

Pioneer in local theater saves 30 years of memories

By LISA DAVIS
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — David Sheaffer carries 30 years of Santa Cruz drama in his head — memories of countless plays, of eager amateurs stumbling over cues, and polished professionals fresh from Stratford-on-Avon.

He watched theater in Santa Cruz outgrow high school drama clubs, he played a part in the wild proliferation of performance groups, and he remembers all of it.

Now Sheaffer, sage of the local stage, is sorting through the memorabilia of years and creating a theater archive in the Special Collection of UCSC's McHenry library.

"I've acted in practically all those (theater) groups," Sheaffer said, recounting the history of Santa Cruz theater. "I used to be in as many as five plays and a few movies a year. And if I wasn't on stage I was reviewing the production."

Sheaffer started in local theater as soon as he arrived in Santa Cruz, in 1954. He was a charter member of the Santa Cruz Community Players, the seminal theater group in Santa Cruz. "There's been a straight line from that group to the majority of

groups in this day," Sheaffer said. He recently helped organize the 30-year reunion of the company, the group's first.

As the Community Players splintered and other companies started up in the increasingly vital world of local theater, Sheaffer moved from production to production, taking a part in company after company. If he wasn't acting he was building sets, or designing programs, or writing reviews.

Or working as an extra in movies filmed in Santa Cruz.

"For two days, I was locked in a room with Brooke Shields and two guys in Mona's Gorilla Lounge," Sheaffer said, remembering the filming of "Tilt." He was also in "Bound for Glory" and "When Your Lover Leaves."

Sheaffer was working with Bear Republic Theater when it folded last January. He was left with piles of posters, playbills, photos and flyers from the company's ten years, and a sense that they were an important part of the county's history. He brought the memorabilia to Rita Bottoms, head of UCSC's Special Collection — and a Bear Republic Theater archive was born.

"It's going to be a really neat

resource for the community," Bottoms said. "David has a really good sense of the material, and a heavy involvement with theater in Santa Cruz.

"And he has a willingness to work with the material. Our staff would have spent endless months, even years, assembling such a wealth of material," she said.

A senior's group brought together the library and the natural-born archivist. The Senior Community Service Employment Program provides wages for elders working with non-profit community organizations. Sheaffer works at McHenry Library about 20 hours a week, putting the remnants of the last 30 years into order.

Sheaffer's experience with local theater is as valuable as the mementos, according to the Special Collections librarian. He can name the actors in productions from 30 years ago, and often knows what the actors are doing now.

"With his meticulous notations he makes it a usable archive," library assistant Carol Champion said. "It's not just an idle collection, it's workable for the researcher."

Sheaffer's feeling for the arts and for Santa Cruz has lasted 30 years, keeping him on the stage throughout that time.

The same love for theater and town now keeps him in the library, writing history with posters and playbills.



David Sheaffer and Ann Vanzetta in a 1958 production of *The Desk Set*, produced by Gloria Lorenzo at the Laurel School Auditorium.

REFERENCE

[REDACTED]



David Sheaffer displays a few of his memories.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel