

The Maui News

Sovereignty Restoration Day marked with kalo-pounding event

La Ho‘iho‘i Ea "Represents us every day"



Maui High School student Kaimana Benjamin (left) and Maui Tempeh employee Charles Revard pound kalo into pa‘ai Sunday at the Maui Nui Botanical Gardens. The nonprofit Lo‘iloa organized the ku‘i, or kalo pounding, in honor of La Ho‘iho‘i Ea, Sovereignty Restoration Day. The Maui News / COLLEEN UECHI photo

KAHULUI — On a bright Sunday in July, Kawewehi “Rusty” Pundyke was surrounded by the smacking of stone on kalo, the sloshing of water buckets and occasional snippets of Hawaiian language.

It was exactly how he wanted to spend La Ho'ihoi Ea, or Sovereignty Restoration Day.

“This is about people just coming together and learning and growing together,” said Pundyke, whose nonprofit Lo'iloa organized the community ku'i, or kalo pounding, at the Maui Nui Botanical Gardens. *“Hopefully the sound of the board and stone can just resonate (with people), and it doesn't have to be like a special occasion”* to ku'i.

La Ho'ihoi Ea was established in 1843 after a five-month British occupation of the Hawaiian Kingdom. On Feb. 25, 1843, British Navy Capt. Lord George Paulet's threats to use force caused Kamehameha III to cede Hawaii under protest, according to the Kamehameha Schools Ho'okahu Cultural Vibrancy Group. Paulet then ordered all Hawaiian flags to be collected and destroyed.

When Rear Adm. Richard Thomas heard the news, he sailed to Honolulu, announced that Paulet had been disavowed and restored sovereignty to Kamehameha III. On July 31, 1843, the Union Jack was lowered and the Hawaiian flag was raised in what would become Thomas Square in Honolulu.



Five-year-old Lauka'ie'ie Stills of Kahului cleans off a pohaku ku'i ai, or poi pounder, alongside mom Lei Ishikawa and 2-year-old sister 'Olena Stills. The Maui News / COLLEEN UECHI photo

Some Native Hawaiians at Sunday's event said that La Ho'ihō'i Ea is not just one day, but every day, as they live to reclaim and embody the culture, language and land of their kupuna.

Reclaiming culture

Before he took on a large mound of kalo Sunday, Hana resident Naihe Akoi recited an oli that spoke to the sacredness of kalo and the hope that *"the people of Haloa"* will one day emerge.

Akoi said La Ho'ihō'i Ea *"represents us every day."*

"Us from Hana, we from the country, so we live sustainably," he said. *"We do not rely on stores. We drink coconuts from the coconut tree. We hunt and fish from the 'aina and we fight for our own. So to us La Ho'ihō'i Ea is just another day of living the life."*



Steamed kalo sits ready for pounding beside a freshly made batch of pa'i'ai, the glutinous product before water is added to make poi. The Maui News / COLLEEN UECHI photo

In Hana, Akoi works with Malama Haloa, a program under the nonprofit Ma Ka Hana Ka 'Ike, which offers ku'i sessions for students and the community and produces about 300 pounds of pounded kalo a week. When a visitor Sunday asked Akoi when the pounded kalo is ready, Akoi said it's a gut feeling, something you know within "*your na'au.*"

"Everything is one feeling in the Hawaiian culture," he said.

Meanwhile, through his nonprofit, Pundyke has a twofold mission — restoring taro patches in Iao Valley and connecting at-risk youth to the land. About 10 years ago, Pundyke started cleaning up the overgrown lo'i. With the community's help, he was able to clear 10 patches, one of which is currently planted.

The nonprofit provides the cultural aspect of the Maui Police Department's juvenile intervention program. Every Sunday, up to 20 youths come to the valley to learn about the history of the area and tend to the lo'i.

“What they like is there’s a lot of metaphors that connect what we’re doing to things pertinent in their life,” Pundyke said. *“This is kind of about waking them up.”*

Currently, Lo’iloa grows dryland taro, but Pundyke hopes to get water to the lo’i some day. He hopes that if the county purchases the assets of landowner Wailuku Water Co., then maybe the nonprofit can work out some sort of long-term lease.

Reclaiming language

With 2-year-old ‘Olena in her lap, Lei Ishikawa watched as her 5-year-old daughter, Lauka’ie’ie, pounded poi. Ishikawa, a kumu at the Punana Leo preschool in Lahaina, speaks Hawaiian language fluently, as do her children.

“These are the kind of things we want to teach them,” Ishikawa said, indicating the crowd of people pounding kalo. *“We have to educate them because this is going to help build their identity.”*

Off to the side, Ojai Daniels and Thomas Rodhe easily carried on a conversation in Hawaiian. The two men come from different worlds. Rodhe was born in Sweden and moved to Maui in the late 1980s. Daniels was born on the Mainland but grew up on Kauai, where his mother is originally from.

Both married Maui girls and have children in Hawaiian immersion programs, so they’ll take any chance they get to practice.

Daniels, who has four children with wife Sheri, remembered how the Hawaiian immersion program used to be *“just a component of Paia School.”* Now, Hawaiian immersion students are the majority, he said.

Daniels is glad to see the change. His great-grandmother was a native speaker but came from a generation where families were scolded for using Hawaiian. When his mother was growing up, teachers would go to homes and discourage parents from speaking the language. When Daniels was a student at Kamehameha Schools Kapalama, his parents encouraged him to study a language that he could *“use at the hotels.”* His siblings took

Spanish and Japanese. But Daniels is the only one who uses his second language every day.

“My mom . . . has taken Hawaiian language classes,” Daniels said.

“Seeing her grandchildren, us having conversations and they want to be a part of it, that’s driven her.

. . . We’re actually changing that mindset. Don’t be embarrassed to use the language. Hawaiian or not, just do it.”

Reclaiming land

Keeaumoku Kapu’s father, Paul, was the last living heir of Kauaula Valley when town authorities forced him out of his home in 1947. He lived with a family on Lanai, later served in the Korean War and came home to raise his kids on Oahu.

But, in 1994, Paul Kapu started having visions of a woman looking out a window, urging him to return home.

“I said, ‘Dad, you must be drinking too much,’” Keeaumoku Kapu recalled.

But when his father took him and his siblings to the valley, showing them important sites and even pulling his old poi pounder out of the bushes, that’s when Kapu knew his father was right.

The decision to come home would set off a nearly 20-year battle with Makila Land Co., which argued that a person supposedly related to the original 1848 awardee had sold the interest in the 3.4-acre parcel to Pioneer Mill in 1892. But the Kapus were able to trace their family claim back to the original awardee. On June 23, a 2nd Circuit Court jury returned a verdict in favor of the Kapu family.

Emboldened by the victory, Keeaumoku Kapu said Sunday that he wants to help families put together the documents to reclaim their own lands. He and several other families meet at 6 p.m. every Thursday at the Na’aikane o Maui Cultural Center in Lahaina.

“The celebration of La Ho’iho’i Ea is continual for me. I never forget about our past,” said Kapu, chairman of Aha Moku o Maui. “It’s not identifying who you are as a kanaka, but it’s about identifying who you were and applying those things.”

* Colleen Uechi can be reached at cuechi@mauinews.com.

COMMENTS

0 Comments

Sort by Oldest



Add a comment...

[Facebook Comments Plugin](#)

The Maui News



NEWS

- Local News
- Obituaries
- Community News
- Business

SPORTS

- Local Sports
- Sports
- Spotlight
- Hawaii Sports
- National Sports

OPINION

- Editorial
- Letters to the Editor
- Columns

CONTACT

- Subscribe
- Submit News
- Advertise
- Contact Us

- Weddings
- Backstage
- Dining Out
- Island Events

Copyright © Maui News | <https://www.mauinews.com> | 100 Mahalani Street, Wailuku, HI 96793 | 808-242-6363 | Ogden Newspapers | The Nutting Company