

Thursday, April 21 2011

## MAUI CARES

### *Neighbors Helping Neighbors*

*Caring volunteers are the heart of a very valuable nonprofit program that helps Maui's kūpuna. "... more than often, they become 'ohana."*

**Cindy Schumacher**

The number of seniors on Maui is growing. People are living longer, on average, and naturally, most elders want to live in their own homes. Having grown accustomed to living independently, it is harder for many elders to consider a time when they will need some assistance. When that time comes, they can find themselves suddenly dependent on other people.

One of the great commandments, "Love your neighbor as yourself," points us to their need and has become the daily routine of Neighbors Helping Neighbors, a 15-year-old Maui nonprofit agency.

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"Our mission at Neighbors Helping Neighbors is to provide compassionate care to seniors while making a positive difference in the quality of their lives," said Executive Director Gerri Shapiro.



With a passion to help Maui's Kupuna, many Neighbors Helping Neighbors Board and staff members also volunteer to help senior clients in their spare time. (left to right) James Mariano (friend of the Board), Gerri Shapiro (Executive Director), Board President Sarah Shim, and Board members Mapu Quitazol, Heather Greenwood and Nancy Meyer

## *Kūpuna...*

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"We recruit and train volunteers to provide in-home care for seniors, enabling them to remain in their homes and independent," said Neighbors Helping Neighbors Executive Director Gerri Shapiro.

These caring volunteers are the heart of their very valuable program.

Shapiro compares Neighbors Helping Neighbors to Match.com. "Because that is what we do," she said. "We find sweet, wonderful, compassionate people and match them with lovely elders. And more than often, they become 'ohana."

Shapiro refers to her staff and board members as "a dream team" who are all crazy about kūpuna. It is that passion for helping seniors that is the glue that makes Neighbors Helping Neighbors work. "So much so, that many of our workforces also volunteer to help our senior clients in their spare time," she said.

"I was brought up in a family where giving freely of one's talents and skills to better the community is common," said Executive Board President Sarah Shim. "I am doing what my parents taught me, to always give back."

Neighbors Helping Neighbors is in the process of expanding, with new programs and initiatives in the works. In January 2011, Maui Electric Company (MECO) awarded a \$5,000 grant to the organization for its Aloha Cruisers Senior Transportation Program. The program represents a

collaborative effort to provide much-needed transportation services for seniors on Maui. The funds will be used to cover mileage reimbursement and liability insurance for volunteer drivers who transport seniors wherever they need to go.

"This financial support is so important," said Shapiro. "Since the cutback in funding from the county, many Maui seniors have been left with few options for rides to medical appointments, shopping and errands. This leaves them isolated and homebound."

"Maui Electric has been a part of this community for almost 90 years," said MECO President Ed Reinhardt. "We live here, we work here and we believe in helping those who help others."

"We are deeply grateful to MECO for this grant," Shapiro replied. "When other agencies have been unable to provide senior transportation, Neighbors Helping Neighbors has consistently been able to find a volunteer who would serve from the heart."

"We are delighted that Neighbors Helping Neighbors has become the lead agency in coordinating and administering expanded senior transportation services through their Aloha Cruisers Project," said a Maui County Office on Aging representative. During 2009-10, Neighbors Helping Neighbors, supported by Kaunoa Assisted Transportation, Kaunoa Retired Senior Volunteer Program, the Maui County Volunteer Center and the Maui County Office on Aging, provided 25,000

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In mid-November 2010, the Adopt-a-Kupuna Holidays Project was launched, in which county workers were invited to adopt an elder during the month of December. "Their faces told the story and I was glad to be part of this project," said Neighbors Helping Neighbors Executive Board President Sarah Shim (middle). "It made my holidays," said Iris Chrysler (left). "God bless those that made this happen," said Elsie Stewart (right).

Mae Borromeua (left) provides Aloha Cruiser Service to Kathleen Cosgrove. Volunteers receive 50-cents-per-mile reimbursement and insurance coverage for giving a senior a ride.



## Kūpuna...

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hours of volunteer services to seniors.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors provides a service based on making a difference in someone's life. "If you are a caretaker who needs a break, our volunteers can spend time with your loved one while you take time off and recharge your battery," said Shapiro.

"I am the only active family member participating in my sister's care," said one of these respite clients. "My sister is disabled with early-onset Alzheimer's disease. Neighbors Helping Neighbors gave me long-overdue relief. They recharged my soul with a sense of community and taught me that we all need a constant flow of giving and receiving."

"One year ago I experienced severe health problems and I asked for assistance to accompany me to medical appointments and shopping trips," said client Pat Ross regarding her Neighbors Helping Neighbors volunteer Adele Rugg. "Adele helps me in every way. She is an incredible and dearly loved friend. I am so grateful for her in my life."

Jeannie Brew, a volunteer from Lahaina, recently received special honors at the Neighbors Helping Neighbors Volunteer Recognition Luncheon for "going the extra mile." "She helps so many of our seniors with shopping, friendly visits and preparing meals," said Shapiro. "She has a special gift for bringing calm and joy to elders who may feel lonely and need companionship."

Neighbors Helping Neighbors was honored with the 2009 Star Award from the Beverly Foundation of Albuquerque, New Mexico. "Our Star Awards recognize 'the best of the best' organizations that provide transportation to older adults," said Foundation President Helen Kerschner. "We congratulate Neighbors Helping Neighbors for making an enormous contribution to seniors, their families and to communities on Maui."

A heart of compassion running through our community is what Neighbors Helping Neighbors provides. Centuries ago, St. Francis reminded us, "Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console. For it is in giving that we receive."

For more information, call 249-2545 or email [www.nahoaloha.org](http://www.nahoaloha.org)