

## Creating The Good Community



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Early in 1955, Edward L. Clissold, Chairman of the Continuing Committee overseeing the planning of the Church College of Hawaii, and President of Oahu Stake, walked into a vast field of sugar cane carrying a long pole with a rag attached to the end. President Clissold stood in the cane on what would be the site of the future McKay Foyer, and waved the pole high overhead above the tall cane. At the outer edge of the field, by what is now the circle at La`ie Elementary School circle, Paul Ijima started up his machine, sighted on the makeshift flag, and bulldozed his way through the sugarcane "digging out what eventually became Kulanui Street." (Baldrige manuscript, p.6)

That same year, at 11:00am on February 12, President David O. McKay walked that dirt track and stood on a temporary platform raised above the sugarcane for the groundbreaking of the land and dedication of the future campus. He blessed the faculty who would teach here, and the students who would study and graduate from here and go back out into the world. In the dedicatory prayer he blessed the future visitors who would come here "and his words of blessing were prophecy: "that this college, and the temple, and the town of La`ie may become a missionary factor, influencing not thousands, not tens of thousands, but millions of people who will come seeking to know what this town and its significance are." (Law, p.69)

News reporters at the time estimated one thousand people present in the clearing within that sugarcane field. Few of them could have envisioned many millions of visitors coming to the tiny village of 1955. Nor could they have imagined the significance of this out-of-the-way place or why it would pique the interest of so many people from afar. At that time, Hawaii was still a Territory of the United States and had never seen anything near even one million visitors to the whole territory. But the Lord's prophet saw them.

Three years later, December 17, 1958, in his dedicatory prayer of the completed campus, President McKay petitioned the Lord: "Bless this institution that it may hold the respect of sister educational institutions and wield an influence throughout the world for good to all educational circles. To this end, Father, continue to bless...the president of this institution, [and] his associates in the presidency. Continue to uphold them and inspire them. Bless the faculty, the deans, the student body, and all associated with this center of learning. Give the instructors the ability to see clearly the discernment between truth and error that they may be successful in refuting the...pernicious doctrines that would destroy the free agency of man, ... and weaken, and perhaps destroy, faith and belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ." (Law, 257)

The foundation of the Polynesian Cultural Center rests upon similar prophetic vision, as did the Hawaii Temple when it was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 1919.

Looking back at the prophetic visions that brought about each of these three institutions, we cannot deny that the Lord has a purpose and a destiny for our small community. Our task today, and for at least the coming academic year, is to examine ourselves through the prism of the prophecies that have shaped our university, its sister institutions, and our community of La`ie. It is to our benefit to mark those things that need attention, effort, even hard work, to improve what needs improving, to sustain and assist those who are being left behind or left out altogether from the benefits that the Church, our institutions, and our community provide.

Throughout human history, communities have formed for various purposes. Social history is concerned with values and goals and how groups within the society interact with each other. Political theory looks at power structures in the community, how they work across group boundaries, and how they can be changed for the good of the whole. Community planners design spaces and structures to best facilitate human interaction, hence the planners' concern with "making places humane" by ensuring that the human dimension of towns and communities is not lost in the drive toward building marketplaces for economic gain. In these ways, then, we form communities and construct institutions; for protection, as in a City of Refuge, a fortress; or for religious reasons, such as a Cathedral City or a Temple Town; or for educational purposes, such as a College or University Town.

Social anthropologist, Anthony P. Cohen's approach to the study of the community is interpretive and experiential. He sees the community as a cultural field with a complex of symbols, believing that community exists first, in the minds of its members, in the meanings that people attach to the symbols of their community as well as to its boundaries. "This reality of community," he writes, "is expressed and embellished symbolically.... (Cohen 98) People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity." (Cohen 118)

What are those elements that symbolically reference our community? What are the symbols of our community? Certainly the temple, the university, and the PCC are all rendered visible by their physical structures, but their invisible, symbolic, meanings are more powerful. It is the idea of the temple, the idea of the university, the idea of the PCC, and the idea of La`ie that shape our attitudes, behaviors, and identities as we "reside" within them. Along with that, the natural landscape of La`ie community shapes our idea of it. The beautiful Ko`olau mountains, the wide stretch of the blue Pacific Ocean, and the lush land between these two natural boundaries together form the image in our minds of our landscape, our home, our Place. Island-encircling Kamehameha Highway is, in both directions, our link to all other communities. The past, the history of the community, helps define its purpose, and the 20th Century population growth and institutional expansion helped shape its defining mission. But it is in our time and place today that we need to understand the essence of our community's destiny. Destiny is an inevitable reality, and we will need to marshal all our strengths, skills, talents, education, cultural knowledge, the principles of the Restored Gospel and prophetic utterances to effect change where it is required, to help those in need, and to create a more safe, more beautiful, and more caring community.

Some of the realities of our community health and well-being may be surprising to us, but we must face them, nevertheless, and we must do so with a commitment to effecting change. The most recent U.S. Census publicly available was recorded in the year 2000.

Here is the report of our community:

Image 1: Demographics

877 La`ie residents are foreign born.

1,356 over the age of 5 speak a language other than English at home.

Image 2: Racial Makeup

The largest racial group was Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders, followed by White and mixed race individuals.

Image 3: Housing

In 2000 there were 107 vacant rental units --

I would venture to guess that these are no longer vacant today!

This year, 2004, 800+ BYUH students are also renting in the community.

Image 4: Cost of Rental Housing

Most rental units in our town cost between \$750-\$1,499 a month

Image 5: Families

In the year 2000 women headed 90 family households, either as single mothers, single grandmothers, or in other roles.

Image 6: Population (by age)

Children under the age of 18 comprise the largest segment of our population.

More than half our population (54%) is 24 years old or younger.

Image 7: Income

The median income for females was \$13,492 lower than for males.

The Last Image 8: La`ie Poverty

80 families living in poverty in our community is 80 too many!

702 people in La`ie living below the poverty line is heartbreaking.

These realities exist in spite of tremendous contributions being made from within the community.

From my own experience working at the Polynesian Cultural Center, I know that its contribution to the local community is exceptional, and I can testify to you that it is the institution that has almost single handedly fulfilled President McKay's prophecy regarding the millions of people who would find their way to La`ie. Let's take a look at the contribution the PCC makes to our community:

1st Image: PCC, October 1963-August 2004:

Over this 41-year period:

Total visitors to PCC = 31 million people

And 14,000 BYUH students have paid for their education by working at the Center.

The income to the University in student wages & other support totals \$140 million over these four decades.

2nd Image: PCC, Employees, August 2004:

BYUH student employees: 700 (approx)

Full-time employees: 286

Community / high school / part-time / on-call: 371

Total full and part-time employees: 1,357

The Last Image: PCC, Projected 2004 Activity in Local Hawaii Economy:

For this year alone:

More than \$16 million in salary/wages/benefits to full-time community employees,  
most, if not all, of these are La`ie residents.

More than \$8 million in commissions to sales agents (on or off-island)

More than \$25 million purchases of other goods and services from Hawaii companies.

More than \$1.1 million general excise taxes paid to State of Hawaii

More than \$5 million average capital expenditures (construction/equipment)

Total this year: \$55.1 million == PCC will contribute to the economy of our state and our community.

In our community we serve in many roles. We may very likely live next door to each other on the same street, work together at the same institution, worship together in the same ward, and even be related to each other by marriage or other family connection. Our children and grandchildren play soccer or baseball or basketball together, and these connections cross boundaries of economics and culture. Pacific people live and interact in groups, extended families, villages, and tribes, and within the group the spirit of volunteerism, contributions, and sharing of resources ensures the well-being of its members. The elderly are treated with deference. They are referred to as Auntie or Uncle, both titles being respectful terms in Pacific Island cultures.

When BYUH students congregate in Foodland wearing skimpy swimsuit tops and towels or lavalava about their waists, they appear to have no respect for the local community. If you live off-campus, students, shouting and partying through the night in a neighborhood of families is disrespectful of them, and of yourselves. When these things are discussed, the single most repeated observation from local residents is this issue of "having no respect".

Other issues are more serious: editorials in this week's local newspapers headlined: "Third Year in a Row, More

Live in Poverty." "More Isle Residents Also Going Without Health Insurance;" "Can Locals Compete?" This latter report refers to the cost of housing and shows a large photograph of the Ocean Villas being constructed at the Turtle Bay Resort. These luxury condominiums range from \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million per unit and more than half of the 57 units in the project were sold within two weeks. "Resort owners are often wealthy mainlanders...looking for desirable locations for their second homes," the paper reports, "The increased demand boosts prices and 'takes them well out of the range of the local community.'" "It forces the local community into a noncompetitive state and it's a tremendous area of concern." (Honolulu Advertiser, Sunday August 29, 2004. F4)

On this same issue of poverty in Hawaii, a University of Hawaii Social Sciences Public Policy Center spokesperson observed: "There are a lot of tourist-industry jobs that don't pay that well, and what we might be seeing is a significant number of working poor." (The Honolulu Advertiser, Friday, August 27, 2004.)

Also in La`ie, rental housing is at a crucial level of concern. Some of the problems include absent or uncaring landlords who rent sub-standard houses at high rents, and landlords renting to students for higher group rates than single families can afford. This shuts out the needy families in the community: those with young children who are living on basic wages. Very concerned about this situation, BYU-Hawaii administrators are taking a proactive approach by focusing on better student enrolment management and on-campus housing plans to help alleviate problems of overcrowding in La`ie's rental housing.

The employment situation in La`ie is also very challenging. Community members must compete with newly arrived mainland students, faculty wives, and even service missionaries for many jobs, both skilled and unskilled, with the town's three major employers.

In the area of education the costs of a BYU-Hawaii education, and its academic requirements, place it beyond the reach of many La`ie people. An adult community member needing a job would greatly benefit from community outreach courses in basic computer skills, business management, office management, and other areas suitable to BYU-Hawaii or PCC employment.

A case in point here is the announced construction of the multi-million dollar hotel to be built adjacent to both this campus and the PCC. While news reports cited some 400+ job opportunities, realistically, these jobs will go to those who are qualified to hold them. What would it take for HRI, the PCC and the University to attach to the project a Marriott training program for potential local applicants that can provide the certification necessary to successfully secure one of those jobs when the hotel opens? This would be a proactive way of ensuring good community relations while providing opportunities for people often shut out of other jobs.

Persistent challenges in the community include crime, growth, and outside forces.

Kava drinking and drugs, particularly ICE, lead to burglaries, violence, family breakdown, and at risk children, and uncontrolled growth leads to overcrowding in community homes, infrastructure problems, lack of basic services such as street lights, sidewalks, safe paths and community recreational facilities. We cannot think that the high-priced developments of the north shore will not impact upon our small community. Other forces of outside influence have attempted to erode the foundation of our town in the past. There was a time not so long ago when a group of Anti-Mormons took up residence in La`ie and became very active in protesting the Church at key locations in the community. Recent gang-like behavior and violence fueled in large part by the gap between the haves and have-nots, between some La`ie youth and students, must be addressed. In doing so we must understand that 2,400 students from the mainland and foreign countries moving into a community as small as ours where they partake of the rich blessings of a high quality education, and University activities in clean, beautiful facilities, can seem an enormous divide for youth growing up in a crowded neighborhood without access to any of these things. The definition of the term "interdependent" is "to be mutually dependent" " and

here's a definition: "The mission of one institution can be accomplished only by recognizing that it lives in an interdependent world with conflicts and overlapping interests." (Jacqueline Grennan Wexler, The American Heritage Dictionary)

Many questions bear asking:

- \* What is the impact of 31 million visitors upon a small town of less than 5,000 people over the span of four decades?
- \* How significant are Pacific cultural values such as volunteerism, community activities, group dynamics, and contributions to the Church to our community?
- \* What contributions do BYU-Hawaii students make to the local community?
- \* What are the personal and family implications of materialism, economic struggle, and social inequity within the community?
- \* How can we construct a community environment that is hospitable to residents of all economic levels?
- \* In what ways does the monumental style of the Hale La`a redesign and landscaping signify our La`ie identity?
- \* How is La`ie defined? Is it defined by the PCC? The Temple? The University?

Or is its distinguishing factor the Church?

- \* If our community's distinguishing factor is, indeed, the Church, how do we represent that identity to others?

Our physical community of La`ie is bounded by the sea and the mountains, but a symbolic boundary, the Church of Jesus Christ, also encircles this community, on a deeper emotional and spiritual level in our collective psyche.

On October 15, 1992, President Arthur Haycock spoke at a campus devotional. One of the many wonderful experiences he shared was this: "I was present when President David O. McKay broke ground in the middle of the cane field right out here in front of the McKay Auditorium. We cut down the sugar cane in order to do that, and he broke ground out there where the flags are flying...and speaking of the faculty, President McKay said, 'No man or woman can teach at this college who does not have in his heart an assurance, not a mere belief, but an assurance that God has had his hand over this entire valley of La`ie.'" President Haycock continued, "in the sixty years that I've been here, I know that to be true and I have seen his handiwork in all that has been accomplished." (BYU-Hawaii Archives)

In the year 2000, we celebrated the sesquicentennial of the Church in Hawaii. On November 1, of that year, then Hawaii Temple President, J. Richard Clarke, published a letter in our BYU-Hawaii Magazine in which he reminded us that, "Temples bless every land where they are built. Temples of the Lord have always symbolized the presence of the Living God watching over His covenant people Israel." Then he defined the joint mission of the three founding institutions of modern-day Laie: "The Hawaii Temple is the anchor tip of the institutional triangle joined by BYU-Hawaii and the Polynesian Cultural Center to form the resplendent prism through which Christ is revealed to the people of the Pacific."

May I conclude with a few words from President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved living prophet. In the year 2001 he wrote: "'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' We speak of the fellowship of the Saints. This is and must be a very real thing. We must never permit this spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood to weaken. We must constantly cultivate it. Simply put, we must be friends. We must love and honor and respect and assist one

another. Wherever Latter-day Saints go, they are made welcome, because Latter-day Saints are mutual believers in the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ and are engaged together in His great cause. We are one great family, eleven million strong."

(Gordon B. Hinckley, *Stand a Little Taller: Counsel and Inspiration For Each Day Of The Year*, p. 112.)