



Spreading the News

Five Kamehameha graduates are enjoying the bright lights of local broadcast journalism



Paula Akana at KS. She anchors the KITV-4 News at 6 and 10 p.m. Monday through Friday.



Robert Kekaula at KS. He's found success as a journalist, an actor and a singer.

They join you in your living rooms almost every night.

Easily recognized by hundreds of thousands of islanders, they are the most visible alumni Kamehameha Schools has ever produced.

As broadcast journalists, anchors and reporters, these five local media personalities – **Paula Akana '80, Ron Mizutani '83, Robert Kekaula '83, Diane Ako '88 and John Veneri '90** – serve as role models for young Hawaiians everywhere.

They have achieved success in a business where the lights shine brightly but the demands are many and the pressure is always on.

And, although they are among the most recognizable people in Hawai'i, they have not forgotten their blue and white roots.

"Kamehameha is, and will always be, one of the most important things in my life," says Mizutani, sports director at KHON-TV Channel 2. "It helped me academically and instilled in me my culture. Without those values, I wouldn't be where I am today. I know that for sure."

"Kamehameha really prepared me for where I am today as far as working, taking care of my family and giving back to the community as much as possible," said Akana, an anchor/reporter with KITV-4 who got her start through a University of Hawai'i journalism program internship in 1983.

Akana said Kamehameha speech teachers Judy Naniole and Lure Hayes were instrumental to her success. "Those two really helped me



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to speak up and have really good diction. As for my journalism career, (former student newspaper advisor) Darrell Schuetz would have to be the key person. He’s the one who got me interested in journalism and writing.”

“I really, really treasured my years at Kamehameha, it was such a wonderful experience during my youth,” said Ako, a weekend anchor/reporter for KHNL News 8 who was such a precocious youngster that she skipped kindergarten and first grade and eventually graduated from Kamehameha at 16.

“My parents moved to California, so I had to live in the dorms,” she said. “That made me really independent. It was something more than I could appreciate at the time, but it forced me to become a young adult at a young age.”

Ako said being able to make a difference is what she loves about her job. “I just did a story about a girl with cancer. I told the community about ways that we can help her – like donating blood. It makes me happy to think that I might have been able to make her life just a little better.”

“Kamehameha taught me to be humble and about friendship and ‘ohana,” said Veneri, a sports reporter and fill-in anchor at KHON-TV Channel 2. “Those were keys for me. Things like Song Contest and such were a big part of it – it was about learning how to be with each other.”



Ron Mizutani at KS. Besides broadcasting, Ron and wife Michelle have a business selling aloha print ties.



Diane Ako at KS. A former ski instructor, Diane is a weekend news anchor and reporter.



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John Veneri at KS. In addition to being a sports reporter, John is setting up his own video production company.

Veneri, a former University of Hawai’i football star who helped lead the team to the 1992 Western Athletic Conference title and eventually landed a spot in the 1995 Hula Bowl, said Kamehameha counselor **Cyr Pakele ’70** was there for him during his formative years.

“My parents divorced when I was 8, and he helped me through the tough times in high school, dealing with my stepmom and with my mom being so far away,” Veneri said.

“My sophomore year I was having a lot of problems and anytime I needed to talk he was there. We even had a few family meetings as well, where he would call my parents in – not because I was in trouble, but because we needed to talk. Man, he helped me so much.”

For Kekaula, the multi-talented former actor and current singer (he’s released three albums), Kamehameha’s television production class, under the direction of Jan Myers and Mark Middleton, was where everything started.

“I spent all my time my sophomore, junior and senior years in the television studio,” said Kekaula, the sports director at KITV-4. “We made music videos, did student news, we made a film, a movie – the course was just getting started, just getting to be an ‘in’ class, so there were just a handful of us and we pretty much had free rein.”

Classmates Kekaula and Mizutani both expressed interest in someday returning to Kamehameha as teachers.

“A couple years ago, I had the chance to hire somebody as a



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Robert Kekaula and Paula Akana are joined by Kehau Fernandez '94, an associate producer with KITV-4. Naalehu Anthony '93 is a cameraman with the station.

broadcast journalist,” Kekaula said. “There were 478 applicants for that one job, and not one of them had a Hawaiian last name. And of the 478, only 22 had ties to Hawai‘i. I thought that was kind of sad, so that’s why I want to teach.”

Kekaula had some advice for prospective broadcast journalists. “If television is the medium they want, then they should start in radio first. The reason I recommend that is no matter how hard you try, if you grew up in Hawai‘i, you speak pidgin – even if you don’t know it. And you won’t realize it until you hear yourself. There’s nothing wrong with pidgin, but you’ve got to be able to turn it on and off.”

While all five journalists have achieved much, it hasn’t always been easy. Mizutani, an ultimate family man who credits wife **Michelle (Wong ‘89)** and children Dane Lanakila (9), Haven (4) and Tai-John (1) for his success, often tells the following story about his college days.

“I was approached by one of my journalism professors at the University of Hawai‘i, and basically he told me that I couldn’t do what I’m doing today because I’m Hawaiian,” he said. “He didn’t say so point blank but said that in so many words. Through a lot of hard work and trials and tribulations, I made it.

“That professor was one of the first guys to call and congratulate me, and I told him that I had used him as my motivation to make it. So my message to the kids is to believe in, and be proud of, who you are. Because if you believe in yourself, you cannot fail.”