



Medical team fills healthcare gap in Kau

Following Hurricane Lala, volunteers have helped residents access healthcare

By Victoria Budiono
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A team of volunteer physicians and healthcare workers continues to provide medical services in Kau following Hurricane Lala, helping residents access care at a time when transportation disruptions and damage to local health facilities have

made it more difficult to get medical attention. The storm battered the state two weeks ago, with Hawaii island suffering the most severe impacts, particularly in the remote Kau District. Torrential rain and strong winds damaged or destroyed homes, washed out roads and disrupted access to communities, while widespread power outages left thousands without electricity. Two people in Kau died in the aftermath of the storm and many have been left

without a home. The medical team, operating out of the Naalehu Gym shelter, was established through Hawaii County's existing mobile health program, which works with healthcare providers to bring services into rural communities. Erin Samura, a pharmacist and executive assistant supporting Mayor Kimo Alameda's healthcare and public health initiatives, said that because a provider was already part of the program, the county was able to

quickly mobilize the team and establish a clinic in Kau after the storm. The need became especially apparent after transportation between Naalehu and Pahala was disrupted, limiting residents' ability to reach Ka'u Hospital. The Hawaii Island Community Health Center was also dealing with mud and storm-related impacts, further limiting access to care. "We were able to stand it up pretty quickly after the storm hit," Samura said. The clinic has served

residents ranging from children as young as 2 years old to adults in their 80s, providing general medical services and helping bridge the gap until local providers can fully resume operations. Patients have sought help for a range of needs, including wound care, mental and behavioral health services, and prescription refills. For residents who needed medication, the medical team worked with hospitals, pharmacies and other community partners to have prescriptions filled and either

delivered to patients or brought to the medical site for pickup. "The hospital also offered services to fill prescriptions and have it sent out," Samura said. "It's all in collaboration, really, with our partners." The clinic generally has a team of five to seven people on days it operates. State Department of Health public health nurses and members of the Medical Reserve Corps also have joined the effort, at times bringing the

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Ambassadors of peace

Exchange students gain perspective studying Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima bombings

By Leila Fujimori
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Seven students from Hiroshima, Japan, folded origami paper cranes with their Hawaii counterparts and others Saturday morning at the Pearl Harbor National Memorial in memory of Sadako Sasaki, a young girl who survived the 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima but was stricken with leukemia from radiation and died 10 years later at age 12. "Sadako heard the legend of the paper cranes, that is if you fold 1,000 paper cranes, you are given a wish," said Taylor Smith with the nonprofit Pacific Historic Parks as she stood in front of an exhibit at Pearl Harbor dedicated to the youngster. "Her wish was not to get better, but it was for peace." The seven Japanese students, ages 15 to 19, were chosen from 30 applicants to come to Hawaii as part of the Parks for



PHOTOS BY JAMM AQUINO / JAQUINO@STARADVERTISER.COM

Hiroshima students Yui Irie, right, and Ichiko Shiromizu, center, demonstrated how to make origami cranes for Taylor Smith, programs and collections coordinator for Pacific Historic Parks, Saturday at the Pearl Harbor National Memorial. The activity paid homage to Sadako Sasaki, who survived the 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima but died 10 years later of radiation-related leukemia at age 12.

Peace exchange program to grow in their understanding of the past, foster mutual understanding by acknowledging cultural differences and sharing values, and further develop and serve as ambassadors of peace. The third annual Parks for Peace event came at a fitting time, as Aug. 6 marked the 81st anniversary of the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima during World War II.

an online session, along with the family of a survivor of the Dec. 7, 1941, bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces. Hina Ishimaru, 17, said she was especially touched by the video testimony of a Pearl Harbor survivor's children — "the feelings they had as a child" and the

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KOKUA LINE



CHRISTINE DONNELLY

Readers question fees to use debit cards

Question: Even if I pay in person at a satellite city hall or the DMV, they charge a fee to use a credit card or even a debit card — it's not just online or at the DMV Now kiosk. I asked why a fee is added to the debit card since it withdraws money from your checking account; nobody had a clear answer. Maybe because it's backed up by a credit card company? That's dumb: The check can bounce, the debit card will decline on the spot. **Q:** How does the city get away with charging a fee to use a debit card to register a vehicle, renew our license, etc.? This is an instant withdrawal, like cash. AI says federal law (Durbin Amendment) prohibits debit surcharges in all 50 states. Yet I see more and more businesses doing this, and the city has done it for a long time.

Answer: Kokua Line has received numerous similar questions lately, asking the city to explain its legal basis for charging a service fee for debit card payments, with some citing artificial intelligence responses as evidence the practice is not allowed. But Harold Nedd, a spokesperson for Honolulu's Department of Customer Services, said the city's practice is perfectly legal. Here's his full response: "We appreciate the opportunity to respond. The convenience fees charged at our satellite city halls for both debit and credit card payments fully comply with federal and local laws. The public confusion appears to stem from a misunderstanding of the federal Durbin Amendment to the Dodd-Frank Act. That law does not ban the application of service charges or convenience fees to debit cards. Instead, it simply limits — or caps — the 'swipe fees' that large financial institutions are allowed to

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charge merchants to process debit transactions. Honolulu’s card fees are strictly convenience fees authorized under Honolulu Revised Ordinances § 2-4.2(b) and City Administrative Rules § 03-72-3. These rules allow the City to offer multiple modern payment options while passing the transaction processing costs directly to the users who choose that convenience. Any resident who wants to avoid paying this card convenience fee can still register his or her vehicle without any extra charge by paying with cash or a check at any satellite city hall.”

The example of registering a motor vehicle also applies to any other card payment to the city, made online or at a satellite city hall or driver’s license center on Oahu, to which a 2.35% service fee is added. The service fee rises to 2.5% (plus a \$4 remote transaction fee) at DMV Now kiosks in grocery stores.

To the first reader’s point, there’s a \$25 fee for a bounced check.

The law and administrative rules Nedd mentioned allowed the municipal government to establish convenience and service fees for payments made to it by “electronic means,” which include payments “made by automated clearing house (ACH) transactions, fed-wires, credit cards, charge cards, debit cards, stored value cards, and other electronic payment technology not yet developed.” The fee “shall not exceed the reasonable costs of the city relating to the processing of the payments,” the law says.

His response refers to electronic payments made to the city, not to all businesses; readers also have questioned debit card service fees charged by food trucks, online retailers and other private enterprises. We followed up with the state Office of Consumer Protection for information about that and received the following response:

“Businesses that impose a surcharge on a debit card transaction may violate their own agreement with the card brand (e.g., Mastercard, Visa, Discover, or Amex) not to impose a surcharge on a debit card transaction. Consumers can inform the business that their surcharges are noncompliant and request that the fee be removed or refunded.

“If the business does not offer to remove or refund the surcharge, consumers who pay a surcharge on a debit card transaction are encouraged to report non-compliance to the card brand by calling the customer service line on the back of your debit card, or by one of the following methods:

“For Visa, file a complaint using Visa’s Rules Complaint Form, available at usa.visa.com/Forms/visa-rules.html.

“For Mastercard, send an email to merchant_surcharge@mastercard.com or call Mastercard direct customer support at 800-627-8372.

“For Amex, call customer support at 800-492-3344.”

Mahalo

Mahalo to an angel, Kelii, who rescued two kupuna who were in a vehicle that has seen better days. Our car stalled in Kalihi on Nimitz Highway late one evening and blocked the right lane. Kelii came to our rescue to help us move our vehicle to the side of the road and get it started so we could drive it to a nearby mechanic shop. Blessings to you, Kelii! — *Grateful kupuna*

Write to *Kokua Line* at *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, 500 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 2-200, Honolulu, HI 96813; call 808-529-4773; or email kokualine@staradvertiser.com.



PHOTOS BY JAMM AQUINO / JAQUINO@STARADVERTISER.COM

Taylor Smith of Pacific Historic Parks explained the meaning behind the 1,000 origami cranes on display at an exhibit honoring Sadako Sasaki, a young girl who survived the 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima but later died of radiation-related cancer. “Sadako heard the legend of the paper cranes, that is if you fold 1,000 paper cranes, you are given a wish,” Taylor said. “Her wish was not to get better, but it was for peace.”

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forgiveness they expressed.

Ishimaru was looking forward to an afternoon tour of the USS Arizona Memorial, saying: “When I stand just above the Arizona Memorial, I will feel more real and emotional rather than just listening in YouTube or homepages.”

The memorial marks the watery grave of 1,102 American sailors and Marines entombed in the battleship. A total of 1,177 USS Arizona crew members died in the Dec. 7 attack, nearly half the 2,390 American service members and civilians killed that day.

Ishimaru said she decided to become a youth peace volunteer at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park when she realized that “the truth of Hiroshima is not widely known to the world.”

“It is also important to tell what happened, but also I wanted to learn what happened, so I have to grow and grow ... and increase in peace activities.”

She said she didn’t know much about Pearl Harbor before joining the exchange program and would like to share with other students what she has learned.

“First, I want to tell them that there are a lot of different perspectives. It doesn’t matter what religion or country they belong to; even between Japanese, there are different perspectives that each one has,” she said, adding that once these differences are understood, then



conversations toward peace can begin.

Ishimaru also revealed that her involvement in peace ambassador activities led to her maternal grandmother sharing that her mother and one sibling were “hibakusha” — atomic bomb survivors — and three other siblings died from the Aug. 6, 1945, blast.

Their family’s udon shop and residence were near ground zero.

“She didn’t want to tell because it hurt her a lot,”

Ishimaru said. “I told her telling the story is the hard thing because it was hard to recall the sad memories.”

The teenager said she would like to open up opportunities for others to talk so that younger generations can “keep their memories alive.”

Nozomi Hirai, 16, said her paternal grandmother was living in the Hiroshima countryside and was spared from the bomb.

“I was brought up in Hiroshima,” she said. “I



knew that I had a biased view of the war. I really wanted to know what Americans think about the war and what they were taught about the war in school.

“So far, I went to some museums in Pearl Harbor. I don’t think they have a biased view of the war, that Japan was so evil. They didn’t say such a thing. I’m glad they’re not thinking about war from an only American side, but a more objective perspective.”

The Sadako Sasaki exhibit at Pearl Harbor includes a tiny origami crane made by the sick child.

Also Saturday, the visiting group met University

Laboratory School students and will meet others from the University of Hawaii at Manoa and the Hawaii Technology Academy.

Kaita Endo, 18, a 2026 graduate of Punahou School who was born in Hawaii but whose parents are from Japan, said he joined the Parks for Peace program to get more in touch with his Japanese side and to help strengthen the connection between Hawaii and Japan.

“My American peers see me as fully Japanese ... but when I go to Japan, they see me as fully American,” he said. “I really don’t fully fit in with either group.”

Endo said that with many

Students from Hiroshima joined Hawaii students to fold paper cranes Saturday at the Pearl Harbor National Memorial as part of the Parks for Peace exchange program. Among them were, at left from left, visiting students Ichiko Shiro-mizu and Yui Irie and University Laboratory School student Zion Cor-nog; and below from left, University Lab student Zoe Luo, Nozomi Hirai from Japan and University Lab student Kayla Tachibana.

of his peers, “there is a little bit of a lack of understanding about Hiroshima, even though they grew up in Hawaii.”

“The educational system didn’t really teach them about Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima. They teach about World War II broadly. Regarding Hawaii specifically, there could be more done to highlight the history between Hawaii and Japan,” he said.

Endo visited Hiroshima in 2025 and said he was surprised by the similarities between some of the survivor stories, their reflections on war and their forgiveness.

“It was devastating ... but they can come to the sense of forgiveness, but also that one decision (to go to war) wasn’t representative of the whole country and the people.”

Endo, who plans to study engineering at the University of Washington, said that learning about Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima has helped him gain a “whole perspective” and to avoid having a bias and to keep “an open mind.”

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total number of people providing support to about 10.

The physicians are private medical providers who volunteer their time to serve in Kau on days when they are not seeing their regular patients. The clinic remains active three to four days a week, although its schedule can vary depending on the availability of the volunteer providers.

Samura said the county is assessing how much longer the medical team will be needed, as access between Pahala and Ka’u Hospital has been restored and local providers, including the Hawaii Island Community Health Center, recover and resume services.

Samura added that mental health is also a priority in Kau, although she declined to provide additional details about the specific needs being reported in the community. She said the Governor’s Office has a team on standby that can be deployed if additional mental health resources are needed.

As immediate disaster needs begin to ease, the county is shifting its focus toward longer-term recovery.

Distribution points in Naalehu and Pahala, which have provided residents with food, water and other essential supplies since the storm, were scheduled to close Saturday as residents report that their immediate needs have largely been met.

The county plans to transition toward community

resource centers that can help residents address longer-term needs, including healthcare, employment, insurance, education and other services.

Samura said the county is working with community organizations, businesses and leaders to create spaces where residents can access multiple resources in one place.

“We are one ohana,” she said. “Our community organizations, our community businesses, our community leaders, we’re all part of this.”

The county is also assessing housing needs as part of the recovery effort. Samura said temporary housing is being provided through hotel placements coordinated by the state Department of Human Services, as well as Airbnb

options coordinated through Catholic Charities Hawai’i and Aloha United Way.

Residents seeking help can submit a request through the county’s request-for-assistance system on the Civil Defense Agency’s website, which allows officials to connect people with available resources and track needs

across the community.

Samura said the county expects residents’ needs to continue changing as the recovery progresses.

“We’re going to continue to work with our community partners to continue to hear and see and look and sense out what the gaps are, what the needs are in the community, so that we can properly fill those gaps,” she said.

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