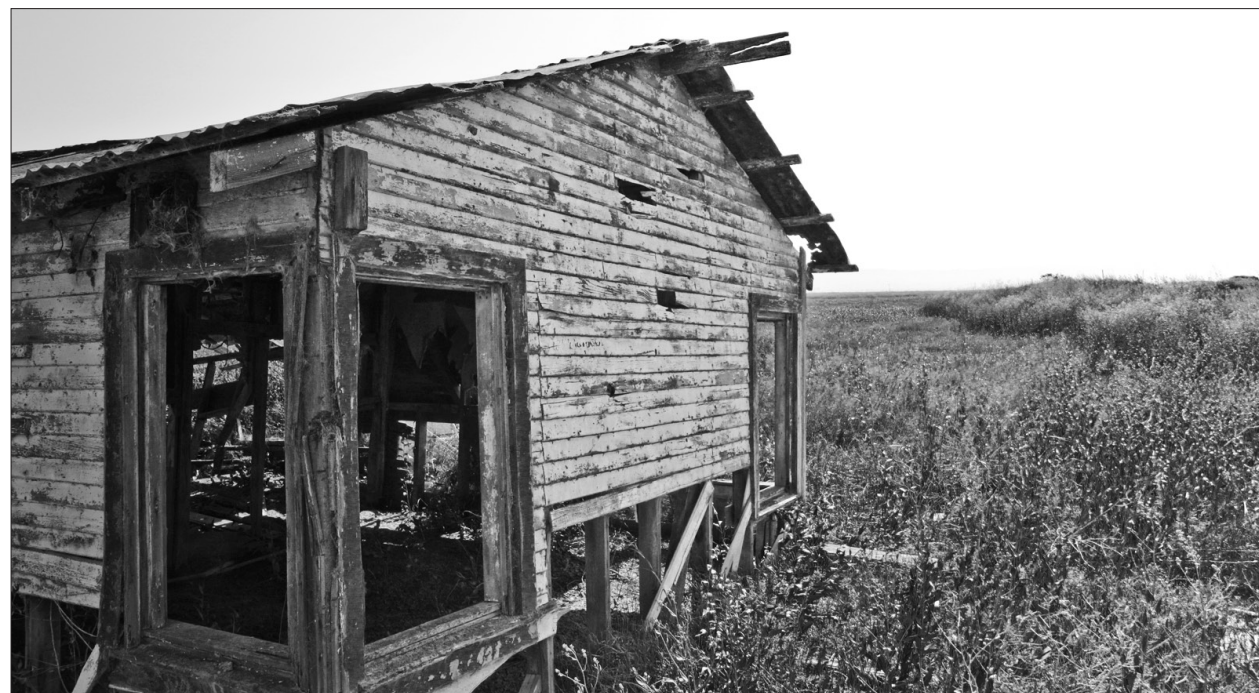
Today, the entire town is owned by the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge (DES-FBNWR), and is part of a massive wetland restoration effort.

Trekking through miles of marshland, salt ponds and high grasses or following along the railroad track where Amtrak trains still barrel through daily are the only routes into the town, both of which are illegal, as



The ghost town has been abandoned for over 33 years.

PHOTO / Joseph Geha, The Pioneer



Many of the buildings in Drawbridge were built on stilts to mitigate the effects of the tides.

PHOTO / Joseph Geha, The Pioneer

it is currently off-limits to the public. Occasionally, the DES-FBNWR will host trips for students and visitors out to the town.

The rare visitor is greeted by an array of dilapidated structures, ranging

from one-room shacks to multi-room palaces of the marsh; almost all of them are tagged with the work of local graffiti artists.

High grasses envelop most of the buildings, while inside they are slowly filling with the marshland mud that the entire town is steadily sinking into. Some of the interiors are graced with the prose of some visiting poets, while others are simply bent and broken, almost completely rotted.

It's still relatively easy to make out where kitchens, washrooms and bedrooms would have been laid out, but the marsh is making its presence known.

"The end effort is basically that it will fall down, the wood will decay, and it will just be marsh again," said Eric Mruz, manager of DES-FBNWR. "It is all good marsh habitat, we've restored some of those island ponds."

A large amount of de-

bris and litter accumulates along the shores of the ponds and creeks, as it is a major depository of the entire Bay. What can be found on the dry land, however, are new geese nests filled with eggs, juxtaposed with several empty, rusted canisters of steel shot, used for hunting fowl.

Although letting the marsh reclaim the straggling frameworks of the abandoned shacks seems like a do-nothing plan, the results of the plan could be extremely beneficial.

Chris Kitting, a professor of biological sciences at CSU East Bay, says it's imperative those wetlands are protected and left alone.

"There are endangered species there, the best population of California clapper rails and the largest population of salt marsh harvest mice that are unique to San Francisco Bay," said Kitting, noting the salt marsh harvest mouse would become extinct if it disappears from the area.

It is not a common occurrence that a community like the Bay Area gets the opportunity to view the return of lands to the natural state, as is happening in Drawbridge, and only time will tell if the once flourishing marsh will return to prominence.