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SUPT. HORNBECK BLASTS TEN SCHOOL BUSING MYTHS

Sells System to Area Realtors

by Tom Livingston, Staff Writer
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Telling a salesman how to sell is no easy trick, but Pasadena Superintendent of Schools Ralph W. Hornbeck did just that Tuesday, addressing the Pasadena Board of Realtors on the topic "Selling the Pasadena School System."

Hornbeck's basic pitch was that home buyers often ask about schools, and if realtors can't sell the school system, they probably can't sell the property.

The superintendent gave his Altadena Town and Country Club audience plenty of ammunition, and drove his message home with table-thumping intensity. His talk was followed by an enthusiastic standing ovation.

After exhorting the realtors to learn more about the schools, Hornbeck challenged ten busing "myths":

--"My child will not be able to go to school with neighborhood children." Not so, said Hornbeck. Youngsters spend half their elementary education at a neighborhood school, half with neighborhood children at another school.

--"My child is wasting half his time on buses." The facts are that the average Pasadena bus ride is 4-1/2 miles, or 20 minutes. The longest is 9 miles, or 30 minutes, Hornbeck said.

--"Buses aren't safe." Hornbeck responded that buses "are the safest form of transportation," and that there have been no serious injuries on Pasadena school buses.

--"I'm not sure my child is safe in 'that neighborhood over there.'" Children are not bused to the middle of a neighborhood, they are bused to a school, Hornbeck said, adding that virtually all neighborhoods are safe anyway.

--"Hasn't there been a sharp increase in beatings and extortions?" This year violent incidents at the schools are at a five-year low, Hornbeck said. Last year, the number was slightly up overall. "What we really have is a sharp increase in attention focused on us," he said.

--"What about after-school activities?" Students now have a double choice, he said. If they are attending school across town, they may participate at that school and ride a late bus home, or they may participate at their neighborhood school.

--"Busing has driven taxes up." Hornbeck said the tax rate is down three cents this year, and that busing has actually resulted in a profit of sorts for the school district. He said the busing program costs $1 million. He said the state pays roughly three-fourths of that cost, and that the schools were spending $190,000 on busing before the integration program began. Over and above those factors, the district has netted $228,000 in federal desegregation money (ESAP) during the last two years, which more than offsets busing costs.

--"What about white flight?" The superintendent asserted that the level of white attrition (14 per cent last year, 11 per cent this year) is slackening. He said the economy, urbanization, birth control and other factors are more responsible for white flight than busing.

--"Hasn't busing hurt real estate sales?" Hornbeck cited a recent Star-News study which showed the answer to be no. He also pointed to Board of Realtors figures released at Tuesday's meeting which revealed dollar sales volume up from $27.7 million at this time last year to $38.2 million this year, and number of units sold up from 1,013 to 1,311.

The superintendent then turned on the hard sell, examining why he believes Pasadena offers a top notch education. Among the many factors he cited were 40 teachers applying for every job opening this year; small class size; 900 paid and volunteer aides supplementing a 1,500-teacher staff; reading and math profiles to measure each child's progress; 435 courses at the senior high schools including six foreign languages taught through the fourth year; dozens of new and innovative programs and fine programs for children with handicaps or special needs.

"Top that!" he exclaimed. "In Pasadena, you get more for your money, and it adds up to a very salable product." He invited the realtors "not to believe anything I've said just because I've said it," and go visit the schools themselves.

Program chairman Gus Mallman, after the ovation died down, told Hornbeck he is "a terrific salesman."