



From Punahou with Love

Maui's Cordy MacLaughlin marks nearly 30 years with Kamehameha

"Kamehameha has given me more than I have given the schools."

Although she's a proud graduate of Punahou School, Cordy MacLaughlin has spent most of her life at Kamehameha.

The interim headmaster and principal at Kamehameha Schools-Maui, MacLaughlin has devoted nearly 30 years to the KS mission. But she said she's received even more in return.

"Kamehameha has given me more than I have given the schools," MacLaughlin said. "Through its legacy and traditions, through the students I have taught, and through the wonderful colleagues I've had, I've gained much. I guess you could say that my experience at Kamehameha has helped me reconnect with my own Hawaiian-ness."

Carrying a master's degree in education from the University of Southern California, MacLaughlin arrived on the Kapālama campus in 1971 as a grade six teacher. She was one of the first participants in Kamehameha's "administrative intern" program in 1977, and later moved to Maui to work with the Neighbor Island Resource Center, a job she is still involved with today.

But MacLaughlin's greatest challenge has been to oversee the development of Kamehameha's Maui campus. Kamehameha opened temporary facilities in Pukalani in 1996, and a permanent facility was unveiled just off the Kula Highway in Pukalani in August of 1999.

Currently, MacLaughlin's staff of 36 serves 176 students in grades kindergarten through seven. Beginning in school year 2002-03, Maui's first freshman class will begin its journey to graduation.

"Every year out here has been a 'transitional year,' no successive years have been the same," MacLaughlin said. "While at times the job has been challenging, it's always been exciting. This is a great time to be a part of Kamehameha. Especially on Maui, we are making history. And it makes me very happy that Pauahi's legacy will be reaching so many more Hawaiians."

MacLaughlin said she and Kamehameha Schools-Hawai'i Interim Headmaster Barbara Robertson have become close friends as they've both taken on the challenge of putting a school together from scratch.

"We're the new kids on the block," MacLaughlin said. "Being on a neighbor island, Barbara and I have learned to be resourceful and solve problems on our own. We haven't had the luxury of filling out a request for service or picking up the phone to ask some department to help us with an on-site crisis. This has made us both stronger."

MacLaughlin said the Maui community has embraced Kamehameha, adding that she's going to stick around for a few more years.

"I've been around for so long that I now have several children of students I taught at Kamehameha," she said. "When I start seeing their grandchildren, I am out of here!"





Island Style

For Hawai'i's Barbara Robertson,
it's all about the children



Barbara Robertson speaks softly and carries a big responsibility.

As interim headmaster and principal at Kamehameha Schools-Hawai'i, she has been intimately involved with the school since its inception in temporary facilities in Keaukaha in 1996.

But it's a task she almost wasn't around to accept.

After spending her early career in Florida and then serving 15 years as both a teacher and elementary school principal at Hawai'i Preparatory Academy, Robertson said she was ready to pull up a rocking chair and enjoy retirement.

"In 1991, when I thought I was going to go back to Florida and retire, I felt very old. And I think starting this new campus has rejuvenated me to a large degree," she said.

"This school is like an answer to a prayer I had when I was at Hawai'i Prep. That prayer was that our Hawaiian children would have an opportunity to have a school similar to Hawai'i Prep. It's a school for children who can afford to go there, and consequently, the teaching is quite good."

Robertson currently oversees a staff of 21 that serves 176 students in grades kindergarten through seven. Next year, the school will add an eighth grade class and double the enrollment of grades three through seven.

Phase I construction of permanent facilities in Kea'au will be completed by September 2001, with K-12 occupancy expected by fall 2002.

Born and raised on Hawai'i, Robertson is a Kohala High School graduate whose father worked for Parker Ranch. She is a member of Church College's (now BYU-Hawai'i) first graduating class, where she earned an associate arts degree. She also attended Idaho's Ricks College, Alabama's Troy State and earned her master's degree from the University of West Florida.

Robertson said that as principal, she cherishes most her relationship with the children. "I can go through my day and experience all of the pressures of decisions that have to be made," she said. "But all I need to do is leave my office and walk into those classrooms and it just brings reality back. Those little faces, and those hugs around the waist – this is what it's all about – this is what you work for."

The veteran educator said she's formed a special bond with Cordy MacLaughlin, principal of Kamehameha Schools-Maui. "There are not many things that go on that we don't discuss with each other," Robertson said.

"But for both Cordy and I, it's not been an easy thing. What people don't understand about what we do is that we are in the process of building a school. And that has to be our focus.

"We're trying to develop new avenues and form partnerships with the people and organizations on our islands. For us to begin to think about student exchanges or boarding or other issues – we haven't even begun to go there yet.

"We're in constant change, and that's what is nice about it. We're always working with someone, or something, to try and make things better. And no one, no one – except Cordy – really knows what it's like."

And though she may be taking on the biggest challenge of her career, Robertson is apparently feeling young once again, saying thoughts of retirement no longer enter her mind.

"I'm going to stay here just as long as I feel I'm needed," she said.

"Those little faces, and those hugs around the waist – this is what it's all about – this is what you work for."