

THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

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Local



“I am ready to start eating again.”

Ray Lutz • Democratic congressional candidate

HUNGER STRIKE ENDS AT DAY 11 FOR CONGRESSIONAL HOPEFUL

Activist sought debate with incumbent Hunter

MICHELE CLOCK • U-T

EAST COUNTY

No one would have blamed him if he'd indulged in a cheeseburger or slice of chocolate cake.

But Democratic congressional candidate Ray Lutz opted for healthier fare Monday for his first real meal in 11 days: a Greek salad and a breadstick.

The longtime East County

political activist admitted he got about as much traction from the attention-seeking move as possible.

"I am ready to start eating again," Lutz said in an interview Monday, his 53rd birthday, before heading off to Pat & Oscar's restaurant in El Cajon.

He started a hunger strike at sundown Aug. 12 with the goal of

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BORDER-PASS USE LOW

Frequent-commuter program unpopular among pedestrians

JANINE ZÚÑIGA • U-T

SAN YSIDRO

Six years after a trusted-traveler program was launched to help speed up border crossings for pedestrians, 95 percent of people who regularly walk into San Ysidro from Mexico still don't have a SENTRI pass and lack a clear understanding of how the system works, according to a new poll.

The San Ysidro Pedestrian Port of Entry Crossing survey was conducted last month by the South County Economic Development Council, with help from the San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce. It found that of those who don't have a SENTRI frequent-commuter pass, 22 percent said they didn't believe it would save them time or was worth the cost. Twenty percent said they didn't know how to obtain one and 15 percent said they had never considered getting a SENTRI card.

In addition, 14 percent said they thought they were ineligible. The rest of the respondents gave other reasons, including fears of having their legal status revoked.

"To wait over an hour, the elderly, children, in the hot sun on a muggy day, is not acceptable," said Cindy Gompper-Graves, CEO of the development council. "We have to find a way to make this work without compromising security and commerce for either the

United States or Mexico."

Gompper-Graves is organizing the survey results and recommended solutions in hopes of presenting a report this week to U.S. Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Alan Bersin, who recently committed the agency to boosting the overall amount of SENTRI cardholders to 75 percent.

The agency said about 25 percent of vehicles going through the San Ysidro crossing have enrolled in the SENTRI program, while 2 percent of pedestrians have.

Customs and Border Patrol cooperated with the survey's coordinators, said Jackie Dizdul, spokeswoman for the agency.

"We will continue to work with our local partners and with our international partners to increase SENTRI enrollment," she said. "We look forward to using this survey and other feedback from the community as a starting point."

SENTRI — Secure Electronic Network for Traveler's Rapid Inspection — allows low-risk, preapproved travelers to be processed quickly when entering the United States. It's used at land ports of entry in California, Arizona and Texas.

The program began in 1998 for drivers. In 2004, customs officials expanded it to pedestrians. For two years, SENTRI

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SENTRI statistics

25%

Percentage of vehicles going through the San Ysidro Port of Entry that have enrolled in the SENTRI program.

2%

Percentage of San Ysidro pedestrians who have enrolled in SENTRI.

22%

Percentage of regular border crossers without a SENTRI pass who said they didn't believe it would save them time or was worth the cost.

\$122

Cost for a five-year SENTRI pass. Many of those surveyed thought the pass cost \$180 to \$300 per year.



The border-crossing lane for pedestrian users of the SENTRI identification program is empty as a line fills with nonusers waiting to enter into the United States in San Ysidro. JOHN GIBBINS • U-T

SENTRI • Shopping, visiting family and friends, business top reasons given for crossing border

FROM B1

participants have been allowed to use the same pass for designated vehicle and pedestrian lanes.

Leaders at the San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce said many in the community knew anecdotally about why people lacked SENTRI passes and are now pleased to have some statistics as confirmation.

The group recently asked customs officials to let it take

over marketing of the SENTRI program, said its executive director, Jason Wells.

"(Customs and Border Protection) should do the inspections but work with the community to do the marketing and assistance with the application process," Wells said. "It can be done at a fraction of what it would cost CBP to do it exclusively."

Tony Cruz, project man-

ager for the survey, called the results a "snapshot in time."

Teams of up to 10 people each were stationed at the customs building in San Ysidro, with permission from customs officials, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. for seven consecutive working days in July. Cruz said respondents were surprisingly open when answering questions about crossing times.

About 57 percent of re-

spondents said they crossed at least a couple of times a week, and as many as 24 percent said they cross daily.

More than one-third of the participants said they enter San Diego County to shop, 24 percent said they visit family and friends, and 23 percent said they go to work or conduct some kind of business in the United States. Others said they cross to go to school (8 percent), for tourism (6 percent), for a medical reason and for other purposes (5 percent).

Gompper-Graves said the

number of people crossing for school was skewed downward because the survey was taken in July. She plans to conduct three more surveys, once for each of the next three quarters, to get a more complete picture.

Cruz also said many of those surveyed thought a SENTRI pass cost \$180 to \$300 per year, when the actual cost is \$122 for a five-year pass.

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