

Westbrook to sign *A Century of Success* at Chaucer's

By **Kerry Methner** / CASA

EVER WANTED TO MEET ONE OF THE MOST PROLIFIC AND SUCCESSFUL WORKING JOURNALISTS in Santa Barbara? Consider stopping in at Chaucer's on Sunday, March 13th at 3pm and meet Leslie Westbrook, as she signs her book, *A Century of Success: A Future of Possibilities*.

Santa Barbara City College officially closed its year-long centennial celebration with the launch of Westbrook's book, a 128-page hardcover covering the college's first 100 years.

"This book brings together in a masterful and engaging way one hundred years of history, memories, challenges and victories," said SBCC Superintendent/President Dr. Andreea Serban in the book's introduction. "The demand for what we offer – an exceptional and affordable higher education and comprehensive services – has never been greater."

With some insight, the folks who visioned the project brought on Westbrook who has lived, worked, and been actively engaged in the community for over 30 years.

Westbrook took time out recently to answer a few questions about her book.

CASA: What is the story of how you became attached to this project?

Leslie Westbrook: I received a phone call from Steve Boehm, who is part of the Boehm family, inquiring about my availability to write a book for an "institution." He didn't tell me who or what, at the beginning.

He recommended me for the project to the college president. A previous writer from the college had to drop out due to scheduling conflicts, I believe, so the project was just underway when I was brought in. The timing was right.

I met with Dr. Andreea Serban, SBCC President/Superintendent and I was very enthusiastic about creating this book for the college (in addition to doing all the writing, I collected over 180 images and wrote captions as well, with the help of Joan Galvan, PIO). I am very grateful to Dr. Serban for her faith in me, and I think she would tell you she was not disappointed. I also feel very lucky that I was chosen for the job.

CASA: What was the most interesting discovery you made in researching/writing this book?

LW: There were so many. It was fun to learn about some of the star alumni of the college, ranging from David Crosby (who came and played for a music class one day. Imagine how surprised those students must have been!) to opera tenor Eduardo Villa and World Series slugger Jesse Orosco.

I love that the campus has been visited by many interesting dignitaries, including President Clinton, First Lady Hilary (at the time) and now President Barack Obama when he was running for office. How many community colleges can boast about that? As a jazz fan, I also love it that the Stan Kenton and Count Basie bands performed on campus.

CASA: What was the research process like? Did you have assistance?

LW: I faced a tsunami of research, which I happen to love – and I probably could have done more had there been more time. For the most part, I was on my own, working seven days a week to meet the deadline.

Michael Redmond, of the Santa Barbara Historical Museum was very helpful, as he always is with early Santa Barbara history.

I had access to half a century of student newspapers – *The Channels* – that were invaluable in painting college life over the past 50 years.



Leslie Andrea Westbrook

Dr. John Kay acted as institutional memory and I loved working with him.

CASA: How is SBCC important to the community?

LW: I cannot stress the importance of education not only to this community, but also to the world at large. I think just about everyone in town, including me, has taken a class or two at Adult Ed/Continuing Education – such a wonderful asset.

Learning is one of the great joys of life and expanding our horizons, but becoming model citizens is important. College is also a time to have fun, as I recall!

CASA: Is this your first book? How did it feel to complete it?

LW: I have written several books that didn't see the light of day and am working on three other books right now (which I hope will all reach the finish line, at least one will as it's due May 20th).

I am currently working with NEA Jazzmaster 2011 Johnny Mandel on his memoir. He wrote *The Shadow of Your Smile*, the theme for MASH, scored many movies, and did arrangements and/or produced records for everyone from Frank Sinatra to Diana Krall and Barbara Streisand. He also played in Count Basie's band and even worked with Michael Jackson on his first album. That's a really fun project and I like working with people on their memoirs very much, especially when they have led interesting lives.

CASA: What are you most proud of as an author that you've written?

LW: I am very proud of the SBCC history book – because it's lively and not staid or stuffy. The people who have read it have given me very positive feedback. Having said that, I am most excited about my own book, that I am also working on at the moment. I meet monthly with a small group of women writers who are amazing. We critique and spur

one another on. I have a good feeling about this project, which I can't talk about too much because it might jinx it!

CASA: Do you come from a family of writers? When did you start writing? How did you get your start in writing? Did you have a mentor?

LW: My mother, Marcella, was, and remains, my mentor. She has always written, but it was not her profession – she's just completed a play and I give her credit for steering me from a very young age toward writing and reading. She still reads my writing and offers advice and encouragement.

I was reading before kindergarten and I wrote a Halloween poem in elementary school that won a prize. I had to read it in front of the entire auditorium! I don't remember the poem, but I remember the prize: a gift certificate for a bookstore.

My father, Forrest, was a jazz pianist (he is alive but doesn't play anymore) and I give him credit for giving me a sense of rhythm on my keyboard, which is attached to my computer.

CASA: Where are you from?

LW: (My mother's womb!) I was born in Pasadena, and am a third generation Californian.

I grew up in Santa Monica and moved to Santa Barbara over 35 years ago and have spent the bulk of my adult life here, with a brief stint in New York City where I worked in publishing.

CASA: What is your favorite part about living in the Santa Barbara area?

The Pacific Ocean. I love my California – all of it, including the weather, which I don't take for granted – and Santa Barbara is quite a unique spot in the golden state. I love waking up to see the sunrise over the Pacific Ocean from my roost in Summerland and watching the sunset at day's end.

Chaucer's is located at 3321 State Street in Loretto Plaza.

