

Town focus Rancho Santa Fe

New superintendent connecting with students, parents

By Sylvia Mendoza

RANCHO SANTA FE — Dr. Daniel Vinson, newly named superintendent of the Rancho Santa Fe School District, then hurried to meet with a waiting teacher. On the way back to his office, he stopped to listen to mission reports recited by students, then greeted parents in the lobby before finally shutting his office door behind him. He settled into his seat and smiled.

"I have the perfect job," said Vinson, 54.

With more than 30 years in the education field, Vinson relishes his role as the new superintendent of the Rancho Santa Fe School District.

Buried under mounds of paperwork and a growing student body, Vinson said it was an ideal time to move from the Bay Area, where he worked as assistant superintendent of human resources in the Mountain View Elementary School District, and get back to what was important to him.

"In a small district, I have daily contact with students and parents who have their kids' best interests at heart. This is what education is all about."

Vinson attributes his passion for education to his mother. "I've always loved being around kids," he said. "For as long as I can remember, I've always wanted to be a teacher."

In high school, he worked with the city of San Leandro Parks and Recreation Department as a playground supervisor and camp director. He also visited his mother, Virginia Vinson, at San Leandro High School, where she was the student activities director for the majority of her 28 years on campus.

"I saw how much fun she had interacting with students and the way the kids responded to her, and I wanted to be a part of that."

Not only did Vinson's mother introduce him to the educational arena, she introduced him to the woman he would marry, Sara Jane Holmes. The couple have been married 32 years.

Vinson commutes to Northern California on weekends to visit his



Dr. Daniel Vinson was recently named the new superintendent of the Rancho Santa Fe School District. "I hope that everywhere I go, I share the value of education," Dr. Vinson / Union-Tribune

wife, a hospital administrator in San Jose, until she can transfer to San Diego.

He lives with his 27-year-old daughter, Alison Vinson Gaconnet, a lobbyist for the Motion Picture Association of America, and her husband, Cory Gaconnet, a Navy doctor stationed at Balboa Hospital. Vinson's son, Drew Vinson, 25, is also considering relocating to San Diego because the dot-com company he worked for shut down.

Having his family around would be ideal, Vinson said. In the meantime, he intends to immerse himself in the community and explore San Diego County.

"I walk for miles and miles, and I'm going to know areas like the Torrey Pines Reserve and Carmel Valley."

However, he still misses the Pacific

light Ocean in San Jose and Stanford basketball games. "It was hard giving up the basketball tickets for games played during the week. I love to watch college sports," he said.

His transfer hasn't been all roses. Initiated by fire to the intricacies of the community at his first school board meeting, Vinson listened to passionate arguments on proposed new school sites. Realizing how important it was to have input and feedback from the diverse groups within the community, Vinson quickly implemented a Superintendent's Supervisory Committee, where the 24 members work together to recommend sites.

Community support certainly makes the school system stronger, Vinson said.

Despite the challenges, Vinson

feels he made the right move. Still, students and parents have welcomed him, and former superintendent Dr. R. Roger Rowe has guided him. "He's been my mentor," Vinson said. "We have different styles, but change is healthy."

With a three-year contract Vinson hopes will be renewed, getting the new school under way and keeping academic standards high are priorities.

"I want to be a good role model, too," Vinson said. "I hope that everywhere I go, I share the value of education. I truly believe it's the best gift you can give your children."

Sylvia Mendoza is a free-lance writer from Elfin Forest. Do you have a story idea for Rancho Santa Fe? Contact Robin O'Neal at (760) 476-8215 or robin.oneal@uniontrib.com.

SPOTLIGHT

The Rancho Santa Fe Garden Club and Winterthur — An American Country Estate will present "A Day in the Garden" from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Jan. 19 at the garden club, 17025 Avenida de Acacias, as the featured speaker will be Tom Buchter, deputy director of the garden department at Winterthur Museum and Gardens in Delaware. He will lecture and show slides about "Creating Design Unity for House and Garden." Following the lecture, there will be a home and garden boutique for all attendees.

The cost is \$45 and includes a box lunch and surprise gift. Seating is limited.

Reservations must be made by Jan. 16. Mail checks to Donna Ferrier, P.O. Box 1624, Rancho Santa Fe, CA 92067. For information, call Ferrier, (858) 759-9011.

DATEBOOK

• **Rancho Santa Fe Association:** The group meets tomorrow and Jan. 17 at 9 a.m. at 17027 Avenida de Acacias, at Rancho Santa Fe. Members meet the first and third Thursdays of each month. Information: (858) 756-1174.

• **Helping the animals:** Helen Woodward Animal Center will have its next volunteer orientation from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday at 6461 El Arroyo. Opportunities are available to work in pet adoptions, therapeutic riding, pet encounter therapy, the Animal Care Center, the equine hospital and in the education department. Volunteers must be at least 14 years old. Information: (858) 756-4117.

• **Pet adoptions:** The staff of the Helen Woodward Animal Center encourages the public to remember the pet home for the Holidays pet adoption drive, which runs until Sunday. The campaign takes place in 45 states, Canada, Mexico and Puerto Rico. The goal is 150,000 pet adoptions. Information: www.homefortheholidays.com or (858) 756-4117.

• **Artists reception:** The Rancho Santa Fe Art Guild will have a reception from 5 to 7 p.m. Jan. 10 at the Rancho Santa Fe Art Gallery, 6004 Paseo Delicias. Information: (858) 759-3545.

• **Rancho Chamber Orchestra:** The group will present "Romero, The Royal Family of the Guitar" at 8 p.m. Jan. 15 at Fairbanks Ranch Country Club, 6550 San Onofre Road. Angel Romero will give a special conducting appearance. Tickets and information: (858) 446-7336 or visit www.sdcso.org.

• **Fairbanks Republican Women Federated:** The group will host a talk-show-style presentation and a wine and cheese social on Jan. 21 at a time and location to be determined. Information: visit www.frtwo.org/calendar.htm.

• **Community Courts of Rancho Santa Fe:** The next performance will be from 7 a.m. to 12 p.m. Jan. 22 at the Rancho Santa Fe Garden Club, 17025 Avenida de Acacias. The featured artist will be soprano Alison England. The concert will be preceded by live and hors d'oeuvres at 6 to 6:15 p.m. Tickets are \$25. Information: (858) 759-7495.

• **New Years:** The Rancho Santa Fe Historical Society will host a New Year's celebration on Jan. 23 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Information: (858) 316-9291.

• **Community Center memberships:** The new extended hours at the Rancho Santa Fe Community Center, offers a variety of programs, events and trips for Ranch residents of all ages. Renewal notices were mailed in November. Information: (760) 756-2461.

E-mail DatebookItems@uniontrib.com 14 days in advance to DatebookItems@uniontrib.com or send by mail to (760) 476-8295 or by mail to Datebook, 5130 So. Avenida Encinas, Carlsbad, CA 92008.