

Hanalei residents rally to save watershed
Tucked along the majestic Hanalei Bay, Waipā offers a portal to the past.

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Step back into time when residents of Hanalei Bay nurtured and tended to the land and sea. The history of Waipā speaks volumes to its ancestors and the caretakers today who strive to preserve their heritage.

Waipā

Past ritzy Princeville, beyond the trend shops of Hanalei, over one-lane river bridges sits a breathtaking site of luscious greens and deep navy blue mountains. It's a veritable portal to ancient Hawai'i: Waipā.



THE LEGEND OF HĀLOA is the story of the very first Native Hawaiian, who was born from a kalo or taro root. Thought to have birthed a stillborn, Wākea (Sky Father) and the Daughter of Mother Earth, Ho'ohökūlani, buried their premature son, Hāloanakalaukapalili (quivering long stalk) in a spot that Ho'ohökūlani could tend to each day. She kept the area clean and free of all weeds and animals, and stirred the mud as if she were tucking Hāloanakalaukapalili in to sleep. As her tears watered the burial sight, a green leaf poked through and slowly grew into a kalo plant. Delighted by their new blessing, Ho'ohökūlani birthed another son and, in honor of their firstborn, named him Hāloa. Wākea and Ho'ohökūlani told Hāloa that, unlike the normal duties of a younger brother, he

needed to take care and watch over his older brother. Hāloa obeyed and tended to Hāloanakalaukapalili and the kalo soon began to grow in abundance. By his hands, the land became fertile and rich in medicinal leaves and nutritious kalo. Hāloa would then go on to forever care for his older brother and the land that provided for him.

Like the story of Hāloa, Native Hawaiian history is richly embedded in its soil. Respect for the 'āina (land) came first before any decisions were made within the ahupua'a (land divisions). The connection to nature and the fruits of its labor were considered honors, not expectations. Today, untouched land is hard to find here. Much of it is home to residences and businesses, luxurious hotels along powdery beaches, shopping malls and energy-producing windmills. There

By Kristen Nemoto | Photography by Jarod Powell



are only a few places left where Hawai'i looks like it did prior to the introduction of invasive species and the modern population. One place in particular is truly a gem; a place where the land is so sacred that the very name means "a prayer to the gods." This place, tucked gently along the majestic Hanalei Bay, is known as Waipā.

In 1982, Hanalei residents had learned that Kamehameha Schools had plans to build a gated community on one of the last remaining ahupua'a on the island of Kaua'i. Native Hawaiian advocate and repatriation leader LaFrance Kapaka-Arboleda, gathered residents of the North Shore community to inform them of the potential land distribution.

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Resident David Sproat recalls his reaction to the news. He was surprised by the lack of knowledge that the lease owners had of the 1,600-acre watershed. From an environmental standpoint, the plan was a disaster.

"They had some lots in rivers, streams and swamps up the sides of mountains. It just didn't make sense," Sproat says. "They had no idea of the lay of the land."

Motivated to protect another native land from being wrested from the people, leaders within the community began to rally together. Residents proposed transforming the valley into a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing hands-on cultural learning. As Kamehameha Schools' sole mission is to perpetuate the land for the sake of Native Hawaiian people, Sproat stressed the importance of the residents' opinions for the use of the ahupua'a.

"We had discussions and we asked them: Why not use this land to educate and reach out to people instead of making it into a place that will be closed off to the community?" says Sproat, a Kamehameha Schools graduate who wanted to create a place where all children could have access to learn about Native Hawaiian culture. "It was really a 'for-profit' organization back then so it was hard to negotiate our idea to transform it into a nonprofit — to build and create something for the kids."

Negotiations, debates, meetings and discussions lasted four years. Kamehameha Schools eventually accepted the idea to transform the ahupua'a into a hands-on educational facility and soon the

lease was placed in the hands of the Foundation.

But the challenge to realize their vision had only just begun, according to Sproat.

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What they were doing was making poi. Bags and bags of poi. Bound to a 35-year lease (with a probation period of 10 years) stipulating they would produce weekly pounds of the Native Hawaiian staple. Waipā had soon found its mission: To help Kaua'i's families from all over the island by creating immediately consumable, healthy food by working the land.

The family connection is intrinsic to the success of Waipā. Sproat's own daughter and long-



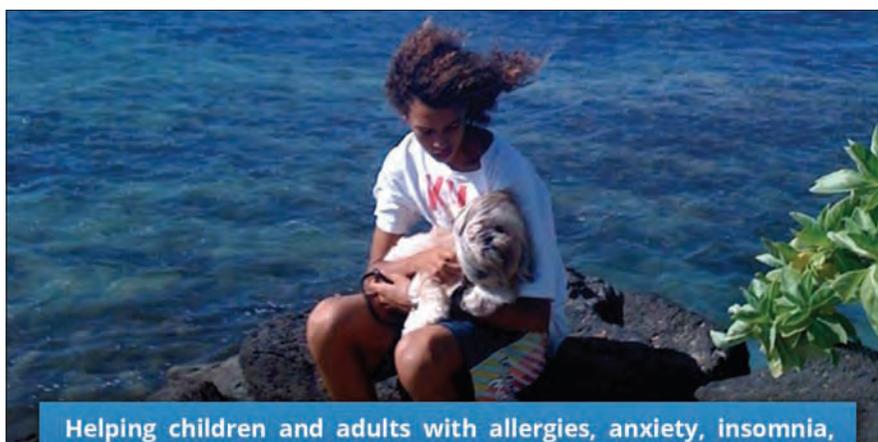
Along with poi distribution on Thursdays, Waipā hosts a weekly Farmers Market; outdoor annual food and music festivals; a koa tree reforestation site; and a coastal fishpond and nursery.

time Waipā volunteer, Stacy Sproat-Beck, became the executive director in 1994 when Sproat accepted the position of Kaua'i Fire Chief. At the time, Sproat-Beck had just settled back home after graduating with a business degree from the University of Southern California.

"There were not many opportunities for young people here who [leave] to get an education and want to do something other than work in the visitor industry," she says. "When I moved home, I decided I needed to create something for myself, and other people who want to come back and work within the community."

Today Sproat-Beck manages Waipā with the help of nearly 20 full-time and part-time employees and countless volunteers. Among the many contributions of Waipā, one of her favorites is to provide educational opportunities for children.

"We love the kids who come and learn about Waipā," Sproat-Beck smiles. "They come with open hearts to the hands-on learning that takes place. We need to pass it down to each generation so they may take over one day."



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