

JVEF honors Wheeler's contribution

By Molly Hayden, Staff Writer

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Wheeler Middle School Principal Brenda Vierra-Chun addresses the JVEF crowd after receiving the Norbert Commendation Award at the annual JVEF meeting. Wheeler Middle School was recognized for its dedication in providing an excellent environment for military students and families.

WAIKIKI — More than 300 educators, volunteers and family members gathered to celebrate military participation in schools at the Hale Koa, Aug. 29, for the annual Joint Venture Education Forum (JVEF) meeting.

Initiated in 1998, the JVEF is a partnership between Hawaii's military community, the Hawaii State Department and other organizations. The forum supports cooperative efforts to assist schools and military family member students within the public school system.

The JVEF also encourages military participation in Hawaii public schools through numerous outreach programs and partnerships, as well as open dialogue on educational concerns that promote an understanding and support for the needs and transition issues of military children and their families.

Col. Cosmas Spofford, Headquarters and Service Battalion's commanding officer, Marine Forces Pacific, emceed the forum.

"We are here to recognize the efforts of the volunteers, military, schools, educators and faculty, as well as contributions of elected officials and business leaders," said Spofford, "all of whom have significantly enhanced the learning experience for our children."

Spofford kept the meeting on track as speakers lined the stage, giving updates on new programs and education initiatives, including textbook and technology, transition programs and partnership highlights.

Col. Joseph Pedone, director of Manpower, Personnel and Administration, Pacific Command, explained JVEF's history and the impact military partnership has made on students islandwide.

"These are challenging times ... especially tough for military children experiencing adjustments of a transient lifestyle and the stresses and uncertainty of multiple deployments," said Pedone. "School becomes more than a place of learning for these kids. It represents the stable force in their lives."

Currently, Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, Airmen and Coastguardsmen participate in 165 school partnerships statewide. They provide a vital link between the military and local community with numerous outreach programs and a positive presence in schools.

"The positive impact of these initiatives are due to the dedication of many individuals who have given their time, expertise and heart to support schools and children," said Spofford.

One by one volunteers moved across stage, receiving lei, handshakes, certificates of appreciation and numerous words of gratitude for their efforts.

As the meeting neared its end, Wheeler Middle School staff received the JVEF Norbert Commendation Award on behalf of its faculty and students. The award recognizes schools that provide an excellent environment for transitioning students and families. The quality, assistance and support of military students gave Wheeler Middle School a "golden seal of excellence" from the JVEF and the community.

Principal Brenda Vierra-Chun, joined onstage by Cathy Sumner, Parent Community Networking Center (PCNC) facilitator, and Melissa Crowley, transition coordinator for Wheeler Middle School, graciously accepted the award.

“We are fortunate enough to serve the children of parents who sacrifice for our country,” said Chun. “Our military partnerships (aid) in our success.”

Since 2000, the JVEF has spent more than \$47 million in federal funds for school repair and maintenance, textbooks and technology, school partnership projects, school playgrounds, curriculum initiatives and citizenship and transition programs in schools.