

An Eagle Returns to His Nest

Laney Grad Swanson Speaks at Commencement

By Zusha Elinson
Post Staff Writer

As a high schooler, Sandre Swanson was told by guidance counselors that he wasn't college material, but he attended Laney College anyway to be on the wrestling team.

More than thirty years later, the accomplished politician and candidate for the East Bay state assembly seat returned to his alma mater to give the commencement speech and give the college credit for sparking his long political career at the graduation ceremony held Friday at the Henry J. Kaiser Convention Center Arena.

"Laney was the first place where instructors were paying attention to me and encouraging me to reach my potential," said Swanson. "It was there that I got involved in student government and met people



Laney Professor and BART Board Member Carol Ward Allen with Sandre Swanson at the Laney College graduation.

like Ron Dellums and Lionel Wilson."

Swanson served as the student body president before graduating from Laney in 1971 with an associate degree in Psychology. He went on to

work for Congressman Dellums in 1973 where he eventually became chief of staff, later serving as Congresswoman Barbara Lee's Chief of Staff as well.

Continues on next page

Laney Grad Swanson Speaks at Commencement

Continued from page 1

Swanson told the Laney graduates that he knew an important part of their dream and mission in life will be reaching their own potential and working to improve the prosperity of their community. He challenged the graduates to "redefine the meaning of the American flag for their generation and work for world peace and social justice".

Swanson requested that the graduates "accept a responsibility for providing a better life for the next generation by asserting your citizenship and paying close attention to public policy debate in our state". Swanson asked the graduates "to support policies that make

the education you have received a right for all citizens and not just a privilege for the few who can afford it."

Two thousand family and friends attended the ceremonies to watch and listen as five hundred graduating students were awarded their degrees and certificates.

It was the second time that Swanson had spoken at a Laney graduation- the first came when he was the student body president in 1970.

"I value my experience at Laney; as a young person I was encouraged to reach my potential," Swanson reflected. "It was the first place I learned to write a budget and now I handle multi-million dollar budgets."

A self-proclaimed "average" student at Berkeley High School, Swanson began receiving good grades at Laney, he later transferred to San Francisco State receiving his BA in Psychology.

Leading Laney students in a march in Oakland against the Kent State shootings and the bombing of Cambodia in 1970, Swanson first met Dellums.

"One of the things I told the students was that 'You're going to need to be concerned about the same issues we were concerned with back then, not because our generation failed, but because these issues take generations to work out,'" said Swanson.