

Community Action Board director set to retire

Christine Johnson-Lyons to step down after 27 years of service

By LUKE BARNES

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SANTA CRUZ — Christine Johnson-Lyons will step down as executive director of the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County after 27 years.

Johnson-Lyons, who will officially retire in mid-September, first joined the board in 1986 and has overseen its growth and the introduction of several key programs to help low-income residents.

Founded in 1964, Community Action Board aims to help alleviate poverty and its causes in Santa Cruz County.

Praise for Johnson-Lyons' work and commitment toward community service has come from around the county.

"I'm thrilled that people like Christine are in our community and have rolled up sleeves for decades and worked tirelessly to improve it," said Watsonville Mayor Lowell Hurst. "She's going to leave an outstanding legacy and be a hard act to follow."

Johnson-Lyons said she remembers first becoming interested in community action during the 1960s.

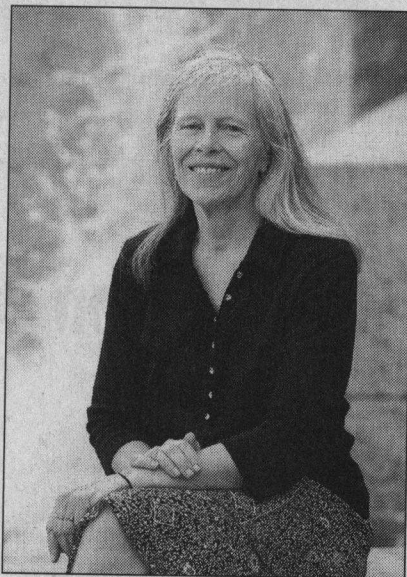
"I heard Lyndon Baines Johnson talking about community action when he was on campaign trail in '64 as high school student," Johnson-Lyons said.

"Living in Santa Cruz County I was very aware of good work that the CAB was doing."

Jane Weed-Pomerantz, who was mayor of Santa Cruz during Johnson-Lyons's initial appointment in 1986, said, "She has demonstrated tremendous flexibility not only in funding but also answering the needs of what the community needs to be addressed."

Weed-Pomerantz said that the success of the nonprofit lay in the way it trained those in need to become self-sufficient.

"It's not just a handout but equipping people to both advocate for themselves



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Christine Johnson-Lyons will retire from the Community Action Board in September.

and manage stresses of life," Pomerantz said.

Johnson-Lyons has overseen a wide variety of programs, such as the Davenport Resource Service Center, which services low-income, rural isolated communities, and the Community Restoration Project, which helps provide employment advice and direction for low-income and at-risk youth and adults.

Weed-Pomerantz was particularly complimentary of the Community Restoration Project, which helps previously incarcerated youths or adults return to society. "They can come back from the edge and be full members of the community," she said.

Weed-Pomerantz also emphasized that, despite leading the Community Action Board for more than a quarter of a century, the organization is prepared to continue without Johnson-Lyons.

"It is a great loss for the agency; it

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CHRISTINE
JOHNSON-LYONS

RESIDENCE: Watsonville

OCCUPATION: Executive director, Community Action Board Santa Cruz

EDUCATION: Graduated with honors from UC Santa Cruz, masters degree in public administration from San Jose State

FAMILY: Husband and daughter

also represents an opportunity to see how we can continue," she said. "This is a time to take stock."

County Supervisor Neal Coonerty, who has worked closely with Johnson-Lyons, agreed.

"One of the marks of a real leader is that they've created an organization that can survive the main person's retirement," he said. "The CAB staff work well and train well together and sure that organization will be a successful in the future."

Johnson-Lyons, an avid gardener and grandmother, said she wants to stay informed about the nonprofit's activities, but also plans to take some leisure time, much to the relief of her friends and colleagues.

"I really wish Chris well because anyone involved in human services needs to take time for self care," Weed-Pomerantz said.

Although reluctant to retire, Johnson-Lyons said she is satisfied that she is leaving the nonprofit in good shape.

"The board is in good hands. The programs are in good hands with very competent staff," she said. "There are programs in place to deal with the initiative."

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