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Teacher's seen college grow up

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WHEN Elsie Staley first went to work for Cabrillo College 32 years ago, she taught reading in tin-roofed buildings in Watsonville.

Now the Reading Center at Cabrillo has about 20 Apple and Macintosh computers, audio and video equipment designed to improve reading skills and a staff to help the more than 500 students who take classes at the center every year.

Staley, 63, who is retiring this year, has seen a lot of changes at Cabrillo since 1959, when it first opened its doors, but she thinks even bigger changes might be ahead.

With the state budget deficit nearing \$13 billion and the threat of massive cuts in education looming, Staley thinks Cabrillo, like other schools in the state, is in for a rough ride.

The idea of leaving Cabrillo behind and going into retirement took a little getting used to, Staley said. After all, she has been working since she was 12.

Born and raised in Modesto, she started working there in fruit canneries and factories. She remembers the hot summers working in the factories. She is sure they influenced her desire for an education.

"There is nothing like working in those factories during the summer to make you wish school would start just so you didn't have to work," she said.

After high school, she attended San Jose State, where she majored in fine arts and fashion design. She remembers her parents' reactions to her going to college and studying art.

"My mother said, 'It's not practi-



Kurt Ellison

Elsie Staley, who's been working for Cabrillo for 32 years, is retiring this year.

cal.' My father didn't care because he thought going to college was a waste of time for women," she said. "He thought women would end up getting married and having kids anyway."

"I was going to be a fashion designer when I graduated from college," Staley said, laughing. "But I was too practical."

Staley studied painting in college and she still paints, mostly watercolors and in acrylic. A couple of watercolor paintings hang in her office.

After she retires, she plans to do more painting and she will again become active with the Pajaro Valley Artists Association, a group

she joined many years ago, but she hasn't attended a meeting in 25 years.

"They'll faint when I walk into the meeting," she said.

She and her husband, Ron, plan to travel in Europe in the fall, do some snow skiing and spend more time with their two sons' children.

Her husband started working for the Pajaro Valley school district in 1948 as a teacher and coach, and later became vice principal at Watsonville High School. He retired eight years ago but has been in charge of the school district's disaster preparedness program since then.

Her career in education has been rewarding, she said. Over the years, she has helped thousands of students, many of whom didn't speak English as a first language, with their reading.

But there were those who graduated from local high schools and found they needed to improve their reading skills to keep up with the increased volume of required reading in college.

Whether it's helping students, or running the Reading Center, Staley said she wouldn't change anything in her 32-year career at Cabrillo.

"Cabrillo has been a wonderful experience," she said.