

**SGI-USA PARTICIPATES IN WEST SIDE YOUTH FESTIVAL
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The youth of zip code 96792, the Waianae coast of Oahu, were spotlighted at the West Side Youth Exhibit Festival, held Aug. 21–28. The theme, “Our Precious Youth, Show Your Treasures,” was showcased by a gigantic grassroots effort including the SGI-USA West Side, businesses and community groups all uniting to create a successful event for the young men and women.

The normally quiet Waianae Mall hosted the event, bustling with hundreds of volunteers who sported hand-screened T-shirts with the festival’s logo. More than 150 donors contributed to the event’s success. People from all over the island came to spend the day. More than 250 young people shared their treasures, displaying art work, crafts and collectibles. On stage they performed the hula, sang, did Hip-Hop dancing and gymnastics and played in bands.

Months of groundwork were spent preparing for this event. West Side SGI-USA members brainstormed ways to make a difference in this “Year of Victory in the Community.” Once they hit on the idea of the event, committees were formed and groups went out into the community to solicit support and involvement. At first there was no response. The members regrouped, chanted at the Makaha Community Center, and determined to make this a great success. Doors began to open, and support from a variety of organizations and merchants came pouring in.

Convincing family and friends to have their children bring their “treasures” was not an easy task. Obstacles were overwhelming. But, in reply to President Ikeda’s expectations, the West Side members persisted.

The University of Hawaii’s Matsunaga Institute for Peace cosponsored the event. Both Hawaii Governor Ben Cayetano and Honolulu Mayor Jeremy Harris proclaimed Aug. 21–28 as Waianae Youth Week.

The opening ceremony began with the traditional *Oli*, or chant, welcoming everyone to the festival. Dr. Ralph Summy, the Matsunaga Institute’s executive director, greeted the crowd, and messages sent from Hawaii’s congressional delegation were read by youth. A surprise visit from U.S. Representative Patsy Mink highlighted the ceremony; she expressed her joy at seeing so many young people displaying their talents. Mayor Harris offered his heartfelt congratulations and aloha.

Representatives Emily Awae and Mike Kahikina, Senator Colleen Hanabusa and Councilman John DeSoto also sent congratulatory remarks.

Leeward District Deputy Superintendent Bruce Nagauwa also congratulated everyone for their focus on youth, stating that it will pay high dividends in the future. Through his many years as an educator, he said, he had witnessed a lot of success from Leeward area students which often went unnoticed.

In fact, the vocational program at Waianea High School is one of the best in the state. He emphasized the importance of parents believing in their children, and that they have the potential to be number one. Supporting the students and their dreams will help them grow up to succeed in the world.

Five trees painted gold created the “Trees of Dreams.” Each tree was laden with thousands of paper leaves containing original compositions with the children’s dreams for the future. Three of the children read their dreams during the program.

The goal of the event was to share the precious dreams and talents of the Waianea Coast's youth with the people of Hawaii, and, more importantly, to instill a sense of pride and hope for the future in these young people and their community. The collective dream is for a community that is drug free, abuse free and trash free. To that end, this will be the first of what the community intends as an annual event.

The Trees of Dreams are currently on display at the Waianae Library, the site of the week-long event's culmination.

On Friday, Aug. 27, world-renown sumo wrestler Konishiki, who hails from the West Side, viewed the Trees of Dreams. Since his retirement, Konishiki has dedicated himself to the enrichment of children, and he donated \$5,000 to the festival for youth programs and schools in the area. He expressed his happiness that so many community groups became involved with the same target of helping and encouraging youth.

Konishiki emphasized the importance of education and working to change the Waianea Coast's image. The leeward coast of Oahu often receives negative press, and this event showed a positive side of the young people and their families as they united in support of their community's future.

Through the months of preparation, deep friendships were formed across the community, bringing this diverse cross-section together as *ohana*, or family, and bringing to life the true spirit of our theme by creating victory in the community.

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