

El Cerrito and Kensington Women of the Year to be Honored Tonight

El Cerrito's Woman of the Year, Kimi Honda, and Kensington's Woman of the Year, Ciara Wood, are among those being honored tonight at the Women's History Month program at Contra Costa College.

By Charles Burress -12:05am

The Women of the Year of West Contra Costa County being recognized tonight at Contra Costa College include senior advocate Kimi Honda of El Cerrito and community safety advocate Ciara Wood of Kensington.

In celebration of Women's History Month in March, Contra Costa College and the West Contra Costa Branch of the American Association of University Women host an annual program to honor Women of the Year from communities in West Contra Costa County. This year 10 women were chosen.

The mayors and the two county supervisors in West County are asked to select an honoree from their respective communities. Each city develops its own selection criteria.

In El Cerrito, Mayor Ann Cheng recommended Honda, and the City Council passed a resolution March 7 affirming the choice and honoring her many contributions, including those to the Japanese-speaking senior group Sakura Kai.

In Kensington, the choice was made by Supervisor John Gioia, who selected Ciara Wood, who's being honored in part for her dedication to wildland fire prevention.

Below are the descriptions for Honda and Wood in the brochure for tonight's 7 p.m. program at the Knox Center for the Performing Arts at Contra Costa College in San Pablo.

Senior Advocate Kimi Honda

An El Cerrito resident of 35 years, Ms. Honda is a role model for many. She has always led by example and is instinctively engaged in her many activities. High energy, a positive self-image and winning smile accompany Ms. Honda throughout the many activities that fill her day.

Ms. Honda is a graduate of Stanford University and possesses a graduate degree in educational psychology, a teaching credential, an administrative credential and a real estate license. Although retired after 25 years as a school nurse with the Oakland School District, she continues in her profession by coordinating an annual health fair for Sakura Kai participants. Having served on El Cerrito's Committee on aging since 1997, Ms. Honda is an active member of the Committee on Aging Health Care subcommittee. Ms. Honda was co-recipient of the Excellence in Teaching Award from the California Council of Adult Education in 2007.

Ms. Honda is a coordinating instructor with West Contra Costa Adult Education offering participants of Sakura Kai a twice a month, day-long, program of fellowship, cultural and educational opportunities, activities and services. This older adult educational opportunity program is co-sponsored by the City of El Cerrito. As president and board member of Sakura Kai, a Japanese-speaking Senior Center, Ms. Honda worked tirelessly on an endowment fund to raise money for a Sakura Kai Room when the City of El Cerrito is able to build a new senior center. Members of Sakura Kai have raised over \$78,000.

Ms. Honda is a dedicated volunteer and senior advocate. Her community involvement also includes service as a BART community advisor; COSAS (Communities Organized to Support Adult School); Stanford University Alumnae member and a life member of Contra Costa JACL. Her wise counsel was also sought recently in connection with preparation of a city council proclamation commemorating the life and work of Fred Korematsu. Ms. Honda recently retired from the board of J-SEI, formerly JASEB (Japanese Services of the East Bay) after 35 years of service where she initiated and chaired the production of the JASEB calendar for 25 years.

Ms. Honda raised three children and enjoys bowling, ballroom dancing, taiko, golfing and traveling.

Community Safety Advocate Ciara Wood

When Kensington resident, Ciara Wood, looks out over the grassy rolling hills of the East Bay, she sees two things: gorgeous open space, and disaster waiting to happen. The “disaster” is wild fire.

Born and raised in Kensington, she was a theater major at San Francisco State University. Returning as an adult to live on the border of the East Bay Regional Park District, Ciara has chilling memories of the 1991 Oakland Hills firestorm. A longtime community activist, she has devoted much of her time to wild land fire prevention, including serving on the board of the Diablo Firesafe Council, a nonprofit organization working to cut wild fire risks in Contra Costa and Alameda counties. The organization works with fire agencies and various community groups on fire prevention public education. It also oversees hands-on fuel reduction, or brush thinning, projects along the open space-urban interface.

With Ciara’s help, the Diablo Firesafe Council has worked closely with Supervisor Gioia’s office and county and city fire agencies to teach residents how to make their homes and neighborhoods less vulnerable to wild fire—creating “defensible space.” Ciara also served on the Kensington Police Protection Community Services District (KPPCSD) board for eight years and was on the volunteer board of the Kensington Community Council. While serving on the KPPCSD, Ciara was instrumental in bringing improvements to Kensington Park, owned by the district.

“I like the volunteer tradition in Kensington,” she said. “Kensington made choices to empower the community to participate in self-government as much as possible—I think this is hugely important.”

Many people may not know that the woman frequently seen in a wide-brimmed hat snipping blackberry and poison oak bushes along the Kensington-Tilden Park border is a theater buff, who taught drama at El Cerrito High School for several years.

