

FOREVER WARPED

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Warped Tour **Q**



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Bodega Bay | High: 60 Low: 52

Details, Page B8



The Sunday Press DEMOCRAT

JULY 2, 2006 • SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

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WORLD CUP

THE FINAL 4

Upsets push Portugal, France
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Photos by KENT PORTER / The Press Democrat

Jesus Reyes, 12, left, avoids the ball thrown by Brandon White, 5, during a game of dodgeball on the side of the Sonoma County Growers Exchange building in Roseland on Thursday. Reyes, his brother, cousins and neighborhood friends come together after sunset for what Reyes calls "dark games."

The kids of Roseland

By JEREMY HAY | THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

As sunlight fades away in Roseland, the time comes for what 12-year-old Jesus Reyes calls "dark games." The pint-sized Reyes, his brother, cousins and neighborhood friends meet at the white-painted concrete wall of the Sonoma County Growers Exchange.

For hours, they kick or throw a ball against the wall as Highway 101 traffic rushes by a block from where Reyes lives — a little house on Barham Avenue with an old, thick palm tree and red landscaping rocks in the front yard.

Al Paige, 56, owner of the fruit and vegetable wholesaler, offers his wall up for a reason: "I'm street smart," he said.

"Get to know your kids, and you get to know your neighborhood," said Paige, who also doles out free fruit to the kids, instructs them in apple varieties, and insists they say please and thank you.

It is hard to imagine a Sonoma County neighborhood where that aphorism is more apt:

About 4,500 children age 17 and younger — out of 14,000 residents — live in the area bounded by Sebastopol Road and Hearn Avenue, Highway 101 and Stony Point Road. That's a higher percentage of children than in any other similarly sized area of the county, according to U.S. Census data.

Roseland's kids are 55 percent Latino. And about one out of five of the kids, about 850, lived below the federal poverty line of \$17,050 for a family of four in 1999, the latest year for which such data is available.

They are coming-of-age children in a neighborhood where a resurgence of civic, political and economic activism has fueled



Jesus Reyes, 12, of Roseland worries about gang members who hang out down the street. Reyes, citing his father's advice, said: "Don't ever be one. Don't ever get near one. Don't even look like one."

ROSELAND: Gang activity dictates safe areas to walk

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

efforts to redevelop its commercial core and hold a violence-free Cinco de Mayo celebration, and given rise to huge marches in support of immigrants, both legal and illegal.

They are children who will influence the future of a county where by 2020 the Latino population is likely to grow by 50 percent and the number of residents older than 65 to rise by 86 percent.

In Roseland, it seems at times that not a minute passes without sight of a child or children at play, trailing to or from school, bicycling along Sebastopol Road, or simply wandering the streets with, especially in these summer days, the loose-limbed abandon of the young.

Query them and their parents about the life of children in this southwest neighborhood — where old orchards and crowded apartment buildings, where family barbecues carry on as often as not in sight of gang graffiti — and a sort of social map emerges.

Gangs and violence are familiar signposts. Whether the Cinco de Mayo violence that convulsed Sebastopol Road in 2005 or the latest gunfire, such troubles are common currency in neighborhood conversations. But the conversations also show how the new Roseland University Prep high school, now expanding beyond its warehouselike Sebastopol Road building, has become a beacon of hope for many.

The conversations also show that Roseland's increasingly Latino makeup comforts many of its residents but is a strain for some others. And they make clear that the neighborhood's children are well aware of its reputation as a place that is poor and too often troubled.

The neighborhood

Cindy Escobar, 13, who will attend Montgomery High School this fall, recalls that before she moved from Windsor, friends warned her that Roseland was "kind of a ghetto."

"They said there was a lot of violence, that it was a bad neighborhood," she said in her new home in a west Roseland subdivision of big single-family houses that could have been plucked from any newer Santa Rosa neighborhood.

Escobar said that so far, her friends have been proved "completely wrong."

But their negative assessment rings truer in the lives of other Roseland youths.

In the heat of a recent afternoon, Melissa McKenzie and a friend walked south along sidewalk-less Burbank Avenue.

They stopped to talk and the dark-haired McKenzie, 14, who wore gray sweatpants and blue eye shadow, dissected Roseland according to which gangs dominate which areas.

"We go certain ways," McKenzie said. "We cut through the fields, and we don't go over by Sunset (Avenue), because that's not at all a good place."

That's a sureño area, she said, and she comes from a norteño family, putting it off limits unless she wants trouble.

Then, McKenzie rattles off the schools she's bounced between, from Lawrence Cook Middle School to Airway Community School, to classes at the county's Sierra Youth Camp where she said she spent time this year for fighting.

Ivan Montez, a farmworker's son who said he wants to be a Marine, knows about fights — and about trying to avoid them.

"I run a lot of times," said the 14-year-old, who wears his black hair pulled tightly back, sparkling earrings bearing the rapper 50-Cent's name, and a blue and white LA pendant around his neck.

One day last week, Montez was one of a dozen kids on bicycles clustered in front of the pink and beige apartment buildings on Delpport Avenue, his home since moving from Oakland two years ago. Then, like birds leaving a wire, the kids wheeled away, leaving Montez alone at the curb.

At that very spot, he said, is



KENT PORTER / The Press Democrat

From left, Stevie Cuevas, Omar Davila and Angel Morales search for blackberries just out of their reach at the Los Arboles apartment complex in Roseland.

where "they shot at us." The shooters were norteños, he said, and they missed as he and a friend ran. Behind him, the rear wall of a carport behind the apartments is messy with blue sureño gang graffiti.

He wants nothing to do with gangs, Montez said — and he didn't like having an uncle, now deported, who was a gang member — and he would much rather talk about his school, Roseland University Prep. "That's the best school I ever been to, they help a lot," he said. "I feel like I learn more and the students get more attention by the teachers — and there's no gangs."

The schools

In conversation after conversation, as much as they bring up gangs, young people and their parents, bring up Roseland area schools.

They are schools with major challenges and troubles.

English is the second language for about 70 percent of students in the four-school Roseland district, and 77 percent qualify for free or reduced price lunch. The district ranks among the lowest in the county in the state's Academic Performance Index scores, although its schools generally score equal to or better than those with similar student bodies.

At Elsie Allen High School, attended by many neighborhood students, average SAT scores last year were the lowest in Santa Rosa City School District.

But there also are some promising signs. A higher percentage of sophomores at Roseland University Prep passed the state's high school exit exam in March than at any other high school in Sonoma County.

Under the charter high school's partnership with Sonoma State University, graduates who meet academic targets are guaranteed admission to Sonoma State University and assistance in securing financial aid.

That's a priceless prize, said Genaro Salgado, who lives with his wife and two sons in a West Avenue house about half the size of a mobile home.

"I really like it there, I want to go," said Angel Salgado, 14. He and his brother, Francisco, 12, said they feel more comfortable and more motivated in Roseland schools than in others they've attended.

"The schools are more safer, they protect us from gangs," said Angel Salgado, who in the fall will enter eighth grade at Roseland Accelerated Middle School. "The teachers worry about your grades so you have to work hard."

His sons have thrived, Genaro Salgado said. "Angel got, what, Angel, 3.46 GPA?" he said.

"Actually, 3.44," Angel said. The boys play football in the grass and gravel outside the front door and since moving to

Roseland a few years ago have been happier than ever before, said Salgado, 38, a maintenance and landscape worker for Kendall-Jackson Wine Estates.

"Once they got here, they didn't want to leave," he said.

The tensions

But a few blocks north on Mara Court, Sherri Lee has a less sanguine view of Roseland.

Lee, a single mother disabled by progressive arthritis, said the cul-de-sac of six new homes is a "sanctuary" for her and her two sons, "but the neighborhood is kind of scary to me."

She won't let her son, Joseph, an avid skateboarder, leave the court. Some of his friends' parents are reluctant to let their kids walk from elsewhere in Roseland to visit. The gang graffiti worries her, she said, and at night, "we hear gunshots."

"And helicopters," said Joseph, 13, referring to the Sheriff's Department helicopter that seems to make regular circles around Roseland.

Most distressing, said Lee, who is white, is the effect that life in a neighborhood where 45 percent of residents are Latino has had on her two sons.

Joseph said he doesn't "trust the walk" down West Avenue to and from school, because, he said, "they call me racist names out of their car windows: cracker, white boy."

Then Lee cried, describing how conflicts with Latino students at Elsie Allen High School have hardened her oldest son, 16, and his attitudes.

Now, he is wary of Latinos and, she said, "he has to feel like he's some tough big man every day to go anywhere. He's not getting his childhood."

In some ways, Mari Morales, 27, who grew up in a blue house on Dutton Avenue and now lives with her husband and two sons in a one-bedroom apartment on West Avenue, could not be more different than Lee.

"This may sound so off to you, but I feel more comfortable living in the barrio than I would anywhere else, because I came from it," said Morales, a patient technician in the labor and delivery ward at Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital.

In Oakland, where her eldest son lived for two years with his grandmother in a predominantly black neighborhood, "it was terrible for him," she said. "He used to be picked on, he got beat up in school."

Now he's back in Roseland and she worries less about him because "here, it's like Hispanics, we take care of each other."

But then, at other times, Morales also worries about ethnic and gang tensions.

"I really fear that the gang-bangers around here might try to pick a fight with him not realizing he's only 11 years old,"

she said, referring to Omar.

"And the colors," she said. "He wears a lot of blue, and this one" — she points to Angel, 8 — "he wears red, and I come from a family that has gang members, and I know how it is."

"So I'm really scared for these two, especially being that there's been graffiti on our apartments, and there's a couple of kids around here that claim to be in gangs."

Like Lee, she generally prohibits her sons from leaving the courtyard of their apartment complex.

"We get wet, we play soccer, we play tag, we play come follow me, we play hide and go seek," Omar said. "It gets boring sometimes — we just do the same thing over and over."

Morales said she and her husband, a carpenter, worry most during the summer days when the boys are home alone.

"With all this time on their hands there's nothing for kids to do but get in trouble. I mean, they're good boys, they're not going to go out and specifically look for it, but if it comes up to them they'll think it's cool," she said.

"You know, there's a sense of proving to somebody that you're cool and that you can handle it," she said. "There's just a lot of stuff they can get into."

Such worries led Adolfo Mendoza — who moved to Roseland as a teenager and lived there for 10 years — to help start the Atletico Santa Rosa soccer school, a year-round, low-cost program.

Ninety percent of the school's players are from Roseland, said Mendoza, 36.

"I use the program to get close to these kids, to tell them finish high school, go to college," he said. "Who's beating us to that is the gang leaders, the wannabe gangsters. Those are the people beating us to get those kids now."

They haven't yet got to Jesus Reyes, coiner of the descriptive "dark games," or his cousin, Andres Torres, 12, who lives near Reyes on Olive Street.

The boys are close "like brothers," Torres said. They take the bus to the library together. They signed up for summer school together to stay sharp and meet friends, he said.

Reyes' mother tells him he should be a jockey, because of his size. He said: "I want to be a professional soccer player and, I don't know, those people that design the houses."

Torres wants to be a "really famous car specialist or a painter, like Pablo Picasso. He was the most famous painter of the 20th century."

They worry about the "gangsters" who hang out down the street, Torres said.

"Sometimes when I'm walking to his house I look at them, and they're looking at me," he

said. He said he worries that "they're going to do something to me because you know how, I'm Latino, and they, what's that word, stereotype."

Reyes recited the advice of his father, who manages a Windsor junkyard: "Don't ever be one. Don't ever get near one. Don't even look like one."

Then, after a pause, he said:

"The thing that almost scares me is, like, riding bikes. When you're just looking back, you don't know what's in front of you."

News researcher Theresa Meikle contributed to this report. You can reach Staff Writer Jeremy Hay at 521-5212 or jhay@pressdemocrat.com.

Tuesday, July 4

Sonoma County Fairgrounds Santa Rosa

General admission \$5 • Children 12 & under FREE
 Free Kids' Games • Free Pony Rides • Free Giant Super Slide
Parking at Fairgrounds \$15 (includes 2 admissions)
Free parking in downtown Santa Rosa garages
Free shuttle bus service to & from Seventh St. garage, Fifth St. garage & Second and E St. lot every 10 minutes beginning 4:10 p.m. (no regular City Bus service on July 4)

The Quick
 Music begins 5:00 p.m.
Summer of Love Revue
 Music begins 7:30 p.m.
Fireworks Sky Concert
 9:30 p.m.
 simulcast on

This event is presented by the Sonoma County Independence Day Celebration Association, a local nonprofit organization of volunteers, in conjunction with the City of Santa Rosa and:

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MARI MORALES, lives in Roseland with her husband and two sons