Providing creative opportunities for seniors

Stagebridge theater arts company coming to Santa Cruz County

By ERIK CHALHOUB
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

WATSONVILLE — Forget about retirement — baby boomers still want to stay active in society, according to Soquel resident Lynn Knudsen.

“The age of retirement is not what it used to be,” she said. “The new generation wants to contribute, to educate, to learn. They don’t want to retire.”

Tapping into this, Knudsen is helping to bring Stagebridge, a nonprofit theater company geared toward those aged 50 and over, to Santa Cruz County.

“It’s an exciting new opportunity,” she said. “There’s really nothing like this in the Monterey Bay area that I know of.”

Founded in 1978 in Oakland, and later expanding into Los Angeles, Stagebridge is known as a nationally recognized theater arts program for seniors, Knudsen said.

With people living longer lives, the focus is now on “creative aging,” she said, such as how they can give back to society through creative means.

“This is a vital way of living a senior life,” Knudsen said. “Creativity abounds among seniors.”

While performing for the Santa Cruz Follies, Knudsen realized that, with only one or two shows a year, the performers did not have any other venues to showcase their talents.

With cutbacks to theater arts programs at the college level leading to limited offerings, this lack becomes even more prominent.

“There’s no place they can go and practice on a regular basis,” she said. “That’s what got me really excited.”

Leading the charge, Knudsen is currently gathering curriculum and “wonderfully recognized instructors that everyone knows,” with the goal of launching the program in the summer, she said.

The program is partnering with Cabrillo Stage.

It will offer a variety of performing arts classes, such as singing, acting, improvisation and more. At the end of each class, the students will then perform what they learned in a showcase performance.

As the program grows, Stagebridge will also perform full-scale productions, Knudsen said.

“It really changes the whole concept of aging,” she said. “We are creating a space for creative aging programs that offers older adults performing arts opportunities.”

For information, call 706-8848 or email lynn@stagebridge.org.

ABOVE: Members of the Santa Cruz Follies Dee Sargent (from left), Mary Roitz and Lynn Knudsen are working to bring Stagebridge to Santa Cruz County. BELOW: An improvisation class for seniors is one of the classes Stagebridge will offer.