ISLAND MATTERS *Mufi Hannemann*

‘SustainAbility’ Drives Pacific Rim Forum

If we aren’t living with a disability, or don’t know someone who is disabled, we soon will.

According to University of Hawai‘i’s Center on Disability, 15 percent of the world’s population has disabilities, and they make up a disproportionate share of those burdened with poverty, oppression and marginalization. Meanwhile, in Hawai‘i and the rest of the nation, a rapidly aging population is placing seniors at great risk of chronic illness and disability.

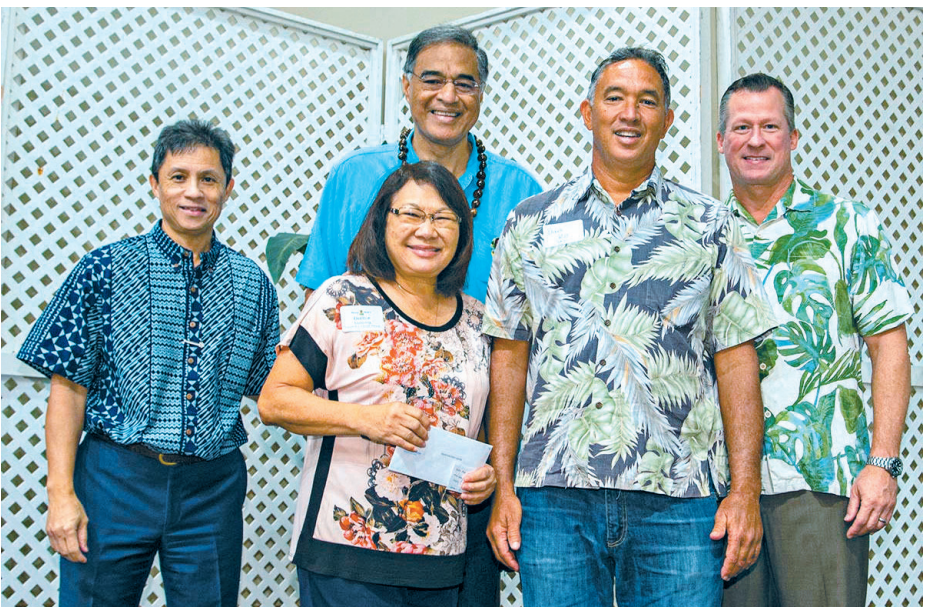
Bolstering the quality of life and bringing dignity and justice for people with diverse needs is the goal of the 33rd annual Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity, which will be held Oct. 9-11 at The Modern Honolulu and Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikīkī Beach Resort.

With the clever theme of “SustainAbility,” the gathering will feature leaders and advocates from many sectors to share ideas and make a commitment to taking the steps urgently needed to address the needs of the disabled.

The conference program will include more than 200 seminars, workshops and special events to encourage networking, professional development, research and personal growth. Topics will range from education reform to new developments in assistive technology, to eliminating poverty. Keynote speakers are bestselling author Dr. James Doty and MIT’s Emile Bruneau, Hawai‘i school superintendent Christina Kishimoto, and Microsoft lead designer Kat Holmes.

Conference co-chairwoman Charmaine Crockett says, “Our greatest challenge of the 21st century is not merely to survive ever-more-acute challenges in a globalized world. Rather, we must ensure that all peoples sustain in their totality, not merely the powerful at the expense of the marginalized.”

One of the attractions of the conference is the first-ever Book Pavilion at The Modern Honolulu from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oct. 9-10. Admission for the public is $25 per day and is separate from the conference. The Book Pavilion theme is “Readability,” a celebration of literary arts that opens the pages on stories by and about people with disabilities and diverse identities.



(Back, from left) HLTA chairman Glenn Vergara, the author and HLTA chairman Scott Ingwers present a check to Debbie Lunning (front, left) and Dan Ko of Youth for Christ USA. PHOTO COURTESY GREGG YAMAMOTO

The pavilion’s keynoters include numerous literary luminaries: author and neuroscientist Dr. James Doty, who wrote the bestseller *Into the Magic Shop: A Neurosurgeon’s Quest to Discover the Mysteries of the Brain and the Secrets of the Heart*; blogger and scholar Jessica Fechtor, author of the memoir *Stir: My Broken Brain and the Meals that Brought Me Home*; and Tom di Maria, author of *The Creative Growth Book: From the Outside to the Inside: Artists with Disabilities Today*.

There will be workshops for fledgling writers and how-to sessions on polishing scholarly treatises, fleshing out fictional characters, penning memoirs and screenwriting. Other sessions include a poetry-writing master class, a literacy seminar and overcoming common writer pitfalls.

Workshop leaders are acclaimed publishing professionals from far and near, including Hawai‘i-born Mana Comics creator Christopher Caravalho, who will preside over a panel about disability themes in comic book culture. Other local literary contributors include UH novelist Shawna Yang Ryan and accomplished novelist Victoria Kneubuhl. Complete program listings can be found at pacrim.hawaii.edu/events/book-pavilion.

Also part of the conference is the celebrity-packed Pac Rim Mini-Diversity Film Festival, showcasing acclaimed movies that spur discussion of diversity.

In addition, there will be a free, all-day “Aging with Dignity Forum,” which will explore how to create viable communities for older adults. This event will be on Oct. 11 from 8:15 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Conferences such as this well-put-together event go a long way towards raising the saliency of the importance of the needs of the disabled and the physically challenged — something that can’t be stressed enough in a state such as ours, noted for its sensitivity and compassion for everyone regardless of our age, background, ethnicity or circumstances. For more information and registration, go to pacrim.hawaii.edu.

Charity Walk Closes With A Bang

HLTA officially concluded its 39th annual Charity Walk with the O‘ahu Grant Breakfast Distribution Ceremony at Ala Moana Hotel, with 128 charities and organizations receiving funds. Several first-time participants made their mark as top fundraisers this year, including Youth for Christ USA, Hui O Momilani PTSO and second-year participant Honolulu Community Action Program. They also brought large numbers of walkers and volunteers to the walk, and thus their efforts were rewarded when they received the largest grants that were distributed.

Statewide, this year’s walk was another record-breaking year, raising $2.27 million for 363 charities across the state. We debuted an online crowdfunding platform this year, and look forward to topping our record again in May 2018, as we embark upon our 40th year. Since our first year in 1978, HLTA has amassed over $32 million to kōkua Hawai‘i’s nonprofit organizations.

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