GAINING FUNCTION

‘THese Are SurvivOrs’
Cabrillo College program honors survivors of stroke, disability

Maggie Reynolds, who will be honored for two years of successful participation at the Cabrillo College Stroke and Disability Learning Center on Thursday, works on her coordination in a ballon activity at the center Monday.

Students gain skills, knowledge through support network

By Karen Guzman
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APFOS @ Flutes, clarinet and violins have gathered dust in Maggie Reynolds’ house after her stroke on Christmas Day 2013. The former folk musician was in the bathroom at a party when she realized she couldn’t move her left leg or arm. Seeing double, she tried to call for help and a garbled noise came out, she said.

“It all happened very fast,” said Reynolds, 71. “When I tried to talk and that came out, it was just horrid.”

Helicoptered to a nearby hospital, doctors told her a blood vessel had burst in her brain. Reynolds said she lied in the hospital bed, half-paralyzed and panicked, feeling like her left half was gone. Nurses had to touch her how to find her left hand, she said.

“The fear of where it was, was just incredible,” said Reynolds. “Looking back, it’s like ‘Holy crow.’ Your brain just doesn’t know.”

This began a four-year recovery process, which brought Reynolds to the Cabrillo College Stroke and Disability Learning Center, a community college program partly funded by private donations. Now an AEPS resident, Reynolds can sit in her electric wheelchair, lift her legs and open Recovery + Page 4.

Recovery
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her left hand.

Along with a dozen others, Reynolds will be honored by the center Thursday for her two-year progress.

Cheered by her peers, Reynolds walked between two parallel bars at Monday’s mobility class, supported by her right arm, a physical therapist and back-grounds rock ‘n’ roll music, she said. The rhythm gives her strength and coordination, said Reynolds, who holds degree in music.

“It’s somewhat easier for the body to move with,” said Reynolds. “You go with what’s inside you — that’s the best of it.”

Meanwhile, classmate Cindy Rady, 70, danced to doo-wop music with a former army colonel and others. Rady, who also be honored Thursday, came to the center in 2012 after her multiple sclerosis worsened, giving her vertigo.

When she first came, she sat folded over, her chest by her knees, unable to sit on the stationary bike, she said. “Now I can get on the bike and even do hills,” Rady said.

Rady, who lived in Paris until 2009, when she was younger, she traveled around the world for months at a time, including three trips to the Himalayas. Her next goal, she said, is to transition to a walking cane.

CABRILLO’S STROKE AND DISABILITY LEARNING CENTER
What: Speech, mobility, dovinity and recreational classes for adults who have suffered a stroke or other disabling condition
Cost: About $150 per semester for class meeting twice a week
Details: Call 631-477-3300 after Aug. 18 for new student registration or visit trypsi.com/stroke410 to donate.

“I want to get rid of the walker, because you can’t take the walker to Paris,” said Rady, a Santa Cruz resident.

Rady said she’s now only re-learned how to sit and stand at the center, but more importantly, has gained a support network. Before, she didn’t have any friends in wheelchairs, she said.

“We’re learning about everybody — what they were, what they are now, what they hope to be,” she said.

Director Debra Bone said the center, which serves 150 students, 75 percent stroke victims, has a motto: “Love spoken here.”

After a disabling injury, people feel like they go longer belong, said Bone. Through trauma, spirit deepens and wisdom is gained, she said.

“There’s that personal connection that really is what healing is all about,” Bone said. “These are survivors.”