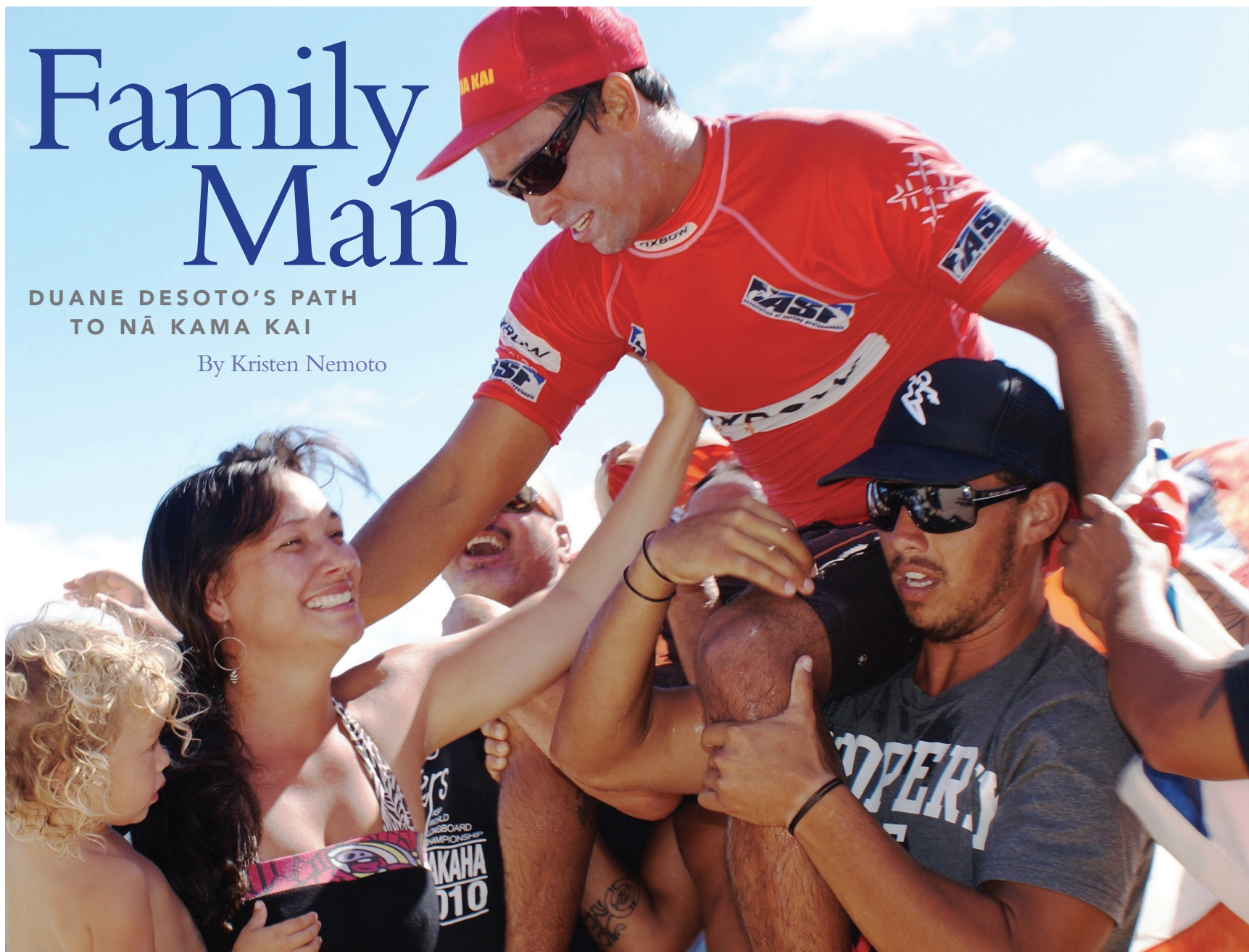


# Family Man

DUANE DESOTO'S PATH  
TO NĀ KAMA KAI

By Kristen Nemoto



By the time he was in kindergarten, he was already surfing. Barely old enough to read and write, Duane DeSoto and his cousins would ride their Uncle Bruce DeSoto's off-duty city bus after school to Mākaha Beach. Their lips cold and blue from surfing all afternoon, Uncle Bruce would sternly instruct them each to "catch 20 more waves" before they could go home.

"I must have been the only one who listened," laughs DeSoto, always last out of the water. "But I loved it. Every day, surfing and being out in the ocean."

As a teenager, DeSoto was a professional surfer. He placed ninth in the 1993 Oxbow Association of Surfing Professionals World Longboard Championship,

alerting sponsors to the Mākaha local boy who seemed to glide and slide effortlessly on each wave. Life, like DeSoto's surfing, soon became easy and intangibly free. He was sent on countless trips to surf the world's best beaches. By 18, he was living on his own—"for good reason"—with a hearty shove from his mother.

As years went by, he grew tired of his life filled with blurry parties and never-ending drives searching for the perfect wave. Grateful for the amount of freedom he was given at such an early age, he nevertheless wanted something more than just fame in the surfing world. He wanted to give back to his community.



“It’s about allowing the children to be their own selves and learn at their own pace. No one learns the same [way]. Everyone is different.”



Home, to DeSoto, is Mākaha Beach. He can remember riding his bike down to the shores as an 8-year-old and being “surrounded by nurturing people,” who took turns watching out for him.

“You can’t find that in many places now, that kind of responsibility to one another,” muses DeSoto. Like so many others around the world, he laments the loss of community in today’s society.

Inspired by his own large family and Mākaha, DeSoto created Nā Kama Kai (Children of the Sea), whose purpose is to empower and connect youth through ocean activities and environmental awareness clinics.

“Nā Kama Kai is a community that eliminates boxes,” says DeSoto firmly. “There is no boundary to learning, especially in the ocean. I think that’s what makes Nā Kama Kai so special. It’s about allowing the children to be their own [selves] and learn things at their own pace. No one learns the same [way]. Everyone is different.”

His passion for teaching and nurturing did not wane, despite continued success as a professional surfer (he won the 2010 Oxbox ASP World Longboard Championship in his own hometown of Mākaha Beach). DeSoto continued with his monthly clinics along with conducting private

sessions with foster care homes and youth correctional facilities.

“Our clinics are open to all children from many different types of backgrounds,” says DeSoto. “But our main goal and mission is to serve kids who are underprivileged and wouldn’t ordinarily have the opportunity to be a part of a program such as Nā Kama Kai.”

From sanding surfboards and ocean safety training to stand-up paddling and beach clean-ups, Nā Kama Kai has grown into a successful free monthly ocean clinic attracting many eager participants.

“We’ve served over 5,000 kids and the numbers continuously grow each month,” beams DeSoto. “It’s such an amazing thing to be able to accomplish what I had set out to do. ... I’m so incredibly blessed.”

In 2013, this 36-year-old Mākaha boy has another reason to be blessed: he and his wife, Dr. Mālia Ka’aihue, welcomed a baby girl named Honua, the seventh keiki in their brood.

“She’ll probably love the water too,” says DeSoto with a smile. Big dreams already await another DeSoto. With her father’s work ethic and big, supportive Mākaha ‘ohana ... anything is possible. ✕