TEDx conference shares ideas and inspires

Second year of event attracts 350 attendees to Cabrillo College

By KIRSTEN FAIRCHILD

APTOS — Nahara Villalobos said she couldn’t wait to return to her home in Watsonville on Saturday.

A junior at Watsonville High School, Villalobos said she was anxious to share with family and friends all that she had learned at a daylong conference dedicated to the theme of “Open.”

One of the youngest among the estimated 350 attendees at TEDxSanta Cruz — an independently organized TED event held at the Crocker Theater at Cabrillo College — Villalobos, 16, said that listening to speakers discuss topics ranging from open spaces and open government to open hearts and open minds added up to a one-of-a-kind experience for her.

“I’m just amazed by everything I’ve heard today,” said Villalobos, one of 15 Watsonville-based students whose attendance at the conference was sponsored by Watsonville Community Hospital.

“1’ve never been to something like this before. The speeches were so powerful. I feel inspired. Being here has changed me.”

Utterances of the words “inspiring” and “amazing” by attendees proved to be a frequent occurrence during the picnic lunch held in between the morning and afternoon sessions.

Irene Tsouprake, a co-organizer along with David Warren, Kirsti Scott and Jon Lutin, said she was pleased by the turnout for the second year of the event.

“TED — Technology, Entertainment, Design — is a nonprofit organization that started about 20 years ago as a single conference in Monterey,” Tsouprake said. “Over the years, it began to grow. The ‘x’ means it’s independently organized; it’s licensed by TED.

“TEDxSanta Cruz is a platform for ideas worth spreading,” Tsouprake continued. “We have 16 speakers that we curated down from the 100 or more nominations that we received around the theme, which is ‘Open’ and every aspect of what that means.”

Terry Corwin, the executive director of the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, said he was honored to have an opportunity to talk about open space at the conference.

“Events like these are important because they’re a new way to share ideas and have us think about things in new ways,” Corwin said. “I’ve enjoyed every talk I’ve heard. It’s been a great experience.”

Writer and consultant Terri Schneider, known for her prowess as an adventure racer and triathlete, gave a presentation called “Standing Still to Move Forward.”

“I’m a TED fan,” Schneider said. “I probably heard of TED for the first time from a friend and then I started watching their talks online. With TEDxSanta Cruz, I’m someone who really appreciates people in our community who are doing amazing stuff with their lives. They’re creating something from nothing. They’re coming up with an idea and going after it with all of their passion.”

Former Sentinel reporter Martha Mendoza, a Pulitzer Prize winner, kicked off the conference with a presentation titled ‘Why Open Gov-