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BLAZE CAUSES \$500K IN DAMAGE

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WEDNESDAY APRIL 27, 2011

LOCAL - LIFESTYLE

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CABRILLO COLLEGE



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A 'Dining for History' event will take place Thursday in the Sesnon House on the Cabrillo College campus. The house was built as a private home in 1911.

Dining for History

Talk focuses on history of Sesnon House

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APTOS — Functioning almost as a miniature Hearst Castle, Alto Pino once was a private summer home that hosted glamorous parties, complete with society belles dressed in chiffon dresses and black-tied business and political tycoons.

The guests were all friends and associates of the home's owners, Mary and William Sesnon, who built the home in 1911 on land that her parents — Benjamin and Kate Porter — purchased in the mid-1800s. According to newspaper accounts at the time, a huge celebration was held to commemorate the completion, with fireworks, a vaudeville show and a bulls-head barbecue, with hun-

dreds of guests arriving by train from San Francisco.

One hundred years later, that tradition of elegance continues at the historic mansion, with brides gliding slowly down an outdoor aisle, preceded by colorfully dressed bridesmaids, groomsmen and other assorted members of the wedding parties.

On Thursday, the Aptos Chamber of Commerce will host the latest in its Dining for History series at what's now known as the Sesnon House. The building, which marks 100 years this year, has been owned by Cabrillo College for the past 33 years.

Brian King, the college's president, will be the featured speaker at the event, which will include food prepared by students enrolled in the college's culinary arts program.

Four white columns flank the entrance to the 19-room mansion, and its backyard features a wraparound terrace

IF YOU GO

DINING FOR HISTORY

WHEN: 6 p.m. Thursday
WHERE: Sesnon House, 6500 Soquel Drive, Aptos
COST: \$40 members, \$45 nonmembers

overlooking an expansive lawn that's accentuated by orange Japanese torii, or gates of good fortune. The home cost between \$60,000 and \$70,000 to build and was designed by a San Francisco firm that incorporated elements of Moorish, Mission and American styles of architecture. Features included oak floors and banisters, a tile roof that weighed 97,000 pounds and rain gutters made of

SEE **SESNON** ON B6

SESNON

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copper.

The Sesnons named it Pino Alto, or "High Pine," after a tree that once stood on the property.

"At the time it was built, there were ocean views from the back porch," King said, though the view is now obstructed.

After World War II, when such displays of opulence fell out of favor, the couple sold the home to the Salesians, a Catholic order.

The home was maintained as a seminary and school until 1978, when the college purchased the property for \$850,000, remodeled it and renamed it Sesnon House.

Over the next decade, the mansion housed the Cabrillo College Foundation, the college's community education office and several community organizations.

But when the Loma Prieta earthquake struck in October 1989, the house sustained severe damages that forced

its closure for seven years.

"After the '89 earthquake, it could have easily been demolished, but the college and the community wanted to preserve it, and what a great thing that is," King said.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency provided half of the more than \$1 million needed for the reconstruction, he added, while the remainder came from private donations.

Sesnon House reopened in 1996, and has since been available for use as a community meeting place, by private groups and nonprofits. In addition, the college's Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management Program has operated there since September 1997. The Alto Pino restaurant is open for dinner three days a week and serves as a testing ground for culinary students.

Though the community groups that operated out of the building are no longer there, King said the foundation still has a presence there, and the college is now working to create a digital archive of historical photographs.