

Celebrate Women's History Month with 15 stories of incredible Santa Cruz County female pioneers

by [Lookout Santa Cruz](#)

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In honor of Women's History Month in March, Lookout is featuring the stories of 15 incredible women from across Santa Cruz County. From teachers and farmworkers, to chefs and brewers, artists and authors, skateboarders and surfers, Santa Cruz County is home to an abundance of talented women. Lookout staff members chose their favorite stories featuring some of the county's pioneering female activists, leaders and community-builders.

[Pair of events highlights inspirational locals in Women's History Month crescendo](#)

Jamie Cutter



Teacher Jamie Cutter talks about her curriculum in her classroom at Delta Charter High School at Cabrillo College. Credit: Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz

As an English and health teacher at Delta Charter High School, Jamie Cutter has her hands full. Students and other education leaders say she has made a difference in Santa Cruz County by helping youth develop healthy and critical decision-making skills inside and outside the classroom. [Read her story here.](#)

Ernestina Solorio



Farmworker Ernestina Solorio (left) and Ann Lopez recall how they met while sitting in Solorio's backyard in Watsonville. Credit: Thomas Sawano / Lookout Santa Cruz

From her Watsonville home, she organizes a food distribution program for fellow migrant farmworkers – and she has done this all while working her job picking strawberries and caring for her children as a single parent. [Read her story here.](#)

Judi Oyama



Skateboarder Judi Oyama. Credit: Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz

A fixture on the Santa Cruz County skating scene since the 1970s, Judi Oyama hasn't slowed down. Next up: the 2024 World Skate Games in Rome. Between that and being featured in a new documentary about the lasting influence of Northern California's pioneering skateboarders, Oyama is finally in the spotlight that has shined elsewhere for years. [Read her story here.](#)

Sarah Gerhardt



Mavericks pioneer Sarah Gerhardt. Credit: Boots McGhee

The Cabrillo College chemistry instructor was the first woman to surf famed big-wave break Mavericks. She has taken on gender inequality in surfing, where she sees “a gap in the expectation of women’s surfing” because it is still “defined from a man’s perspective.” [Read part of her story here.](#)

Bella Bonner



Esabella Bonner, who grew up in Santa Cruz, founded the Black Surf Club in 2020, which has engaged more than 250 people and provides people access to the ocean via surfing, often for the first time. Credit: Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz

The young Santa Cruz activist arrived seemingly out of nowhere in 2020 to spur dramatic gatherings for discussions over diversity and police reform. But she had been developing her voice long before George Floyd's death. [Read her story here.](#)

Abi Mustapha



Abi Mustapha atop the Black Lives Matter mural following the 2021 vandalism incident. Credit: Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz

A local artist and co-founder of SC Equity Collab — the initiative that spearheaded the Black Lives Matter mural project — Abi Mustapha led the call for restorative justice in the wake of the 2021 vandalism of the mural outside Santa Cruz City Hall. [Read more about her story here.](#)

Maria Elena de la Garza



Maria Elena de la Garza's work with Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County helped earn her the 2023 NEXTie Lifetime Achievement award. Credit: Maria Elena De La Garza

The executive director of Watsonville-based [Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County](#) has been working in the nonprofit sector for more than 29 years. De la Garza oversees 40 employees and more than 500 volunteers who serve thousands across the county and her work building and supporting community networks have earned her local honors. [Read her story here.](#)

Maria Ramos Bracamontes



Campesina Womb Justice Mutual Aid Project, founded by Maria Ramos Bracamontes was awarded the 2023 NEXTies Health & Wellness Leader of the Year. Credit: Maria Ramos Bracamontes

A passionate advocate for undocumented Indigenous farmworker women, Maria used her entire stimulus check in 2020 to start the Campesina Womb Care Project. The mutual aid effort provides many resources, but it began by offering care packages filled with essential supplies such as pads, tampons, masks and herbal teas for general non-pregnant womb care. [Read her story here.](#)

Rosemary Chalmers



Former KSCO radio host Rosemary Chalmers. Credit: Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz

A presence on local radio station KSCO for more than 30 years, Rosemary Chalmers decided to branch off into a new media entity when KSCO announced it was laying off its staff in late 2022. She created an internet livestream version of the popular “Good Morning Monterey Bay,” adding a number of other segments and regular guests to take on food, health, surfing, animals, gardening, science and business. [Read more about her story here.](#)

Nina Simon



Nina Simon, former director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History and now author of “Mother-Daughter Murder Night.” Credit: Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz

The former director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History put her life and nonprofit leadership on pause in 2020 to care for her mother after a cancer diagnosis. What “started out completely like a fantasy or a distraction” evolved into “Mother-Daughter Murder Night,” a mystery novel that became a bestseller after its 2023 release. [Read more about her story here.](#)

Peggy Townsend



Santa Cruz author Peggy Townsend at work. Credit: Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz

Since her retirement from journalism, longtime Santa Cruz Sentinel writer Peggy Townsend has shifted her storytelling skills into the realm of fiction. In her latest novel, “The Beautiful and the Wild,” Townsend explores the depths of isolation and the power of secrets, drawing from her personal experiences as a journalist and a seven-week van trip across Alaska. [Read more about her story here.](#)

Jessica Yarr



Chef Jessica Yarr’s “plant-forward” menu at the Grove Café and Bakery makes plant-based ingredients the focus, but still uses some meat and dairy products. Credit: Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz

In the world of Santa Cruz cuisine, chef Jessica Yarr has become a well-known name, having left her mark at popular local eateries like Assembly and Gabriella Café. She now owns and operates The Grove Cafe in Felton, earning her recognition and praise as the 2023 NEXTier Foodie of the Year. [Read more about her story here.](#)

Tammi Brown



Tammi Brown on stage Dec. 17 at Kuumbwa. Credit: Ken Doctor / Lookout Santa Cruz

Drenched in the uplifting and sultry sounds of gospel and jazz music, Tammi Brown has performed with some of the most notable music industry icons on a journey that's taken her around the world. Following a cancer diagnosis, the community turned out to support her in a December benefit show. [Read more about her story here.](#)

Adair Paterno



Co-founder Adair Paterno is the sole proprietor of Sante Adairius Rustic Ales, which has locations in Capitola, Santa Cruz and Oakland. Credit: Via Facebook

Paterno co-founded Sante Adairius Rustic Ales in Capitola in 2012 and the craft brewery has since expanded to locations in Santa Cruz and Oakland. When [Paterno purchased former business partner Tim Clifford's stake in the business in 2022](#), Sante Adairius became one of America's few entirely women-owned craft breweries. Paterno is also on the [board of directors of the California Craft Brewers Association](#), a nonprofit trade organization that represents the state's craft and specialty brewing industry. [Read more about her and Sante Adairius here.](#)

Isabel Contreras



Credit: Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz

The Stockton native and VCU Arts alumna was named Community Builder of the Year for the 2023 NEXTies. The award recognized her contribution to the Santa Cruz community through the establishment of [Mi Gente CA](#) in January 2022. [Read more about her here.](#)