Cabrillo gets $1M donation

Danville woman digs deep to benefit college

By TODD GUILD
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

A countywide project designed to help students attend college got a boost this month with a $1 million donation from a former Santa Cruz County woman.

Barbara Samper, who lives in Danville, donated the money to the Santa Cruz County College Commitment, Cabrillo officials announced Thursday.

The project is a partnership made up of the county's school districts, Cabrillo College, CSU Monterey Bay, San Jose State University and UC Santa Cruz. It was formed to increase college readiness and the success of Santa Cruz County students.

The Santa Cruz County College Commitment also provides the Fourth Grade Experience, a project designed to give fourth-grade students a tour of campus, a taste of the college experience and encourage them to work toward higher education.

Samper said her family's roots date back to the 1860s, when her great-great-grandfather built many of her buildings in Santa Cruz.

She built a home in Capitola, which she sold 15 years later, using the $3 million proceeds to start her charity, the Barbara Samper Foundation.

"I grew up in Los Gatos but I spent all my time in Santa Cruz," she said. "I have a huge hist in Santa Cruz County, and I love the place."

It was on a drive from her second home in Danville to Santa Cruz when she stopped for a rest and watched a group of farm laborers working in a field.

"I wanted to find something I could contribute to that would help migrant workers' children," she said.

Soon, she spoke with a representative from Cabrillo College's Cabrillo Advancement Program, which provides counseling support, guidance and college preparatory activities for low-income Santa Cruz County middle and high school students.

That discussion encouraged her to give $1 million for scholarships for those students.

When Samper heard about Santa Cruz County College Commitment she knew she wanted to help.

"I don't think there is anywhere in this country that the teachers and professors get together and decide that they want to work for everyone being prepared to go to college," she said. "I've never heard of anything like this."

Cabrillo College President Brian King called the Santa Cruz County College Commitment a "groundbreaking initiative."

"We are incredibly grateful for Barbara's gift, which provides momentum for the initiative, and lessens the financial burden for our first-year students, allowing them to focus on the achievement of their educational goals," King said.

In addition to supporting student scholarships, Samper's financial support will support the Visual and Performing Arts program as well as the ongoing maintenance of Cabrillo's Music Recital Hall. In her honor, the state-of-the-art performance facility will be named the Barbara Samper Recital Hall.