

JVEF partnership impacts Hawaii schools

By Bill Mossman, Staff Writer

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Photo(s) by Bill Mossman Staff Writer

Just prior to the start of the 2009 Joint Venture Education Forum held Aug. 27 at the Hawaii Okinawa Center, band director David Utrera and members of the Iroquois Point Elementary School Band perform the National Anthem and Hawaii Ponoï during the posting of colors by the Hawaii Public Schools Junior ROTC.

WAIPAHU — Top educators gathered with high-ranking military personnel and lawmakers under one roof, here, at the Hawaii Okinawa Center, Aug. 27, for the annual Joint Venture Education Forum (JVEF).

The JVEF is a celebration of the ongoing partnership between Hawaii's military community, the state's Department of Education and various local organizations.

The mission of JVEF is to promote "great learning opportunities" for those within Hawaii's public school system, explained Col. Michael Davino, executive cochair of this year's theme, "Partnerships for Success: Investing in the Future."

"Schools provide a stabilizing force for our families during these unsettling times," said Davino, who assumed duties as director for Manpower, Personnel, and Administration of the U.S. Pacific Command in July.

Event co-emcee retired Air Force Col. David Tom, agreed, then added, "The past 10 years have illustrated that the JVEF partnership has and will continue to have a positive impact on the Hawaii community at large. JVEF strategy groups and volunteers represent the heart of this organization."

During the forum, approximately 300 guests received updates on several initiatives, including transition, citizenship and curriculum programs.

Attendees also applauded as scores of Soldiers, Airmen, Coastguardsmen, Marines and Sailors were honored for their volunteer efforts at school partnerships statewide; they cheered when Tammy Nochi, administrative services assistant with Radford Complex B, and Darren Dean, Air Force school liaison officer, received School Partnerships Recognition awards from State Sen. Norman Sakamoto (Foster Village, Halawa, Moanalua, Aliamanu, Aiea) and State Rep. K. Mark Takai (Aiea, Pearl City).

Audience members saluted representatives from three schools, including Aliamanu Middle School, when representatives received the JVEF Norbert Commendation Award.

Aliamanu Middle School Principal Robert Eggleston graciously accepted the honor, awarded annually to those who help provide much-needed support for transitioning students and families. He noted that JVEF had been instrumental in providing the school with funding for new textbooks.

"Without JVEF, we would be so far behind," Eggleston said.

The event's keynote speaker, University of Hawaii professor Dr. Ann Shea Bayer, informed audience members that high-achieving students from comfortable families may be found at both public and private schools. In an interview study she conducted among 51 business professionals, Bayer said that 46 chose to send their children to public schools over private schools.

Parents who do so complimented the public school system for the many academic and leadership opportunities it provided their children. They added that they valued schools with an ethnic diversity, claiming the mixing of groups creates life lessons that help foster such positive traits in their children as "empathy and respect for others' differences," Bayer noted.

She concluded that the traditional narrative that favors private schools over public schools is "inaccurate."

“A more accurate community narrative about schools in general would be ‘public schools vary; private schools vary. Do your research and make an informed decision,’” said Bayer, author of the book, “Going Against the Grain — When Professionals in Hawaii Choose Public Schools.”

“Communication will be the key to the Joint Venture Education Forum’s continued success,” said Sen. Daniel Inouye, in a prerecorded video message. “With our down-turned economy and continued deployments, the stresses on our collective community will only increase. Now is the time to come together. Hand in hand as one community, we are, without question, better together.”

State Superintendent Patricia Hamamoto added at the conclusion of the celebration, “We would not be where we are if we didn’t work together. The Department of Education appreciates the partnerships.”

Since its inception in 1998, the goal of JVEF has been to assist military students and their families through outreach programs and partnerships in Hawaii, home of the nation’s 11th largest public school system.

Today, the program continues to meet the needs and transition issues of approximately 15,000 military children by funding school repair and maintenance projects, and providing textbooks and technology upgrades.