Ag supporters honored

By ERIC CHALIHAUR
or威名超覚

WATSONVILLE — When Cabrillo College began its agricultural program in 1967, only five students made up the first class.

Thirty-five years later, when the program now boasts 225 students and recently garnered national attention when it was featured on the Cooking Channel’s reality TV show “The Farm,” Cabrillo College President Laurel Jones was pleased for alumni to propose that her college be chosen to host the program’s second season at the National Agriculture Day Spring Lunch hosted Wednesday.

The annual event, presented by the National Agriculture Day committee, is held on March 21, the anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln signing the Homestead Act.

This poster, drawn by Owen Frederick Witmer, took first place in the poster contest.

Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau and Ag in the City, held at the Santa Cruz County Fair Grounds Friday afternoon, also served as a way to not only honor the organization’s annual award winners, but to shine a spotlight on the benefits of the agriculture industry, said David Van Loen, director of the Santa Cruz Farm Bureau.

“The National Ag Day program looks to America to understand how food is produced and the role agriculture plays in our strong economy,” Van Loen said.

This year’s Al Smith Friend of Agriculture award was presented to Teri Celilo for her support of local agriculture and her efforts to educate the public about agriculture.

“The best of the best,” she said. “We have an incredible supporter of the agriculture industry.”

The former City of Santa Cruz Development Director, who retired in 2005, served on the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake Relief, where she spearheaded the preservation of the Salinas Valley by creating the Salinas Valley Research Zone.

Celilo has also supported local agriculture with her CELILO Farm, and is a graduate of Farming Families of America. In 2005, she was named to the National Women in Agriculture Hall of Fame.

“I’ve always been a busdriver in the world,” she said.

The annual event also featured a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the newly-opened Farm & Food Institute, which serves local students.

Oklahoma student Mary Clifton (left) was awarded the Connie Bean Memorial Scholarship, while Santa Cruz student Brittany Poly after graduating from Santa Cruz High School in May 2013, received a scholarship every year of high school, and also played football as one of the track team’s starting wide receivers for the last five years.

The recipient of the Santa Cruz Memorial Scholarship also received an annual $2,000 grant from the Santa Cruz Memorial Scholarship Program. This brings to total scholarships awarded that Clifton will receive to $4,000.

Laurel Jones, president of Cabrillo College, was the featured speaker Wednesday at the National Agriculture Day Spring Lunch at the fairgrounds.

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