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PICKING UP THE PIECES

Caretakers of Historic Buildings Regroup After the Quake

By Nicole Pugh

When the “Quake of 2006” shook the Big Island last month, the whole world was focused on the residents of West Hawaii and the destruction that the earthquake caused. Especially telling were images of Hulihe'e Palace in Kailua-Kona and Kalahikiola Church in Kohala, both of which received severe damage. One month after the earthquake, however, the work of picking up the pieces of these historic monuments- and securing funding in which to do it- has just begun.

The Grand Lady Will Live On

Hulihe'e Palace Administrator Fanny AuHoy is petite woman with a soft voice and a warm smile. Despite her calm demeanor, the passion she feels for Hulihe'e Palace comes out loud and clear.

“There is no question that (the Palace) will be repaired. ... The community has been coming forth and we are very grateful for the contributions that people have made.”

One example of such support came in the form of a woman who walked through the front door on the morning of the earthquake, wrote a check for \$1,000 and then walked out. AuHoy explains that many visitors have made the Palace one of their stopping places for generations.

“Everybody realizes what a treasure this is and how we have to keep it- and restore it,” says AuHoy.” Not only for the children of Hawaii but for visitors from afar.”

Even with a strong and diverse base of support, however, the current challenges to restoration, especially in terms of funding, are daunting. The Palace administration continues to work with architects and structural engineers to determine the exact cost of restoration.

“I think what they are saying is that it is 1.5 million but it is kind of a guesstimate at this point,” says AuHoy.

At the same time, Daughters of Hawaii volunteers continue the tedious task of cataloguing and packing the dozens of artifacts that are housed at the Palace.

“We were very fortunate that only a few artifacts were damaged at the time (of the earthquake),” says Au Hoy. “ But as we go through the home now...and get ready to store much of the furnishings, we are starting to notice that there are additional artifacts that are damaged.”

Fortunately, Au Hoy says that many of these can be repaired. Local craftspeople have begun to offer their services for repairing and mending of damaged pieces.

Hulihe'e Palace was built in 1835 as the official residence of the second governor of the Island of Hawaii, John Adams Kuakini. After his death in 1844, the building was passed down through Hawaiian royal hands until 1914, when it was sold and its contents put up for auction. The Palace became a museum under the operation of the Daughters of Hawaii after it was purchased by the territory of Hawaii in 1925.

The Palace has been on the National Register of Historic sites since 1973 and may be eligible for some federal and state funding. AuHoy realizes, however, that private donations will be the backbone of restoration efforts. A fund-raising event is scheduled for sometime shortly after the first of the year.

“We don’t know what (it will be) yet, but we know it will be something wonderful,” says AuHoy. “Then, we will follow it up with a big mahalo party- a grand re-opening, something that everyone can look forward to.”

For more information about Palace fundraisers events in 2007 or to make a donation, please contact the Hulihe'e Palace at 808 329 1877.

The Little Church that Can...And Will

It was one of the first images to come out of the Big Island after the earthquake- a pearl-white rock and mortar building with a majestic steeple rising like a beacon out of the surrounding jungle terrain. And on three of its sides, masses of rubble exposing the sacred inner sanctuary- pews in perfect rows, flowers along the back aisle, bibles layed out for a service that would not take place at Kalahikiola Church in North Kohala that Sunday.

A service did take place however, in the little hall to the side of the Church itself, albeit a little later than normal and a few people shy.

“We had a small service about an hour after we should have been here once everybody had been accounted for,” says Kyle Steinhoff, a business consultant and Kohala resident who has been a member of Kalahikiola Church for the last 15 years. “ I came up about 45 minutes earlier (than normal) to check on the minister, who is normally here early. I wanted to see if he had been stuck or if something had happened and that was when I saw (the building).”

Perhaps a coincidence or divine intervention, but as luck would have it, the earthquake happened two hours before services were to take place in the church. In addition, the Reverend George Baybrook, who normally arrives at the church a couple of hours before the Sunday service, was running late that morning. Nobody was in the vicinity when the building collapsed. If events would have occurred a couple of hours later, however, the story may have been slightly different.

“ If something like this happens and we (would have been in) church, it (would have been) a natural tendency to go out how you came in. You wouldn’t know which side to go out of because either side could have gone,” says Steinhoff.

With everyone safe, congregational attention is now focused on what steps to take. This will be a challenge for Steinhoff especially, who is spearheading the congregational committee that will make that determination. Despite rebuilding estimates that range from \$800,000 to 3 million, in a meeting that was held on November 5, the congregation voted unanimously to restore the church to its original aesthetic integrity. Kalahikiola Church was built in 1855 by New England missionary Elias Bond and is on the National Registry of Historic Sites. According to Steinhoff, any modifications made to make the Church more structurally stable must be negotiated with state and national preservation agencies.

The Church is a member of the United Church of Christ and insurance through that organization will cover less than a third of repair costs. It is Steinhoff’s hope that

grants and private donations will cover the rest for the small congregation of about 100 individuals.

“We must make a valid effort to rebuild,” says Steinhoff. “ The same kind of effort it takes to build a church from rocks (taken from) several miles away is the same it will take to raise that money to rebuild. It is a test and I think we will rise to it.”

For more information and to make a donation to the restoration of Kalahikiola Church, please call 808 889-6703.