

THOMAS HICKENBOTTOM: 1947-2013

# Santa Cruz loses a surfing icon

Original O'Neill Surf Team member,  
author dies after battle with cancer

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SANTA CRUZ — Thomas Hickenbottom, a Santa Cruz surfing icon, lost his six-year battle with cancer on Saturday at the age of 65. He died at his Gharkey Street home.

"He was very gracious, always had a smile on his face," said longtime friend Kim Stoner, who met Hickenbottom before the two attended Santa Cruz High School together.

Hickenbottom's love of surfing began when he moved to Santa Cruz from San Luis Obispo with his family in 1954 at age 7.

He ended up having a professional surfing career that took him up and down the California coast with some of the greatest names in Santa Cruz surfing history. He became one of the first members of the O'Neill Surf Team in the late 1960s, often beating the top wave riders from that period.

"Also on the team were Tom Hoyer, Dick Keating, Joel Woods, Gene Hall and Pat O'Neill. At that time, we were rated as the top NorCal surfers," Hickenbottom said in 2012 of his experience with O'Neill.

SEE THOMAS ON A2



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

Thomas Hickenbottom in his garden in June 2012. The longtime surfer and author of two books about surfing in Santa Cruz died Saturday after a battle with cancer.

## THOMAS

Continued from A1

"It was such an honor to be involved with all those great surfers on the same team."

The two-tour Vietnam War medic dedicated himself to surfing Mitchell's Cove, and was one of the first local surfers to regularly paddle out north of The Lane.

"We ruled Mitchell's and had so many incredible sessions, it was truly like a surf heaven on Earth," Hickenbottom said of the days spent at Mitchell's with his closest surfing buddies.

Hickenbottom took his passion for surfing beyond riding waves, authoring two books: "Surfing in Santa Cruz," a pictorial history of the sport from South County to Steamer Lane, and "Local Tribes," a surfing novel.

Hickenbottom didn't just find his love of surfing in Santa Cruz, he met his wife Sue Hickenbottom in a local poetry group more than 16 years ago.

"We were spiritually so connected at a soul level right away," Sue said Sunday. "We did fall in love immediately. We were definitely soul mates."

Hickenbottom was honored in a community fundraiser in 2012, during which more than 300 turned out for a party to help cover the costs of the cancer treatment. He had been fighting the disease in his head and neck since 2007.

Barbara Gerry, a friend of Hickenbottom's since high school, said in 2012 that the outpouring of support for the benefit was amazing to witness.

"It's Tom's enthusiasm, his inclusiveness; he wants to fold everyone in," Gerry said. "That's his nature, to be friendly to everyone, inclusive, loving. He has a love of life, a passion for life and for



LARISSA MUELLER/SENTINEL FILE

Dino Stagnaro and Thomas Hickenbottom discuss Hickenbottom's book, 'Surfing in Santa Cruz,' in 2011. Royalties from the book were donated to the Surfing Museum.

the people that he knows and loves. He's just got a huge, huge heart."

The city of Santa Cruz paid tribute to Hickenbottom in July 2012 with a proclamation dedicating July 21 to his life and accomplishments.

"For me, it was a place of honor to read that proclamation," Councilwoman, and now Vice Mayor, Lynn Robinson said in 2012. "It was one of these wonderful moments to stop and acknowledge an amazing individual in our community. That was his day and it is now in the history books."

Friend Stoner said he always looked up to Hickenbottom for his surfing expertise.

"He was my surfing mentor. I wanted to surf like his style," Stoner said.

Stoner said the two became particularly close after Hickenbottom returned from Vietnam, sharing a passion for the waves.

Stoner recalled the time when his friend shipped an old VW bus to the Hawaiian island of Kauai so that he would have a place to stay

## BIOGRAPHY

THOMAS HICKENBOTTOM

**BORN:** Nov. 21, 1947

**DIED:** Aug. 3, 2013

**SURVIVED BY:** Wife Sue Hickenbottom; sons Tristen and Bryce Hickenbottom; stepdaughter Allison Aguilar; stepson Jay Moore; and four grandchildren

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:** Original member of the Santa Cruz Longboard Union and Westside Longboard Coalition; member of Santa Cruz Surfing Club Preservation Society

**WORK:** House painter and author of 'Local Tribes' and 'Surfing in Santa Cruz'

**SERVICES:** Pending

when visiting.

He later offered Stoner the bus keys so he could use it during visits to Kauai.

Hickenbottom directed the operation Toys for Kauai Kids after Hurricane Iniki in 1992.

Hickenbottom, who was called "Tommy" or "Hicko" by close friends, was an original member of the Santa Cruz Longboard Union and Westside Longboard Coalition.

He was also part of the Santa Cruz Surfing Club Preservation Society, a group that rallied to keep

the Santa Cruz Surfing Museum at Lighthouse Point open.

Hickenbottom was a former Little League coach and contributed to the McPherson Art & History Museum and to the San Lorenzo Valley Museum.

Friends described him as the "quintessential Santa Cruzan."

"He was a fighter," Stoner said. "He fought long and hard on (the cancer)."

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