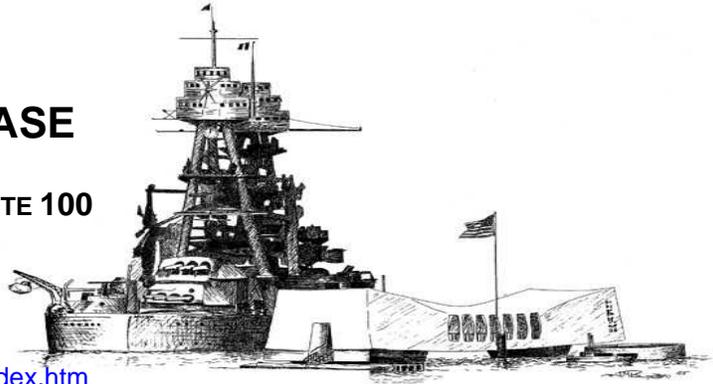


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Pearl Harbor Sailors, Aiea Intermediate students restore pocket wetland

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PEARL HARBOR, Hawaii – Sailors from Naval Station Pearl Harbor partnered with students from Aiea Intermediate School and the City & County of Honolulu to plant native vegetation and remove invasive species during a recent pocket wetland project near Neal S. Blaisdell Park.

The efforts were the second phase of a three-year project that began last October to reduce invasive plant species and trash by 80 percent on the Pearl Harbor shoreline that borders the park. Project organizers also planted 375 native wetland plants to help filter out pollutants before they reach the harbor.

“This is an opportunity for the state of Hawaii to work with the Navy in Hawaii by building a stewardship with the children of Aiea Intermediate School, focusing on polluted runoff in their community and the effect it has on the environment,” said Iwalani Sato, environmental services community relations specialist for the City, during last the event on Feb. 28. “What is really important is for the Sailors working hand-in-hand with the students, helping them increase their knowledge [of] protecting the environment, teaching them how to use the tools in a safe way, and how to work together and build relationship within the community.”

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Sailors with large shovels and protective gear removed patches of grass larger than a car engine, while City workers gave a safety orientation and botany lesson to the 20 students. Participants worked together to plant the native *Akulikuli*, *Ahu`awa*, *Ae`ae* (*Bacopa monnieri*) and *Pohuehue* (Hawaiian Beach Morning Glory).

“We want to show our dedication to the local community and to be a good neighbor in the process,” said Lieutenant Ben Abney, officer in charge, Naval Station Pearl Harbor First Lieutenant Division. “There are a couple of benefits to doing this. The first benefit is replacing the invasive growth of these species with native ones, but the bigger benefit is getting a chance to work with these students and explain the advantages of environmental stewardship and the process of taking care of the land and water through these educational processes.”

It was a chance for the students of Matt Zitello, an eighth-grade science teacher at Aiea Intermediate School, to learn about the environment as well as the Navy’s busiest Pacific harbor.

“The school adopted this little patch of wetland with help from the Navy to help the students learn about the watersheds of O’ahu and the important role they play on the environment of Pearl Harbor,” he said. “It’s really good have the students get out of the classroom to work with and talk to these Sailors who they hear about in the news, and see what they are doing around the community.”

The Navy partners with the City in an effort to beautify and clean up areas along the historic Pearl Harbor bike path as part of the Adopt-a-Stream and Adopt-a-Block programs. Zitello said he appreciated the Navy’s help with this Adopt-a-Stream project.

“It’s not always possible when it’s just us teachers. We need people in the community, the Sailors from Pearl Harbor to help educate the future generations of this country to become more aware of our effects on the environment,” he said.

Non-native plants found along Pearl Harbor can rob native plants of the nutrients, moisture, light and space needed to survive. These plants also deprive wildlife of important food and habitat that might otherwise be present.

On April 18, Naval Station Pearl Harbor will again partner with the City in the annual Pearl Harbor Bike Path Earth Day cleanup.