



Pacific Islands Area

December 2015



Ecological Science Team

Welcoming Ecological Sciences Team!

By Tony Ingersoll, Assistant Director for Natural Resource Technology, State Office

Happy New Year PIA:

The Resource Technology Team has a new name. By unanimous agreement among RT and PMC staff, we have selected the name “Ecological Sciences Team” or “ECS Team.”

Why the name change? First and foremost, we wanted a name that would be inclusive of our Hoolehua Plant Materials Center and staff. As most of you know, the nationwide mission of the PMCs changed about a year ago to be less focused on plant release (from ~35% to 5%) and more focused on technical assistance to and service for Field Office planner’s needs as they work with clients.

As such RTT and PMC are now one Ecological Sciences Team serving your forestry, agroforestry, biology, wild-life, NEPA compliance, cultural resource, conservation planning, economic, water quality, soil quality, agromonic, grazing lands and plant materials discipline needs. This is not to say, of course, that one cannot refer to the our hard working and dedicated Plant Materials Center staff as “PMC,” it’s just to say that the “ECS Team” name is now inclusive of PMC staff and the plant materials/botany discipline.

Furthermore, the “Ecological Sciences” name, in my opinion, clearly identifies our Team’s mission focus, all the ecological science disciplines, including plant materials. It identifies us with the Ecological Science or ECS Practice Standards, Specifications, Jobsheets and Technical Notes for which we are responsible, and for which the PMC’s work is meant to supplement. It also distinguishes us from our excellent “PIA Engineering Team”, or “ENG Team” and their ENG Practice Standards & Specifications.

The name “Ecological Sciences Team” also matches the name for the same team at NHQ, the Ecological Sciences Division. And it matches the name that several states use for Resource Technology, including WA, TX, CO and the Caribbean Area.

For FY16 and beyond, therefore, we are your PIA Ecological Sciences Team ready to serve all your ECS discipline needs. Thank you.

Tony



Bruce Petersen, PIA NRCS Director

Message from the Director

Greetings:

This year marks my 29th year with NRCS and I've seen some incredible work and accomplishments over those years. Serving as your Director this year has given me an appreciation for the challenges and opportunities that tropical island agriculture offers.

In PIA, we deliver programs and services that improve lives and resources like nowhere else in the world. I have seen so many cases where your outreach results in program contracts that improve diet and provide a little discretionary income for producers. A little Farm Bill funding and technical assistance can go a long way here to improve the standard of living for some of the countries most challenged producers.

I received the message and I voice it to my peers and supervisor when appropriate, that "it's different here." We have unique challenges with climate, geography, culture, and programs that make things difficult and require an open mind and broad interpretation to make things fit and meet our producer's needs. I have the support of NHQ staff to find and use the flexibility in our programs. I appreciate the PIA staff thinking outside the box to improve workflow, accuracy, and timeliness and to expand program opportunities for our producers.

The New Year provides me with the opportunity to make resolutions and set goals. I want to share a few things that come to mind:

- We are moving to a workload-based budget. I want us to be in a better position to benefit from that by improving our utilization of Farm Bill funding available to PIA.
- The results of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) for PIA are not where I want them to be. I want to see an upward trend in the key FEVS indexes.
- I expect to make staffing and realignment announcements early in the next year.
- I want to meet with you and our district partners more often.

In closing, I want to thank Donna Hopwood for her service to PIA. I will miss her and have appreciated her dedication and honesty. I wish her the best in her new assignment.

The work of conservation never ends, and our mission keeps growing. I am so grateful for all of you and your willingness to meet so many challenges and priorities in such a positive way. Your service and commitment to the producers in PIA speaks volumes to your character and commitment to the natural and human resources in PIA.

Have a safe and happy holiday. I'll be back in touch with you in the New Year!

Bruce Petersen
PIA Director

Current Developments is a newsletter for employees and partners. You may submit articles and photos to:

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Natural Resources Conservation Service
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International Programs Division: LMI DREE - Lower Mekong Initiative Disaster Response Exercise & Exchange, Sept 2015, Vientiane, Laos

By Tim Brasuell, Civil/Agricultural Engineer, USDA-NRCS, Saipan

A detail, sponsored by USDA NRCS International Programs Division, was completed September 19 thru September 26th, 2015 in Vientiane, Laos. The government of the Laos People's Democratic Republic (PDR) served as the host of the week-long event. The detail was invitational travel and paid for by the US Army Pacific, Honolulu. USDA Foreign Agricultural Service requested a USDA representative from the NRCS who could assist the U.S. Team with one of the themed topics requested by the host country; "Flooding Impacts to Agriculture". There were approximately 130 participants from the LMI member countries.

I served as one of the team facilitators to a multi-national group of Subject Matter Experts (SME) and guided the group through the TTX (table-top exercises). My duties were to encourage participation and team work, introduce reference materials, guide the dialogue towards generating team responses to the various disaster related scenarios, and document the TTX results for the final report. I participated in the U.S. team's After Action Review processes after each day's sessions. I also participated, along with all event participants, in a site trip to a local village to hear presentations from village and govt leaders on the devastating 2008 flood and its impacts in the area and on-going plans to mitigate future events.



Participants attending the detail in Vientiane, Laos.

Purpose

To enhance multi-lateral coordination, communication, and cooperation among the United States, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to ensure flood response readiness in the Lower Mekong region.

Highlights

- Over 130+ participants were in attendance from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, US, and Vietnam
- Opening ceremony led by MG McCaffrey (USARPAC) and Mr. Thammavong (Lao PDR)
- Lao PDR delivered presentations on disaster management organization, agriculture and health
- LMI overview delivered by U.S. State Department
- A medical panel session was held with LMI Member States.
- An agriculture sector work group activity was completed.



Mr. Tim Brasuell (USDA) facilitates an agricultural work group activity.

I participated in this event because of my interest in this region and disaster preparedness. I have traveled extensively through the region and served as a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand (Water Resource Engineer, group 92) and am familiar with the challenges posed by flooding disasters, as well as international development issues in the region. I have maintained some basic Thai language skills, and some Laotian words and speech patterns which I believe helped in facilitation and meeting some of the interpersonal communication objectives for the U.S. team.

Benefits

NRCS – applying the nine step planning process and identifying potential disaster impacts to each natural resource component SWAPA+HE (soil, water, air, plants, animals, humans, and energy) can be applied in pre-disaster planning approaches which can lead to best practices of mitigation measures before and during a disaster and best practices during the recovery period. These best practices will vary depending on the nature and magnitude of the disaster. Applying disaster exercise scenarios by NRCS with local SWCD and local units of governments by utilizing the NRCS nine step planning processes on the SWAPA+HE resource base could identify vulnerabilities and best practices in an Disaster Recovery Plan for Agriculture on local agricultural landscapes.

Wetland Training Received

By Adam Reed, Water Quality Specialist, State Office

Our partners at the Forest Service graciously invited our employees to participate in a workshop that they conducted in July. “Comprehensive Well-Being and Resiliency” was a full day focused on optimal health and stress reduction. My first thought was “you have got to be kidding, why am I being sent to Moscow?” It was with great relief, to learn I was heading to Moscow Idaho rather than Russia. While in Moscow I received 5 days of soils training related to hydric soil indicators for making wetland determinations and delineations. The training focused primarily on the biological and chemical transformation of iron in the soil. These changes to iron show up as color indicator clues as to whether or not the soil can be classified as a wetland or not. Participants were from across the country, as were the trainers. The training consisted of a mixture of classroom lectures, but it was field exercises that I found to be the most valuable. While digging through the Palouse soils I found a layer of soil which had the grey colors which we were looking for to indicate a reduced soil. However, a local NRCS Resource Soil Scientist explained that I was actually holding a layer of volcanic ash from the 1980 eruption. Needless to say I had to keep digging.



Volcanic Ash from Mount St. Helens

Food-Producing Agroforestry Landscapes of the Pacific

By Michael Constantinides, State Forester, State Office

Internationally renowned agroforestry expert Craig Elevitch lives in our back garden in Kona, Hawaii. Elevitch has a long track record of creating publications, references and resources for those interested in learning about, installing, and managing a wide range of agroforestry systems.

One of Elevitch’s most recent projects is a publication titled “[Food-Producing Agroforestry Landscapes of the Pacific](#),” supported in part by a USDA Western Region SARE grant. State Forester Michael Constantinides of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) contributed to one of the chapters called, “[Grower’s Guide to Pacific Agroforestry Systems, Information Resources, and Public Assistance Programs](#).” This chapter highlights 10 principal agroforestry systems commonly practiced throughout the Pacific. Each system is summarized by narrative descriptions, diagrams, images, explanations of typical benefits, lists of associated plant species and NRCS conservation practices that would typically support agroforest installation and management.



PIA State Forester, Michael Constantinides

As part of his efforts, Elevitch rolled out the publication via a series of five workshops throughout Hawaii, each including a day of presentations with questions and answers, followed by a field day. The first was attended by 35 people on Molokai. Though NRCS did not present at the Molokai workshop, there was an NRCS presenter who relayed technical and financial assistance opportunities for agroforestry conservation plans at the other four workshops – each attended (at maximum capacity) by 50 participants.

“It is an honor to partner with experts and share the knowledge about agroforestry with others,” stated Bruce Petersen, NRCS Director of the Pacific Islands Area.

Interest and feedback regarding NRCS assistance was very strong. Many NRCS Field Offices have already received follow-up inquiries from workshop participants. Our sincere thanks to our colleagues who graciously stepped up to represent NRCS and our forestry efforts at these workshops. To learn more about NRCS in the Pacific Islands Area and forestry across the islands, visit www.pia.nrcs.usda.gov.

Leading with Excellence, Alignment, and Diversity (LEAD)

Hosted by the Honolulu Pacific Federal Executive Board's Diversity Council

By Jolene Lau, Public Affairs Specialist, State Office



On November 5th, NOAA hosted a free seminar at Ford Island for federal employees. The half-day session included six speakers that covered everything from inclusion, workplace professionalism, and disability etiquette. There was a wide variety of civilian and military employees who were all in attendance to increase their knowledge of Workforce Diversity.

NOAA's Deputy Regional Director, Ed Young welcomed the group and gave a brief overview of the Honolulu Pacific Federal Executive Board's Diversity Council. The first speaker was Victoria Bowens, Director of Diversity and Inclusion for the Navy. She said:

- Don't judge people, get to know them
- "different" could mean better as more creative minds might get the task done quicker
- Be aware of our own blind spots and learn from Emotional Intelligence by Travis Bradburry
- Get 100% effort by 100% of the workforce, that means having accountability
- Authentic leaders make sure that all employees are engaged and productive
- No one wants disengaged employees
- She quoted Colin Powell:

"Leadership is solving problems. The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them.

They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership."

The second session was a combination of two speakers. Kim Coco Iwamoto is a Commissioner on the Hawaii Civil Rights Commission and Rebecca Stotzer is an Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Iwamoto reminded the audience that our words are very powerful. Having experienced many hardships in her life, she shared several personal stories and how she overcame her struggles. An incredibly powerful and dynamic speaker, Iwamoto was also a street activist, foster parent to LGBT children, and as an attorney, took on legal matters

which successfully amended laws to protect the LGBT community. She said, "Be smart and don't ask inappropriate questions." Stotzer encouraged that we promote awareness and be cautious of "celebrating" things that further stereotype the LGBT community.

The third session, by Thomas Conway, Media Coordinator, Center for Disability Studies from the University of Hawaii discussed IT approaches for Accessibility. Conway reminded the audience to have a full understanding of the laws to meet compliance. For example, Section 508 and having information on the website available for assistive technology. Some folks were not aware that computer language for websites must meet accessibility so that screen readers can clearly voice information to a blind person. He provided websites for further reference and learning.

The last session was from two speakers at the Vocational Rehab. Dawna Zane and Margaret Simms work at the employment service agency to help the disabled to find jobs. They talked about having disability etiquette and encouraged hiring officials to utilize their service to have a diverse workforce. Zane shared her personal story and how she triumphed over a tragic accident that left her with a spinal cord injury. Now she is helping other disabled people to find jobs and she encouraged the audience to treat them as equals. She stated, "Don't make things different, continue talking to them as anyone else. Use 'People First Language.'" Simms added that employers should have transparent intentions and conduct "stay" interviews instead of "exit" interviews to find out why loyal employees stay. She also emphasized the need to add diversity in the workplace by establishing a new culture of inclusion. They concluded their presentation with a one-minute video that ended with, "The choices we make, reveal the true nature of our character."

Chris Conklin, Executive Director of the Honolulu Pacific Federal Executive Board closed the seminar by thanking all of the top management present in the room and those who supported their employees' attendance. He encouraged the audience to provide feedback so that they can plan for other speakers next year. This was a worthwhile event with some great reminders about civil rights, ethics, and the laws that protect individuals.

Happy Holidays, wishing you all the best in 2016!

2015 State Conservation Awareness Competition

By Kanoë Malani, District Planner, Hilo SWCD

The 2015 State contest was hosted by the Hamakua Soil and Water Conservation District at the *Wailea Agricultural Group* in Hakalau. Though Friday, November 20th was a rainy day, the students were troupers as they competed in judging soils at three different sites.

Pahoa High School took First Place overall with their student Gernel Javier scoring the highest individual for the day. Pahoa advisor Mailei Bumanglag and assistant Janean Stone (both former contest winners) went home proud of their students. Second place went to **Kamehameha Maui** and third to **Leilehua High School**. These schools recently won the County contest that gave them a birth to participate in the State competition. Our County contest for the Big Island was hosted by the Mauna Kea SWCD and held at Kahua Ranch in Kohala.

Lunch was graciously provided by Doug and Jill Beaton and enjoyed by all. Special thanks to Lesley Hill and Michael Crowell for the use of their farm and everyone who assisted in the contest.

The Pahoa High winners will go on to compete at the National Contest in Oklahoma City on May 3rd-5th, 2016. Good Luck to them and Congratulations to all participants!



2015 CFC Comes to a Close

By Anthony Ingersoll, 2015 CFC Agency Project Officer, State Office

Dear PIA:

Congratulations. We did it!! We completed the 2015 Combined Federal Campaign here in PIA. I am pleased to announce that 42% of our fellow employees have pledged \$10,127.00 in support of local, national & international community services.

Your commitment will make a difference in thousands of lives! It is efforts such as yours that breathe sustenance into our global society, serving its diverse people and their needs and helping solve the issues that are important to all of us. Our collective contributions will help feed our hungry, comfort those in crisis and build a better future for our youth.

You have not only made a donation, you have made a difference in somebody's life. Thank you very much.

Tony
2015 CFC Agency Project Officer



Malama Learning Center - Cooperative Agreement (Final Report)

By Pauline Sato & Chelsey Jay, Malama Learning Center

This report is a summary of project activities performed by the Mālama Learning Center (MLC) with Kapolei Middle School (KMS) Garden Club students and teachers over one year and also outlines future plans for this project beyond the scope of this Cooperative Agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

MLC's main objective for the NRCS Cooperative Agreement (award of \$2,500) was to provide programmatic support for the Kapolei Middle School (KMS) Garden Club toward developing their school garden located in the courtyard of one of its buildings. MLC purchased supplies to expand the two existing raised beds as well as build new ones. MLC also served as the liaison between NRCS and KMS to facilitate presentations to students on topics relevant to growing a garden.

To begin this project, KMS Garden Club teacher advisors, some garden club members and MLC staff, discussed the scope and progression of the project. MLC facilitated a visit by NRCS staff to the site to conduct the required biological and cultural assessments as well as to do an informal "groundbreaking" ceremony.



Groundbreaking ceremony with KMS Garden Club members, NRCS, West Oahu SWCD, and MLC staff.

To date, four KMS Garden Club teachers and approximately 15 students have built and installed 10 planter boxes and also developed a new and exciting partnership with the KMS art teacher and his students to decorate and beautify the new planters. Funding from another grant raised by one of the KMS teachers also allowed them to purchase plants and materials for the planters.



KMS art students painted panels for the planter boxes.



As a gesture of thanks toward the end of the 2014-2015 school year, MLC took Garden Club teachers and students and some of their family members to Kahuku Farms in mid-June for a farm tour and service-learning experience (using privately raised funds and donations). This field trip introduced students to local farmers who produce food on a

large scale for Hawai'i further reinforcing this idea of "knowing your farmer" and also showing them the significance of the knowledge and experiences they are gaining by being a part of the KMS Garden Club.



KMS Garden Club & family members attended a fun service learning activity at Kahuku Farms.

Although this NRCS Cooperative Agreement has concluded, the KMS Garden Club is no doubt continuing to grow and has no plans of slowing down anytime soon. There are two other planters on the east side of the main garden that are in line to be planted in the near future. Since there is no irrigation near these planters, MLC staff and club advisers have discussed keeping the gardens low maintenance and low water load by utilizing native Hawaiian plants. MLC has provided KMS Garden Club with native plants from the Kapolei High School nursery that are adapted to dry environments. By using native plants, KMS will promote native landscapes in urban spaces.

Finally, MLC will encourage its Kupu E2U Leader who is based at Kapolei High School to provide continued support for the Garden Club (mainly in the planting and maintenance of the native plant section) throughout the new school year on a twice a month basis. This will work well into the E2U Leader's schedule as working with Kapolei Complex Area schools is one component of her position (funded by Kupu, another non-profit). In this way, MLC will be able to maintain its connection to Kapolei Middle School and their budding Garden Club.

On behalf of KMS, its teachers, and students, MLC expresses its deep thanks to the staff of NRCS for this unique opportunity to bring gardening and the appreciation of healthy soil to the curriculum of middle school students in the growing city of Kapolei.



NRCS & SWCD at Kauai's Annual Arbor Day

By Alex Wong, HACD Conservation Specialist, Lihue, HI

On November 7th, Jenna Dunn and Alex Wong represented NRCS and East and West Kauai Soil and Water Conservation Districts at the annual Arbor Day event at Kukui Grove in Lihue. Hundreds of residents came out for the free tree giveaway sponsored by the Kauai Landscaping Industry Council and Garden Island Resource and Conservation and Development, Inc. This year 1,200 native and non-invasive species were handed out to participants who had to collect a minimum of six stamps from six different educational booths before they could take home multiple plants for free. The main objective was to talk story with whoever visited the NRCS booth about the various conservation services, best management practices, and educational outreach activities NRCS and SWCD has to offer to private landowners and to the island community.

NRCS informational pamphlets were handed out along with a Hawaiian pollinator coloring-book page that the Lihue office created for this year's Conservation District theme – "Local Pollinators: Our Hardworking Heroes." Families with elementary school keiki were encouraged to talk to their teachers about participating in the island-wide poster contest next year. (This year's submissions can be seen on display during the holiday season at Kukui Grove Center.)



Photo taken from the Arbor Day Hawaii website. <http://www.arbordayhawaii.org/events/kauai.htm>

Despite the persistent wind and rain that provided a bit of a challenge to the various conservation tables throughout the morning, the annual Arbor Day event successfully concluded at noon when the last of the plants were adopted by their recently inspired humans and the Lihue office went home with a short stack of freshly inked "Request for Assistance" forms.

For more information please contact Alex Wong at the East & West Kauai Soil & Water Conservation Districts. 4334 Rice Street, Suite 207, Lihue, HI 96766 or at alex.wong@hi.nacdnet.net

Soil Health Workshop in Kona

By Jacqueline Vega and Amy Koch

Kona Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), in cooperation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), conducted a Soil Health Workshop at the Kona Extension Office on November 3. Resource Soil Scientist Amy Koch discussed the importance of soil health and explained the benefits of managing soils with basic soil health practices. Mike Kolman, Soil Scientist, discussed the characteristics and properties of the unique soils found in the Kona area. Other speakers included local farmer Robert Barnes (Kona Rainforest Coffee) and Arturo Ballar (Staff Biologist with Greenwell Coffee Farms).

About 50 participants representing farmers, ranchers, and government agencies attended the workshop. It was a good opportunity for participants to interact with each other as well as the speakers and invited vendors.



Left to Right: Jacqueline Vega, Amy Koch, and Mike Kolman at the Kona Soil Health Workshop.

Soil Scientist Jacqueline Vega displayed a poster highlighting the 2015 global celebration of the International Year of Soils (IYS). Mary Robblee (Kona SWCD) did an excellent job organizing this event. Feedback from the audience was overwhelmingly positive, with hopes that more workshops will be offered on similar topics in the near future.

PIA Director, Bruce Petersen's Visit to Pacific Islands Area - West

By Gibson Santos, Agriculture Conservation Specialist, Pohnpei

15-12-18: PIA Director Petersen meets the Pohnpei SWCD Board of Directors at NRCS office. Present at the meeting was SWCD Board Chairman Mr. Mark Kostka and SWCD Board Secretary Ms. Francisca Obispo. Discussions revisited the standing priorities highlighted by previous member which include (Planning (conservation planning), outer island outreach, Tree Planting, Animal Waste Management (Farm). Board will re-submit their fy16 budget request through the Department of Lands office after new administration is sworn in. Also visited the SWCD nursery prior to departure.

15-12-17: 2nd day continued with a quick tour at the FSM Pilot Farm, also visited the Dry Litter Piggery at the College of Micronesia National Campus and met Agriculture Instructor Mr. Mark Kostka who is also the current Chairman of Pohnpei SWCD Board of Directors. This Dry Litter piggery serves as a learning site for all FSM students majoring in the field of Agriculture Science, met Mr. William (Willy) Kostka - Director of the Micronesia Conservation Trust(MCT) and Mr. Eugene Joseph – Director of the Conservation Society of Pohnpei.



Leading Veteran, Jungle Scout Used Life in War to Fuel Writing Career

By Bret Yager, West Hawaii Today byager@westhawaii.com

Full story at: <http://westhawaii.com/news/local-news/vietnam-veteran-jungle-scout-used-life-war-fuel-writing-career>

CAPTAIN COOK — Richard Stevens was 4 years old when his uncle disappeared. Growing up, he remained haunted by the simple telegram from the War Department, conveying regrets for the bombardier's disappearance in a B-24 bomber into the dark of the Amazon jungle.

The note brewed a storm of questions: How had the plane plunged into the Amazon when it was bound from the United States to the war in Europe? What was this jungle that had swallowed his relative?

Stevens' young mind began a seething inquiry that would take him to a jungle of his own two decades later, under enemy fire, and bring him full circle. He would then learn to turn the horrors of war into his greatest gifts.

Discovering the Jungle

Stevens entered the Marine Corps when he was 19, then joined the Foreign Service and was flying over the North Vietnam jungle in 1965 as an adviser working with refugees who were fleeing the battle zone. Fascinated with trails since a young child, he had recently learned about the Ho Chi Min Trail — the remote and mysterious supply line leading down from North Vietnam.

Standing last weekend beside a picnic table spread with medals and a few copies of the books he has written about the war, Stevens related the final incident that ended his time in the jungle. As he spoke he began — ever so slightly — to shake.

Lessons From the Jungle

Before Stevens left the war for good, he sat one day looking out from the top of a tree in the jungle, across unbroken forest, as far as the eye could see.

"I knew then we could never win," he said. "The other side was immersed in nature, and was winning. We could not scrape bare every mountain and scorch every forest. We were fighting nature and it was too much."

Stevens also felt responsible for his own role in calling in artillery that decimated forests which he had seen earlier in pristine condition. The guilt stuck with Stevens on his travels out of the war zone, first to the mountains north of Taos, New Mexico, where solitude in a cabin at 8,000 feet helped loosen the trauma. His experience poured out into 2,000 pages of manuscript, which he submitted unsuccessfully, in a cardboard box, to the publisher Doubleday.

Stevens later moved to Hawaii and received his doctorate in history from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Continuing to wrestle with the themes of Vietnam, he wrote two books. One, his 1993 dissertation, is titled "The Trail: A History of The Ho Chi Min Trail and the Role of Nature In Vietnam." The other book is titled "Mission On the Ho Chi Min Trail," published by the University of Oklahoma Press in 1995. Stevens is also the author of two books about organic and traditional gardening in Hawaii.

"War is the territory of the dark side," Stevens said. "Peace is a lot better. I consider myself a warrior for nature now."

At Hawaii Community College — Palamanui, Stevens teaches a course called "Writing Personal History." Through his use of story, he helps other aspiring writers tap the creative force within their own histories and traumas. Working for the state Na Ala Hele trail system, he has also uncovered dozens ancient Hawaiian trails in North Hawaii.

"I still use the energy of Vietnam," he said.

His backyard is a nursery of dryland forest trees, which he and numerous volunteers use to replenish deforested areas. He and his students have planted thousands of seedlings in the West Hawaii Veterans Cemetery since 2005.



Veteran Richard Stevens displays his military medals, authored books and a photo from his days in Vietnam at his Captain Cook home on Saturday.
Photos by Laura Shimabuku/West Hawaii Today



A photo of Richard Stevens in the jungles of Vietnam. *Laura Shimabuku/West Hawaii Today*

Veterans' Award: Certificate of Appreciation

By Michael Constantinides, PIA Veterans SEPM

On behalf of NRCS Chief Jason Weller and PIA Director Bruce Petersen, the Certificate of Appreciation was presented to those for their dedication and service to the US military and the USDA. The following has received the award:

- Sam D. R. Taylor, Soil Conservation Technician, Guam
- Jeffrey C. Wheaton, West Area Engineer, PIA - West
- Maryanne M. Elisara, Program Assistant, American Samoa
- Morgan K. Puaa, Soil Conservation Technician, Hoolehua
- Kurencio B. Ngowaki, Management Assistant, PIA - West
- Michael R. Kolman, MLRA Soil Survey Project Leader, Kealakekua
- Bernard A. Matatumua-Vermeulen, Soil Conservationist, Kealakekua
- Douglas R. Maguire, Grants & Agreements Specialist, State Office

Photos not available for these additional veterans:

- Pele M. Iuta, Soil Conservation Technician, American Samoa
- Stephen D. Case, Contract Officer, State Office
- Jason W. Peel, Assistant Director for ASTC - Strategy & Management, State Office



Sam Taylor and Jeff Wheaton

Michael Constantinides, PIA Veterans SEPM worked with the PIA Director and other NRCS staff to make this presentation possible.



Diego Ayala, Maryanne Elisara (Veteran Award Recipient), and Jessica Ludgate of Pago Pago, American Samoa.



On November 16th 2015 at 1:00pm at the PMC Hoolehua Station with PMC and HFO staff, Mr. Puaa was presented this Certificate of Appreciation.



Kurencio Ngowaki, Management Assistant, Pacific Islands Area - West.



Mike Kolman and Bernard Matatumua-Vermeulen. Photo by Mary Robblee.



Douglas Macguire, Grants & Agreements Specialist, State Office.

Exceptional Employees Have Emotional Intelligence

By Dr. Travis Bradberry, President at TalentSmart

A recent international study surveyed more than 500 business leaders and asked them what sets great employees apart. The researchers wanted to know why some people are more successful than others at work, and the answers were surprising; leaders chose “personality” as the leading reason.

Notably, 78% of leaders said personality sets great employees apart, more than cultural fit (53%) and even an employee’s skills (39%).

The problem is, when leaders say ‘personality’ they don’t understand what they’re referring to. Personality consists of a stable set of preferences and tendencies through which we approach the world. Being introverted or extroverted is an example of an important personality trait.

Personality traits form at an early age and are fixed by early adulthood. Many important things about you change over the course of your lifetime, but your personality isn’t one of them.

Personality is distinct from intellect (or IQ). The two don’t occur together in any meaningful way. Personality is also distinct from emotional intelligence (or EQ), and this is where the study, and most leaders for that matter, have misinterpreted the term.

Just consider some of the EQ skills that leaders and managers commonly mislabel as personality characteristics. These are the skills that set exceptional employees apart:

They’re willing to delay gratification. One thing an exceptional employee never says is, “That’s not in my job description.” Exceptional employees work outside the boundaries of job descriptions. They’re neither intimidated nor entitled; instead of expecting recognition or compensation to come first, they forge ahead in their work, confident that they’ll be rewarded later but unconcerned if they’re not.

They can tolerate conflict. While exceptional employees don’t seek conflict, they don’t run away from it either. They’re able to maintain their composure while presenting their positions calmly and logically. They’re able to withstand personal attacks in pursuit of the greater goal and never use that tactic themselves.

They focus. They don’t get distracted by cranky customers, interoffice squabbles, or switch to a different brand of coffee. They can differentiate between real problems and background noise; therefore, they stay focused on what matters.

They’re judiciously courageous. Exceptional employees are willing to speak up when others are not, whether it’s to ask a difficult (or “embarrassingly” simple) question or to challenge an executive decision. However, that’s balanced with common sense and timing. They think before they speak and wisely choose the best time and place to do so.

They’re in control of their egos. Exceptional employees have egos. While that’s part of what drives them, they never give their egos more weight than what is deserved. They’re willing to admit when they’re wrong and willing to do things someone else’s way, whether it’s because the other way is better or it’s important to maintain team harmony.

They’re accountable. If you’re a manager trying to decipher a bungled report, “It’s not my fault” is the most irritating phrase in the English language. Exceptional employees are accountable. They own their work, their decisions, and all of their results—good or bad. They bring their mistakes to management’s attention rather than hoping no one will find out. They understand that managers aren’t out to assign blame; they’re out to get things done.

They’re marketable. “Marketable” can mean many things. Inside the organization, it means “likeable.” Exceptional employees are well liked by co-workers. They have integrity and leadership skills (even if they’re not in an official leadership position) that people respond to. Externally, it means they can be trusted to represent the brand well. Managers know they can send these employees out to meet with clients and prospects without worrying about what they’ll say or do.

They neutralize toxic people. Dealing with difficult people is frustrating and exhausting for most. Exceptional employees control their interactions with toxic people by keeping their feelings in check. When they need to confront a toxic person, they approach the situation rationally. They identify their own emotions and don’t allow anger or frustration to fuel the chaos. They also consider the difficult person’s standpoint and are able to find solutions and common ground. Even when things completely derail, emotionally intelligent people are able to take the toxic person with a grain of salt to avoid letting him or her bring them down.



Employee Spotlight: April D. Miller

By April Miller, Business Services Specialist, State Office

Born and raised in Northern California, April earned her master's degree in international policy studies and public administration from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. She moved to Washington, D.C. where she trained with the Government Accountability Office in their Professional Development Program and then worked as a GAO analyst. She planned and executed performance audits of several government programs that resulted in more effective and efficient government and helped save the taxpayer millions of dollars.

As senior evaluator for the Peace Corps' Office Inspector General, she evaluated development programs and operations at overseas posts in Latin America and Africa. She interviewed embassy officials and host country cabinet members, and visited with Volunteers at their home and work sites to report on their health, safety, and their working relationships with local partners. She assessed Peace Corps' sexual assault prevention and response program, audited the agency's contracting function, and assisted with investigations of waste, fraud and abuse of government resources.

April moved to Oahu with her husband Lindsay and their two dogs Buster and Sargent in 2012. She worked for Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard in the contracting department. April led strategic planning initiatives, recruited and developed staff, trained technical personnel how to draft contracts and monitor contractor performance, and conducted outreach with local small businesses. She gained an appreciation for the complexity of work culture in a matrix organization of military, civilian and skilled labor staff.

April and her husband love water activities and April is active in the healing community.



April D. Miller, PIA's new Business Services Specialist, State Office

SAIGE 2015 Achievement Award Winners

Article is from SAIGE (Society of American Indian Government Employees) Newsletter - Fall Issue, November 2015 and shared by Jay Doronila, PIA American Indian/Alaska Native Emphasis Program Manager.

Millie Titla, Titla, (San Carlos Apache), SAIGE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD, GS 11-15 (Honorable Mention) - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

in addition to her duties as the American Indian Liaison, she has been the State Outreach Coordinator, Chairperson of the Civil Rights Advisory Committee, and the Agency Coordinator for the Southwest Strategy Tribal Relations Work Group. Prior to NRCS, Millie worked for the San Carlos Apache Tribe as a Soil Conservationist, and also served as the President of her Tribe's conservation district. She has been both Vice President and President of the NRCS Alaska Native Employees Association; and served two terms on the SAIGE Board, 2011-2012 and 2012-2014. She was the Chair of the 2007 Tucson SAIGE NTP planning committee.

USDA/NRCS - AGENCY AWARD

NRCS has been working with Tribes and Tribal members as cooperators for decades, and has been a supporter of SAIGE. In several states, including Montana, the Dakotas and Minnesota, NRCS negotiated with Tribes to establish part and full time offices with Tribal Offices on reservations through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). Forty-five Tribal Conservation Districts have been formed and each one operates independently with the assistance of NRCS. There are approximately 75 NRCS staff who are assigned at least collateral duties to assist with delivering programs to tribes. NRCS has been a supporter of the AISES and has provided scholarship and STEM program development at Tribal Colleges and Universities.



Millie Titla

A Tribute to Justin “Buddy” Perry

By Kori Hisashima, Area Resource Conservationist, Acting (Hilo Service Center)

NRCS PIA ‘Ohana,

Justin “Buddy” Perry was hired in August 2007 as a Soil Conservationist in the Hilo Field Office. He worked with us until he retired from Federal service in February 2013.

As most of you may already know, our former NRCS Hilo Soil Conservationist, Justin “Buddy” Perry passed away on Sunday, December 13 at the age of 38. His ‘Ohana is planning for a memorial service in Kalapana at Uncle Roberts Ava Bar on Saturday, December 19, in the afternoon. If you would like to either, send condolences from you and your family, or send a contribution to a “NRCS PIA” card, you may send it to me at:

Kori Hisashima
HCR 1 Box 4126
Kea’au, HI 96749

If you send a card from your ‘ohana, please include your mailing address on the card. If your envelope is for the NRCS contribution, please indicate that on the envelope.

Buddy is survived by his Wife, Poha, Sons, Kalei, Kahaku, and Kanilau, and a Daughter, Kahinu. He is also survived by his parents, Eugene & Lynn Perry, Brother Joshua and family, Sister Jill and family, as well as his Parents-In-Law, Mr. & Mrs. Tolentino.

Buddy was an excellent conservationist, and was very well liked and respected in the Agricultural community. He was an avid sports enthusiast, and started up and coached for both Baseball and Soccer youth Clubs. He also loved hunting. He will be missed, and his legacy lives on through the great conservation work he did for the farmers, ranchers, and foresters in Hawaii. Attached is a collage of some pictures I found of Buddy while he worked for NRCS.

Mahalo nui,
Kori



Farewell Joseph Tuquero

By Joseph Tuquero, Soil Conservationist, Guam Service Center

Hafa Adai PIA,

The past 7½ have been an experience with NRCS-PIA. The agency has provided me greater knowledge in the environmental field, and of course, life. I have met great people and made life-long friendships. I have accepted an opportunity to work for the University of Guam as an Extension Agent, which is a job I have wanted since I was a college student. The decision to leave NRCS was difficult as NRCS is a great agency to work for.

Farewell and Good Luck to all of you. I hope to meet with all of you again.

Joe



Joseph Tuquero, Soil Conservationist,
Guam Service Center.

"It is with mixed feelings I am announcing the resignation of Joe Tuquero from NRCS. Joe has accepted a position with the University of Guam. While NRCS is losing a valued team member, our local university will be gaining a person with extensive conservation planning and implementation experience. In his new role, Joe can be our partner in servicing the agriculture community and support NRCS mission to get conservation on the ground."

*- Jocelyn Bamba,
District Conservationist, Guam SC*

Personnel Update

Outgoing:

- ◆ Hopwood, Donna, State Office, Transfer to Washington, DC, 12/2015
- ◆ Kelley, Robin, State Office, Transfer to NHQ, 11//2015
- ◆ Tuquero, Joseph, Guam SC, Resignation, 10/2015

Incoming:

- ◆ Miller, April, Business Services Specialist, State Office. EOD: 11/15/2015
- ◆ Wong, Alex, Conservationist Specialist, East Kauai SWCD. EOD: 11/18/2015

Thank you to the ten offices with 37 active Earth Team volunteers contributing 950 Hours