

'We have a strong commitment to our students and that hasn't changed.'

BRIAN KING, Cabrillo College president

A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Cabrillo College President Brian King addresses staff, faculty and student leaders at the Cabrillo's new Crocker Theatre at All College Day on Friday. The event kicked off the College's 50th anniversary celebration.

Half a century in the classroom

Cabrillo College - 2000

Cabrillo College celebrates 50 years

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APTOS — On Sept. 13, 1959, in a makeshift classroom in Watsonville, Cabrillo College opened with 589 students.

Fifty years later, despite funding cuts by the state, the community college has more than 17,000 students taking classes in Aptos, Watsonville and Scotts Valley.

"I think we do a tremendous service to the students because we have much more of an idea of what's going on in all of our classes," said Kathy Cowan, who has taught English at Cabrillo for 28 years. "We engage the students personally."

Friday marked the beginning of a yearlong 50th anniversary celebration at the college. Current and retired professors, faculty and staff gathered in the new Crocker Theatre on the Aptos campus for an anniversary presentation. Former Cabrillo College professors and administrators told stories of the college from its beginning to now.

The school's true beginning was in 1958, when county voters approved forming a junior college district. Dave McGuire, who was hired in 1962 and ran the art department for many years, recalled how few resources the college had in the beginning. There was no money to buy tables or cabinets, so teachers and administrators built them.

"A part-time photo instructor and his students built the interior of the photo lab in a week before school started, and were able to open," McGuire told the audience.



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Cabrillo College staff and faculty explore the college's new Crocker Theatre during a break at All College Day on Friday.

"The faculty had a 'can do' attitude."

In 1960, voters approved a second round of funding for a permanent Aptos campus, which by 1962 had 2,000 students.

It wasn't until 1987 that Watsonville got a permanent Cabrillo location of its own. The Cabrillo center in Scotts Valley opened in 2006 after nearly 10 years of searching for the right spot.

Though teachers no longer have to build their own furniture or lab spaces, college President Brian King said the college's commitment to its students remains the same.

"Fifty years from now, we're still going to be talking about how to meet the needs of our students, how those needs are changing," King said.

The college's opening affected the community as well, said spokeswoman Jana Marcus. Cabrillo was the first postsecondary institution in the county, predating UC Santa Cruz by six years, and helped give local communities new identities, instead of being known as only beachside resort towns.

"People used to come here to retire, and now it's known as a big college town," Marcus said. "It brought artists and thinking minds. (They) all came here because they paid attention to what Santa Cruz did with UCSC and Cabrillo."

As part of the ongoing anniversary celebration on campus, Cabrillo College will host the grand opening of the new Visual and Performing Arts Complex the weekend of Oct. 9-11. The public events, which include performances, tours of the new buildings and hands-on art demonstrations, will be free.

The free tickets are available Sept. 28 and will be first-come, first-served. For more information, visit www.cabrillovapa.com.