CABRILLO COLLEGE CUTS

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By TOYIN LAPAN

Wine classes get the ax

Vineyard, winery owners upset with decision, say industry growing locally

APTOS — Sue Slater has spent the past 11 years teaching the first year of n00b students to cabernet College's course offerings in wine.

It's not surprising that she was crestfallen when she learned in March that all of the wine courses in the culinary program would be suspended for the 2011-12 school year because of budget cuts.

But the instructor was not the only one who noticed the cuts. Along with students who can no longer finish the full pauser of classes in the near future, the Santa Cruz Farm Bureau and local vineyards and wineries are all expressing disappointment in the decision by the college.

"There are job opportunities for graduates of this program. The local wine industry wants people who are familiar not only with wine, but also knowledgeable about our local wine industry," said Mary Lindsey, president of the Viticulture Association of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Lindsey said 30 new wineries have sprung up in the Santa Cruz Mountains in the past few years, and the industry is growing locally.

Slater said the classes are typically at capacity, with a waiting list of students.

"The wine classes are extremely popular every year," she said. "I understand the issues around the budget cuts, but I feel like they took out the wrong classes. These are classes that get people good-paying jobs.

Meanwhile, Slater, who has taught at Cabrillo since 1990, has been reassigned to other classes in the culinary program.

Cabrillo President Brian King acknowledged the value of the wine classes, but said the cuts have hit every area of campus and it could be seen that many of Cabrillo's programs directly affect the local economy.

"I think that's true about every program on campus," King said. "When you look at the economics of the early childhood program, there are Cabrillo graduates who provide child care services to the community.

When you think of health care needs, chances are you will be touched by a Cabrillo graduate.

The wine classes are some of the most recent cuts in what have been yearly reductions since 2008. Since then, Cabrillo has cut $1.6 million from its budget.

In 2010, Cabrillo canceled its monthly 2000-2011 wine seminar, and offered 100 fewer course sections this past school year than in 2009-2010.

Cabrillo is facing a $3.5 million deficit next year, and is cutting funding reductions continue.

The various wine courses at Cabrillo instruct students on every aspect of the industry, from growing grapes to identifying wine characteristics, wine making and pairing wine with food.

"The reality is we are appropriately affected after every reduction so we make," King said. "It's not surprising that the local community is disappointed. A lot of these cuts hit people's passions and teach a novelty.

Current and former students have banded behind Slater and the wine classes and have even started gathering signatures for a petition.

Cathy Bentley, manager of MA Vineyards, said Slater's classes "changed her life." She was the former of Cabernet Franc blankets before selling the business to get into the wine industry.

Ryan Spilke took all of Slater's classes and was a wine buyer for New Leaf before moving to Seattle and taking the same position at Whole Foods.

"I was really surprised to cut it," Spilke said. "It's an amazing program, and there really isn't another one like it.

Jean Brown, executive director of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, said he is trying to find other funding sources for the classes.

"We understand the dilemma the Cabrillo board is in," Brown said. "These are tough financial times and they have to make cuts, we're not naive about that. But it is a unique program that has an economic stimulus for the community, which is important.

We want to not just criticize them but help them."