

CABRILLO COLLEGE

Poets celebrate the muse at annual event

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APTOS — Santa Cruz native Kate Aver Avraham has achieved much in her nearly 60 years.

Among Avraham's accomplishments, being named the unofficial Pleasure Point Body Surfing Champion in the Juvenile Division in 1968 by members of her Live Oak neighborhood.

Saturday night at the Cabrillo College Music Recital Hall, Avraham, 59, received a more formal distinction.

A children's author and poet, Avraham was the first of 20 female writers and poets to share her work at the 29th annual "In Celebration of the Muse" event. Avraham was chosen to lead off the readings as recognition for receiving the 2011 Chapbook Award



AVRAHAM

for her collection of poems entitled "Perhaps the Truth is Also Blue."

Co-produced and emceed by Amber Coverdale Sumrall and Dena Taylor, "In Celebration of the Muse" is the longest-running literary event in Santa Cruz County. First held in 1982, the event has showcased more than 200 female authors over the years and is co-sponsored by the Cabrillo College English Department.

"To think that on that day in 1982 that this was just for women to share their gifts, it's empowering," said Avraham, who participated for the sixth time. "This has become a tradition in this county. The muse represents the resilience and the incredible creativity of the women who live here."

"In Celebration of the Muse" has always been a fundraising event as well, with proceeds being distributed to a number of area organizations that benefit women. Since 2008, the event's proceeds have benefited Poetry Santa Cruz.

"We are a community-based poetry organization dedicated to bring poetry to Santa Cruz County as well as serve the poets of the county," said Len Anderson, Poetry Santa Cruz's secretary and treasurer. "The 'Muse' is a great event because the women of the world have wonderful voices, and all of us need to hear them."

Readers included first-timers new to the area, such as Peggy Heinrich, as well as veterans well-known in the Santa Cruz literary community, Ellen Bass and Wilma Marcus Chandler.

The authors also ran the gamut in ages with Aptos resident Jessica Woods being one of the youngest at 43 to Santa Cruz resident Ellen Treen, one of the oldest at 81.

"It means a lot to be asked back each year," said Treen, who has participated in the event since its inception. "This is a forum for women, and there are always new readers and new ideas. This event is important because when you consider how many

women write, but when you look at what gets published, women still lag behind."

Cabrillo College Computer Technology Center instructor Rhea Leonard attended the event for the first time.

"I think the idea of the muse means whatever inspires you to know yourself better, to appreciate what's here better and even what's not here," said Leonard, whose mother and grandmother were both involved in the arts. "The muse is what helps us articulate our own lives. For me, it's listening to what other people are thinking and saying."

For Avraham, who still body surfs, the idea of the muse was well represented by the readings by her peers Saturday night.

"In the old days, the muse was like a goddess," Avraham said. "The presence of the muse means you're open to your own creativity and open to being guided by the muse's inspiration, spirit and energy. I find these women inspire me each year."