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Samoan Heritage Week Concludes with Annual ELLA Scholarship Gala



On Saturday, June 21, 2024, the Samoa Heritage Week concluded with a Gala celebration at the Ala Moana Hotel. The event was dedicated to the future generation of Samoans and highlighted the many Samoan military families residing abroad. It showcased the Samoan community's commitment to nurturing cultural heritage and traditions, emphasizing the importance of education, resilience, and the spirit of giving back.

Ms. Felea'i Tau, Community Relief Liaison for the Office of the Governor - Hawaii, delivered the keynote address at the evening's Samoan Heritage Gala. The theme of her speech was 'identity'. Felea'i Tau highlighted the importance of community service after achieving personal goals: "I urge you, once you've accomplished your goals, whether becoming a doctor, a lawyer, or pursuing any other aspiration, to consider giving back to Samoa and American Samoa. There's a critical shortage in our healthcare professions and across various fields. Remember, being Samoan carries the responsibility of contributing to the well-being of your community."

The First Lady's Scholarship initiative, called E LELEI LE ALOFA O LE ATUA (ELLA), aims to promote higher learning. This scholarship provides recipients with the financial means to study at a 2- or 4-year accredited college of their choice. Scholarships worth \$1,000 each were awarded to 25 deserving recipients.

Recipients were selected based on their essays, which emphasized the value of Samoan treasures, showcased appreciation for the language and culture, and addressed community challenges.

Recipients:

1. Genesis Alauni

The first recipient of the night was a graduate of Moanalua High School. Her goal is to enroll in the University of Hawaii's Nursing program. She dedicated the award to her parents and her aunty mama's Tiana and Sasamamao. She is the daughter of Richard and Trina Alauni.

2. Keeyon Kesi-Hadley

A graduate of Farrington High School, Keeyon Kesi-Hadley's goal is to major in Biology, following the pre-med track with the hopes of becoming an Orthopedic physician one day. He aimed to assist athletes with their injuries and give back to the Samoan community. The award is dedicated to his older sisters, Mareta Taase and Lamardia Utupo.

3. Caroline Lefaoseau

A valedictorian and graduate of Mililani High School, she dedicates her time towards her greatest passions: Music, Education, and Family. She will be attending the University of Hawaii at Manoa, majoring in Engineering Sciences with hopes to transfer to Oregon State University her sophomore year to complete studies as a Nuclear Engineering Major. She dedicates her award to her father, Tuifagaloa Dr. Afu Lefaoseau III.

4. Ben Mailo

Raised in Waianae, facing multiple health challenges has inspired him to pursue a career in the medical field. He attributes this award to his parents, Joe and Cassandra Mailo, for their ongoing sacrifices for him and his siblings.

5. **Eric Moananu** honors his mother for her tireless efforts and continuous sacrifices to support him. Even though he is away at college and unable to attend tonight, his uncle Victor was present to receive the award on his behalf.

6. **Nerisa Pele-Tukumoeatu**

A graduate of Nanakuli High School. Her future plans include enrolling in a Nursing program at a Junior College and then transferring to a University to pursue a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing. She aspires to become a Travel Nurse in the future. She attributes this award to her parents, her siblings, and above all, to God.

7. **Siitu Pesa**

With roots in the village of Lotofaga in Aleipata, Siitu Pesa is a graduate of Island Pacific Academy, supported by the Lawakua Organization. She aims to inspire the youth by emphasizing the empowering message of Philippians 4:13, reminding us that we can achieve anything through Christ's strength. Siitu is the daughter of Fa'alele and Faasega Pesa, as well as her beloved parents Taamilo and Akenese Luga.

8. **Jordan Posiulai**

A Saint Louis School graduate and has a passion for math, science, and basketball. Heading to the University of Hawaii at Manoa in the upcoming fall, he will pursue a degree in Electrical Engineering. He acknowledges his mother, Dr. Tina Posiulai, for her support and dedication.

9. **Franky Jezeriah Mak Pudja**

A student from President William McKinley High School, he dedicates this scholarship award to his parents. He will be continuing his education at Oregon State University, majoring in Marine Biology and hopefully continuing his football career.

10. **Malinah Niumoana Purcell-Telefoni**

The eldest of five siblings, a student-athlete who has earned a full-ride scholarship to the University of Hawaii for volleyball. Recognized twice as an OC16 All Star and ranking in the top 10 in various categories, her inspiration comes from her grandfather, Lealao Melila Purcell, who saw her potential.

11. **Xehlia Litia Tenemane Salanoa**

Daughter of Fred and Malevine Salanoa, and an alumna of Punahou School. She is embarking on her educational journey and soccer pursuits at South Dakota State University, focusing on Early Childhood Education. She expresses her gratitude to her parents and to God for the blessings she has received.

12. Alayna Leilani Folaau Salausa

Graduating Summa Cum Laude from Leilehua High School, Alayna Leilani Folaau Salausa, of Tokelauan and Samoan heritage, is a member of the Wahiawa United Methodist Church. She will pursue a Biology major at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in the upcoming fall semester. Her aspiration is to attend medical school and become a Primary Care Physician. Alayna dedicates this achievement to her parents.

13. Saylem Salave'a

A graduate of Saint Andrews Priory, her goal is to attend Pacific University in Oregon and major in Anthropology in hopes of being a museum curator or teacher. She dedicates this award to her parents, grandparents, and all her teachers who have supported and guided her along the way.

14. Shekinah Elisapeta Sataraka

A graduate of Aiea High School, graduating with Magna Cum Laude honors. She is the daughter of Nathan and Veronica Sataraka from the villages of Taputimu, Pago Pago, Nuuuli and Poloa. She will be attending the University of Hawaii at Manoa this fall majoring in Biology Medical Technician.

15. Zion Lupesina Satele

Under the strong guidance of the Lord and with the support of her family, Zion achieved a 4.0 GPA and graduated with Cum Laude honors from James Campbell High School. Currently enrolled in UH West Oahu's Health Introduction to Nursing Skills program, she is the daughter of Andre and Sherrill Satele.

16. Marvelous Seiuli

Eldest of two siblings and ambitious college student who excelled as a student athlete at Waipahu High School. Winning 2 OIA Championships and 1 State Ship in his senior year, he now attends Leeward Community College and plans to continue his education at Allied Trades International Union, an apprenticeship trade school. He graciously attributes this award to his parents, family, and the ALL FOR THE LORD YOUTH.

17. Akenese Semaia

Aims to enter Radiology and begin studies at Leeward Community College. She dedicates her award to her parents, Mary & the late Ioane Semaia, her family and friends,

and those who have supported her throughout this chapter. She is forever thankful for this opportunity.

18. Ezekiel Misilei Toleafoa

A native of Nu'uuli and aspires to be a Nurse. His goal is to achieve this dream career and in return give back to the people of American Samoa and also to his family.

19. Waihuka Te Tai

A graduate of Kaimuki High School, his samoan ties are from the villages of Utulei, Aunu'u and Faleasao. His plan is to attend the Honolulu Community College. He dedicates his award to his late grandfather Waihuka "Paddy" Te Tai and Patrick Moati'a Nomura. Accepting his award on his behalf was his aunt Crystal.

20. Noah Grayson Tevaseu

The son of Rachel and the late To'avalu Tevaseu, this recipient was an active student at Kapolei High School. His dream is to become a firefighter, but his short term goal is to further his education to achieve a science degree. He dedicates this award to his mother, for being his hero.

21. Heranihlani Togiai

Born in Hawaii but raised in American Samoa, this recipient's goal is to become a lawyer and someday be a judge at the High Court of American Samoa. She dedicates this award to her hardworking parents especially her two grandmothers who are both in their eighties.

22. Jasmine Tone

She is the daughter of Tuuaga and Jennifer Tone, from the villages of Nu'uuli and Atu'u. For her future endeavors, she plans to major in Medical Technology at the University of Manoa. Her desire to enter the medical field is inspired by the lack of representation within the Samoan community in these types of work forces.

23. Easterlei Olataga Tuitasi

Born and raised on the small and beautiful island of American Samoa, this recipient will be attending Chaminade University in Hawaii, achieving her goal to become a Clinical Psychologist, helping the youth and children of American Samoa. She dedicates her award to her parents, Te'etai Aoto'a and Sifagatogo Tuitasi, her brother Elishama, family and church. Her brother Ionatana was present at the Gala to accept the award on her behalf.

24. Tapaau Tukumoetau

Growing up in the small town of Nanakuli, this recipient will be furthering her education at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She also plans to study abroad in the near future, and obtain a Bachelors in Elementary Education, and hopefully get a Master's in Literature. She dedicates this award to her parents but also her grandparents Viliami and Tapa'au Sara Tukumoeatu.

25. Saniya Ulukita

A graduate of Saint Andrew's Priory and will be attending the University of Oregon. She dedicates this honor to her parents and teachers, who have supported her through every stage of life and helped her grow into a remarkable young lady.

Governor Lemanu P. S. Mauga and First Lady Ella Mauga were unable to attend the special event due to a Pacific Island Forum In-Country visit this week. However, Chief of Staff Loa Tuimavave T. Laupola represented them at the event and conveyed a message from the Governor.

Governor Lemanu's message emphasized, "Let us continue to teach, perform, and uphold all aspects of our Samoan culture, as you have done this past week. It is our duty to preserve the legacies of our ancestors, who successfully passed them down to us. God has truly destined the Samoan people for greatness. As one of Samoa's leaders, I urge you all to continue strengthening our Samoan heritage, no matter where you are in the world. Thank you all for your dedication and sacrifices."

The Samoan Heritage Week gala served as a poignant finale to the week of celebrations, emphasizing the importance of unity, culture, *tautua*, and future investments to all attendees. This event highlighted the strong community ties that shape the Samoan culture and their dedication to building a better future.

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