

# Former UCSC professor is new poetry ambassador

David Swanger hopes to grow interest in poems throughout county

By SHANNA MCCORD

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SANTA CRUZ — David Swanger, one of the most prolific poets in the county, wants to tap the writer in people, even if they've never before penned a thought.

Swanger, a retired UC Santa Cruz literature and philosophy

professor, has been selected poet laureate of Santa Cruz County, essentially acting as an ambassador of the written word.

The two-year position is a collaboration started in 2010 between the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County and Poetry Santa Cruz to promote poetry throughout the county.

In his new role, Swanger hopes to reach out to people and places where poetry is not a part of the

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## AT A GLANCE

DAVID SWANGER, SANTA CRUZ POET LAUREATE



SWANGER

AGE: 71

FAMILY: Married to Lynn Swanger, three grown children

CAREER: Taught educational philosophy and poetry at UC Santa Cruz for 35 years, retired in 2005

DETAILS: Wrote four books of poetry, including 'Wayne's College of Beauty: New and Selected Poems', 'The Poem as Process and Essays in Aesthetic Education', winner of the John Ciardi Prize in poetry.

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2012 A3

## POETRY

Continued from A1

conversation, particularly in Watsonville.

Swanger will be visiting schools and hosting seminars to encourage more writing.

"In one sense, this is a poetry mecca," Swanger, 71, said. "But I want to reach out to those people who are not part of the accomplished and published cohort.

"There is a kind of curtain between people who have recognition already and people who are less sure of their writing. Poetry is a significant way to discover yourself and stay in touch with yourself."

A highlight of Swanger's poetry career was when National Public Radio host Garrison Keillor read one of his poems — "Patriarch at the

Lake" — on the radio program Writers' Almanac.

In the early 1990s, Swanger ran a weekly poetry feature in the Sentinel that included publishing 200 poems from people who would never otherwise receive recognition for their work.

First on his schedule as poet laureate are multiple readings throughout the county in April to celebrate National Poetry Month. He plans to do readings to the county Board of Supervisors and Santa Cruz City Council.

Swanger succeeds UCSC humanities lecturer Gary Young, who served as poet laureate for the past two years.

Thirty-three cities and counties in California have appointed poet laureates to serve their communities, including San Francisco, Cupertino and Los Gatos.

## PATRIARCH AT THE LAKE

The aunts, splendid, pale  
and ample in their bathing  
suits,  
unfurled tablecloths, challa,  
melons,  
seltzer water in blue bottles,  
and  
honey cakes and other cakes.

After the required hour  
everyone  
but Grandpa waded, stirring  
silt  
around our ankles, enjoying  
mud.  
Then, as if called by voices  
beyond  
us, the old man rose, his  
belly taut,  
trunks reaching his knees,  
his shins  
white as fish, and walked  
without  
watching the ground toward  
water.

We parted to let him pass,  
we receded  
onto the beach; he prowed  
outward  
and swam. He remembered,  
he stroked  
and roiled and spumed his  
way away  
then back to us, his  
shorebound spawn.

— David Swanger