



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Cabrillo graduates file onto Carl Conelly Field.

Cabrillo graduates remark on path to education

By TARMO HANNULA and TODD GUILD

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Organizers of the commencement ceremony for the Cabrillo College Class of 2011 took the gamble that rain wouldn't interfere with their outdoor ceremony on Friday.

The risk was worth it. As a dark and heavy cloud layer loomed overhead, 956 graduates poured into Carl Conelly Stadium and celebrated their graduation under dry conditions.

The bleachers were packed with families and friends as the graduates and faculty took their seats for the 6 p.m. event.

"I kind of feel good," said graduate Dan Armstrong, who said he was earning a degree in social sciences. It's been good here. I feel comfortable at Cabrillo. The teachers are very professional — they're good."

Guadalupe Garcia of Watsonville said it took her nine years to complete her degree in early childhood development.

"It feels great," she said. "Between working and school and everything else it has been a real struggle. I've been trying so hard to finish. I had to pay for all my books, all my classes and all the other expenses. It's been hard. I loved it here at Cabrillo."

Martha Vega, who works as a police service specialist at the Watsonville Police Department, graduated in liberal arts/science with high honors in Spanish.

"All I can say is I am so happy," she said as she prepared to file onto the field. "Yes, it's been tough. But now I'm here."

The oldest graduate this year was Santa Cruz resident Jack Scainetti, 84, who earned a degree in art.

Theo Offei, 23, plans to double major in communications and political science, with an emphasis in prelaw, at the University of Southern California.

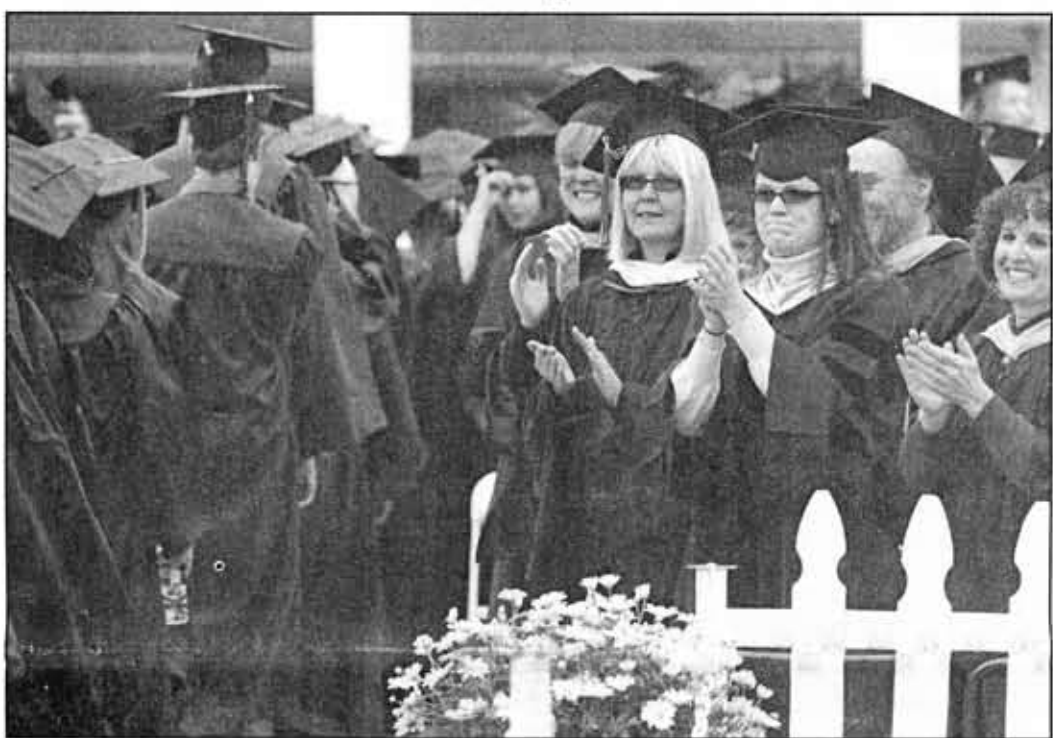
Offei was born in Ghana, but grew up in Italy after his family moved there to escape the Ghanaian authoritarian dictatorship.

He came to Watsonville as part of a high school exchange program, during which time he stayed with a local family. That homestay sparked a desire to live here, he said.

"I've always wanted to live in the U.S.," he said in a Register-Pajaronian interview on Wednesday. "I believe there are a lot of opportunities here. In the U.S. you can basically come from nowhere and go somewhere if you work hard."

He returned to visit his host family in 2008 and started looking into attending Cabrillo College.

He started in spring 2009,



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Cabrillo faculty applaud graduates at the commencement ceremony.



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Martha Vega prepares to enter the commencement ceremony with a degree in liberal arts/science with high honors in Spanish.

initially listing his major as computer science, because of the proximity to Silicon Valley. That quickly changed.

"I had no idea what I wanted to do, but soon I realized my real passion is political science and law," he said.

Offei said he developed a passion for politics during the 2008 presidential election when Barack Obama was elected.

"In the U.S. color doesn't matter," he said. "You can really become someone."

Offei will attend USC on the Jack Kent Cooke scholarship, which provides as much as \$30,000 per year for four years.

"I love Cabrillo," he said. "It's been a good experience. It has given me the foundation to move on to other challenges."

Offei was one of two Cabrillo students who earned the scholarship.

The other student, Sophia Forde, was homeschooled and began taking history and art classes at Cabrillo when she

was 13.

"I was flabbergasted," she said of getting the scholarship. "There is no way I would have been able to make ends meet transferring to a university," she said.

Forde earned an associate degree in history, which she said gave her a foundation of the po-

litical activism that punctuated her time at Cabrillo.

She plans to major in urban planning at UC Los Angeles.

"I like the way that history has taught me how to think," she said. "It's the only humanity that doesn't reduce itself to a formula like other disciplines do."

Forde was president of the Cabrillo Democrats Club, where she led the drive to register 400 students to vote. She also helped start a textbook-rental program at the college.

"I went into Cabrillo at 13 having never taken a college class," Forde said. "They taught me how to be a college student. Once you show your dedication, there's nothing the teachers won't do to help you succeed."