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Chris Matthews was always a big hit behind the bar at his pub the Poet and the Patriot.

THE POET AND THE PATRIOT

Santa Cruz's landmark pub celebrates its 30th anniversary with live music and toasts to its colorful founding owner

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{ **SATURDAY** 7 p.m. The Poet and the Patriot, 320-E Cedar St., Santa Cruz. Free. 426-8620 }

By **WALLACE BAINE**
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Chris Matthews didn't make it to see the 30th anniversary of the pub he co-founded in Santa Cruz. The larger-than-life writer, activist and former county supervisor died in the summer of 2008, but his legacy is still writ large in the colorful brew pub the Poet and the Patriot.

On Saturday, friends of Matthews, regulars at the Poet and just about anyone with a love for all things Irish will come together to celebrate 30 years in business, adjacent to the Kuumbwa Jazz Center on Cedar Street in downtown Santa Cruz. It's almost guaranteed that there will be plenty of toasts.

At the center of Saturday's event is a performance by the Bad Boys a cappella doo wop group, which has an intimate relationship with the Poet. It was the group that Matthews started and led for several years.

"We would do this thing called 'New Jersey Nights,'" said longtime Bad Boy Bobby Bishop. "Most of us in the group through the years were originally from New Jersey. We'd have open mike competitions and Barbra Streisand or Frank Sinatra look-alike contests. It was a whole lot of fun."

Tim McCormick, a limited partner in the business at its founding and now its co-owner, was also part of the group. "Everybody would come as your favorite 'Sopranos' character," he remembered of New Jersey Nights.

The Bad Boys even got the mayor of Trenton, N.J., to visit on New Jersey Night.

Also performing on Saturday will be the Celtic band the Wild Rovers, and a local band called the Knock Off.

The original idea of Matthews was to open a pub similar to the establishments in Ireland, a place where working-class stiff could rub shoulders with professionals. He cultivated a particular kind of audience, steeped in union activism and progressive politics. An Army veteran and founder of the Bill Motto Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars 5888 in Santa Cruz, Matthews, in the years before opening the Poet, had served on the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors representing the Watsonville area, after being appointed to the post by then [and current] Governor Jerry Brown, who had been known to visit the Poet.

Bishop said that when the pub first opened in 1982, it was not a college crowd. "It was more working-class and progres-

sives, artists, hippies. These days, I'd say, it's a good 70 percent a college crowd now. The old dinosaurs just don't come around much anymore."

"He followed the idea of what a pub actually is," McCormick said. "He wanted it to be the center of the community, a lot like they are in Ireland." In many countries, including the early days of the United States, pubs were where politicians would unwind and cut deals, artists would gather to bring a different perspective on the issue and normal folks would keep things down to the earth. It was this vision, said McCormick, who owns the Poet with Sean Brookins, that Matthews was after in the Poet and the Patriot.

Matthews published a volume of poetry in the 1970s and, 20 years later, he wrote "A Flag to Fly," a play about Irish soldiers who deserted a U.S. battalion during the Mexican-American war of the 1840s to fight on the side of Mexico. The play was staged in Santa Cruz, San Francisco and in Ireland.

Matthews also presided at the Poet as the resident provocateur. "He always wanted everyone to feel at home," said Bishop, well-known for his Bobby's Can Cooking barbecues. "He just loved talking politics. He loved talking about Irish tradition, and he was always looking out for people less advantaged than he was."