LISA KOLBECK

For 40 years, Live Oak resident has taught, inspired and cared for preschoolers

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LIVEOAK - Lisa Kolbeck has seen her share of magic spells and fairy hunts in her 40 years as a preschool teacher.

"Preschoolers are just full of (magic)," said Kolbeck, an East Bay native who has lived in Santa Cruz County since 1968. She took as many early education classes at Cabrillo College as she could through the years, and began teaching preschool in 1973, working in various children's centers around the county.

"We have a treasure there," she said of the Early Childhood Education Department at Cabrillo.

In 1988, when Kolbeck's now-30-year-old son was preschool age, a group of parents hired her to teach their children. So began her in-home preschool, which she will retire from at the end of the month.

"My son named it 'Little School' because he already went to another, larger school. Community Children's Center," she said. "I'd never really considered doing family child care, since I had always worked in child care centers, but I discovered I loved the freedom to make space for children in a homey setting where they could feel safe to be themselves and play, where the creation of play worlds can keep bubbling along."

She said she loves creating a school culture full of special days and games and seasonal celebrations.

"I've kept going all these years because that daily contact with children, who are so there in each moment, has been something that gives me great pleasure and joy," she said.

Kolbeck, who earned her creative writing degree from UC Santa Cruz in 1988, writes poetry and children's books, and even writes poems for each child when they graduate. She draws inspiration from her students.

"Children have an amazing ear, and because they're working to understand the world, they often switch words in a really poetic way," she said. "It's one of my favorite, favorite parts of the job -- eavesdropping with a clipboard."

Kolbeck and her husband Eric Hoffman have been married since 1986, and can be referred to as "Mr. and Mrs. ECE." Hoffman is also a preschool teacher as well as a Early Childhood Education instructor at Cabrillo, who also writes children's books and designs toys and playgrounds. When the couple isn't working with local kids, they can be found canoeing or hiking.

"Our canoe has the names of most of the bodies of water we have paddled painted on its sides," said Kolbeck, also an avid gardener.

Kolbeck said she believes she was destined to become a teacher, a job that has filled her life with joy.

"This job really suits my heart," she said. "I can nurture the lives of others, be woven into the lives of families, and I can be myself, in my garden, exploring the world from a child's point of view.”