

Bio-A

BILL AKERS: 1920-2009

3-5-09

# Longtime local newspaperman dies at 88

*Sentinel staff report*

WATSONVILLE — William W. “Bill” Akers, a former newspaperman who covered the organizing efforts of Cesar Chavez and who was resident of Santa Cruz County for more than 30 years, died Feb. 21 after a long illness. He was 88.

“Bill was a dedicated reporter and a gifted writer with a knack for finding just the right word or phrase. He was an eyewitness to history when he covered the beginning of the UFW in Delano and Salinas in the 1960s and early 1970s, and he was one of the few journalists I’ve known who was equally adept at hard-news coverage, human-interest features and commentary,” said former Register-Pajaronian Editor Mike Wallace.

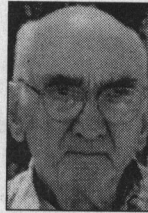
“He was a mentor and role model for those of us who were fortunate enough to work at the Pajaronian in

the 1970s and ‘80s,” Wallace added.

Akers was born May 20, 1920, in Superior, Neb., grew up in Iowa and came to California in 1940. He entered

the Army shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and as a member of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, served in Africa, Sicily and Italy.

The family moved to the San Joaquin Valley, where he edited local newspapers in Delano and McFarland. During his time as editor of the Delano Record, Cesar Chavez was organizing the United Farm Workers. A witness to history, Akers appears in the background of the famous wire service image of Chavez signing the first UFW contract.



AKERS

The family moved to Santa Cruz County in 1969. He was city editor of the Hollister Free Lance before joining the Watsonville Register-Pajaronian in 1970, where he covered the efforts to organize the lettuce fields in Salinas Valley and Chavez remembered him from Delano.

In 1972 Akers became editor of the Green Sheet, which served Mid-County, before retiring in 1983.

Akers was known as a talented writer with a flair for the turn of a phrase. He loved unusual words and tried to find a way to work them into his columns. After his retirement, he continued to write letters to the editor and won a Silver Pen award from the Mercury editorial page editors, given for letters that were singularly well-written. He was an avid reader and student of history and politics and had a broad range

of cultural interests, ranging from the TV show “Hee Haw” to classical music and grand opera, to baseball.

During his retirement years he served as a volunteer driver for the Santa Cruz County Volunteer Centers and a volunteer aide at the Aptos library. He pursued hobbies of drawing with pastels and writing poetry, which, he said, “escaped being doggerel by the thinnest of margins.”

## WILLIAM W. ‘BILL’ AKERS

**BORN:** May 20, 1920

**DIED:** Feb. 21, 2009

**HOME:** Santa Cruz

**OCCUPATION:** Newspaperman

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:** Worked for Register-Pajaronian, driver for the Volunteer Centers, volunteer aide at Aptos library

**SURVIVORS:** Daughters Cheryl Akers of East Lansing, Mich., Kathy Stewart of Bakersfield and Christine Sloan of Brentwood; son William of Sacramento; grandchildren Julie Bumatay of Bakersfield, Jennifer Holbrook of San Jose and Michael Sloan of Wisconsin; and a great-granddaughter

**SERVICES:** No services planned