

Famous historian retires

Cabrillo College teacher inspired generation of historians

By DAVID PACINI

REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — Time is running out for local history buffs who want to enjoy the wit and wisdom that famous area historian Sandy Lydon imparts to his Cabrillo College classes.

That's because this semester, which begins Jan. 24, will be Lydon's last in his 32-year career at the community college that he played a huge role in shaping.

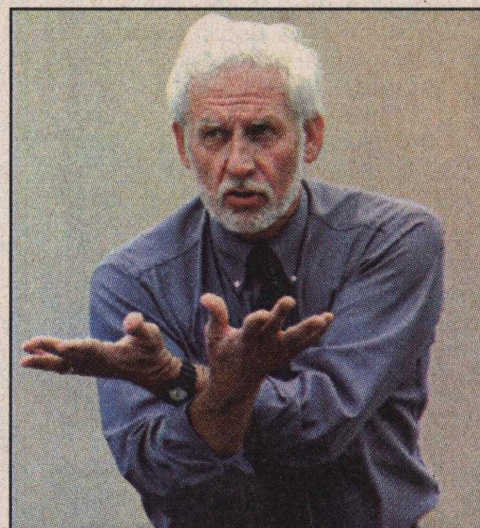
"I don't think words can describe how big a loss it will be for Cabrillo," said college Trustee John Laird. "Retiring" is not a word that would ever apply to Sandy."

In fact, said Lydon, he's not really retiring as much as he is seeking a larger audience.

"I want a bigger bang for my buck," said Lydon, who said he wants to write more books and work on other projects, like a history of Cabrillo.

That means that after 25 years, locals have just one more chance to take History 25A and 25B — which together describe the history of Santa Cruz County and the Monterey Bay region from 1890 to the present.

"I'm going to try this spring to see if I can get it right," Lydon said. "The nice thing about teaching is you get another chance twice a year. "It's my last whiz-bang. I'm walking backwards out of the saloon with guns blazing. There's an exit exam in that class and if you get a passing score you then become a certified local with a lovely certificate suitable for framing



Sandy Lydon delivers a speech at the dedication ceremony for a Cabrillo College extension project in downtown Watsonville last year.

Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

that entitles the bearers to look in the eyes of someone who was born here."

According to college registrar Gloria Garing, there are still seats See HISTORIAN, page 6

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available in History 25A and 25B, but another class Lydon plans for the semester — History 26H on Point Lobos and the Sur Country — already has a waiting list.

Lydon's colorful and entertaining teaching and public speaking style have endeared him to the community and encouraged many others to engage in their own research on the history of the region.

"I was in a teacher workshop he taught back in 1974," said Jane Borg of the Pajaro Valley Historical Association. "He uses slides and photographs in all of his classes. In the workshop he showed a color slide of Chinese Junk out in the water and said it was taken in the Monterey Bay. Then, he said 'Fooled you, didn't I? This is Hong Kong.' He draws those connections around the Pacific Rim — he put the Pacific Ocean at center of our map rather than traditional approach, which has Europe in the center of the

map."

Laird describes Lydon's speaking style as 'gripping.'

"He has the ability to do basic research and turn it around and tell it to people in a way they love hearing," Laird said. "He can be manic — as somebody that enjoys public speaking I always watch his style. There's nothing that his enthusiasm can't make interesting. I hope he keeps doing what he does for another 40 or 50 years."

Claire Biancalana, vice president of instruction at the college, said Lydon also had a profound influence on the development of Cabrillo as an excellent community college. Lydon served the college as chairman of the social sciences department, as a faculty senate president and as a dean at various times. In those roles he helped fine-tune the sabbatical program and build the staff development program, she said.

"He's brought a lot of people here who otherwise wouldn't be here," she said. "It's very sad — it will be very different here without his spirit but he's promised to come back and talk to each new group of tenured faculty about the

history of the college and I'm going to hold him to that."

Lydon said his goal in his work is to encourage people to ask why the region is the way it is and how it has shaped its inhabitants.

"People think they're independent but they're really spread-eagled on the spider web of history," he said. "Forces that have been here longer than you are guiding you."

Lydon praised the college as one of the few institutions that has successfully bridged all of the contending micro-cultures in the disparate county.

"I don't think I've ever said the phrase 'I'm going to work when I leave the house. I say I'm going to school — I tell my students they should be so lucky to find themselves in a profession they like. I will treasure until my last breath my relationship with Cabrillo. There's a civility — a cordiality — about the place."

Laird said of Lydon's books on local history, he was particularly moved by one on Japanese Americans in the area.

"I just felt like I was in the moment when he was writing about it," Laird said. "It's just hard to imagine anybody who can fill his shoes at Cabrillo."