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COURTESY ILLUSTRATION / EIGHT INC.
Illustrations envision the Malama Learning Center, Kapolei, Oahu.

Sustainable impact

» Donors fuel 'wave of education'

By Pat Gee

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The hub of the community. A public and private partnership to improve education. A model for sustainability.

That's a lot to hang on the Malama Learning Center, a \$10 million extension of Kapolei High School to be built in a couple of years. But it's just part of the high school's hands-on, problem-solving curriculum, handcrafted by Principal Al Nagasako.

He is the prime mover behind what he calls his "ultimate dream," which has the backing of the James Campbell Co., which built Kapolei in the 1990s through its affiliate Kapolei Property Development.

"We have the opportunity to impact our culture -- create a culture," he said. "We can do it right."

The center, designed with plant-covered roofs, that Nagasako envisions embodies "sustainability," the latest catchword that represents "green" or environmentally correct living.

It will define "what are we, who are we?" he added.

Incorporating green (nontoxic, recyclable) building materials and innovative technology, the center is planned for three acres on the front corner of the campus facing Kapolei Parkway. It will offer cultural, arts and science education and boast a 500-seat auditorium, amphitheater, dance studio, native plant gardens and nurseries, and classrooms.

Ideally, "People need to use the facilities 24/7," he said.

It is Pauline Sato, an outreach coordinator with the Nature Conservancy, whom he credits with planting the green idea in his head several years ago. Nagasako said he used to be the "least green person" he knew, but Sato changed all that from the moment she first scolded him about using Styrofoam coffee cups, he recalled.

Sato, co-founder of Malama Learning Center and treasurer of its board of directors, said Nagasako was originally thinking of building the complex with a focus on the arts. But she convinced him of the need to combine it with environmental education, like catching two butterflies with one swipe of a net.

Yet she acknowledged that limiting subjects to environment preservation would be too restrictive, so Sato suggested that any work of art or performance would be produced using recyclable, nontoxic materials and natural sources of energy (i.e., solar energy, recycled water, native plants, etc.).



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It is a common misconception that it is not easy being green because it costs more. But Sato countered that the cost of energy saved in maintaining a building could make it cheaper in the long run. An example: designing buildings that incorporate tradewinds to create cross-ventilation, versus those that need air conditioning to cool the rooms. (Every one of the classrooms at Kapolei is air-conditioned, Nagasako said.)

Additionally, the roofs on the Malama center will be planted with low-maintenance native Hawaiian ground cover to reduce heat naturally, Sato said. "Green roofs" are not a new idea in Honolulu, but are few and far between.

Excitement is growing among Kapolei High's 2,200 students as they learn about the plans. Sato said she helped a class at 4:30 one morning when the stars were still out to stake out a compass like the ancient Hawaiian voyagers used to follow the North Star. Located on an education/performance mound (outdoor stage) planted with native Hawaiian species, the compass symbolizes the right course being followed by the school, she said.

It will also will provide a strong visual identity as people drive by, Nagasako added. The state Department of Education "looks to us as a model of sustainability" and a successful partnership of public and private enterprise to accomplish educational goals, he said.



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Kapolei High School students work on the future site of the Malama Learning Center, digging holes and installing 32 pipes where lights will later be installed. Teacher McD Philpotts, front left, prepares a plastic pipe that will be embedded in cement. The students are Eddie Thomas, left, Jared Tactay, Dez Julian, Victor Faavae and Andrew Lopez.

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Public and private organizations have contributed almost \$1 million of the \$10 million needed to build the nonprofit Malama Learning Center -- half of it from the James Campbell Co. and the James and Abigail Campbell Foundation.

Al Nagasako, Kapolei High School principal and prime mover behind the center, has corralled about 200 partners to make his dream of a "new wave of education" come true.

Nagasako said he is reinventing the job of principal, spending a third of his time in the community to solicit

support in the form of "human resources" as well as funds. (He was former deputy superintendent of the state Education Department's Leeward District and principal of Nanakuli High.) It is the way to go for the future with the decades of dwindling of public funds available for school development, he said.

Theresia McMurdo, spokeswoman for Campbell Co., said her company has given \$250,000, and the James and Abigail Campbell Foundation, the same amount, toward the center's capital campaign.

Nagasako said the state of Hawaii has awarded a \$275,000 grant-in-aid, and Hawaiian Electric Co., \$150,000.

About \$22,500 in individual gifts rounds out the capital already received, and \$1 million is expected from the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Nagasako added. Other contributions are pledged from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Wal-Mart and the Group 70 Foundation Fund. Nagasako said the Bishop Museum and Academy of Arts are "open" to offering satellite services.

McMurdo said the vision of growing a green community originated in the 1950s, and "the master plan for Kapolei city included the principle of using energy and resources wisely long before 'sustainability' became a buzzword."

Facilities provided with the construction of the Salvation Army's Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Center, starting late this year, will overlap in the performing-arts auditoriums of the learning center, but "in this growing community, there's room for both," McMurdo said.

What is available right now, as far as community meeting places and theaters, is "nothing," she added.