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Grant to KEY Project fosters community, culture, sustainability

HONOLULU, July 10, 2017 – Hawaiian Electric and the HEI Charitable Foundation has awarded a \$10,000 grant to the Kualoa-He'eia Ecumenical Youth (KEY) Project for the production of poi boards using wood harvested from a large monkey pod tree that fell at Kahalu'u Elementary School in 2016. The grant will help provide new tools, safety equipment, storage and workspace needed by volunteers to complete the community-driven effort.

"Hawaiian Electric and the HEI Charitable Foundation's support will have tremendous impact on the volunteers and will be uplifting for the entire project," said Kaipo Kukahiko, executive director of the nonprofit that provides programs and services for all ages out of its multi-purpose community center in Waihe'e Valley.

Kukahiko is the son of the late Eldean Kukahiko, a community advocate and leader who spearheaded the poi board initiative up until his passing in late 2016, which temporarily halted the project.

"We were deeply touched by the dedication of the volunteers to see this project to completion," said Brandi Crabbe, Hawaiian Electric community relations specialist, during a recent visit to watch students prepare and use the poi boards at the KEY Project community center. "Even more impressive, we know that these cultural tools are already being incorporated into the youth curriculum and will be donated to area families, helping to connect the community and revitalize poi as a dietary staple. It's remarkable what has been accomplished so far."

Community volunteers already have 60 poi boards in various stages of completion. A number of finished boards were donated to KEY Project, Kahalu'u Regional Parks and Recreation Center, and Kahalu'u Elementary School. The volunteer group also donated two reading tables and benches made from the same monkey pod to the Kahalu'u School library for a space in honor of the elder Kukahiko.

"The process of making a poi board can take months, and our goal is to complete 200 boards from this one tree," said Peter Field, a plant farmer and long-time KEY Project volunteer who has been instrumental in continuing the elder Kukahiko's vision. After curing the wood in a nearby pond and removing barnacles and sediment, Field and his son, Ben, carve the rough shape of the poi boards and often help supervise the sanding and finishing. "We're very grateful for Hawaiian Electric's generosity which will help our program to go far and wide."

The donation to the KEY Project will be added to Hawaiian Electric's growing list of "125 Acts of Aloha" for the community as the company commemorates its 125th anniversary. "Acts of Aloha" are charitable donations and service projects benefitting agencies and programs committed to building a more sustainable future for Hawai'i.

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