

# "My dad's the smartest person I know"

Of all the shared experiences Kamehalani Ortiz and his son Blayze have, attending the University of Hawai'i–West O'ahu together is definitely a highlight.

"Not a lot of people get to say they got to go to school with their parents," said Blayze, 19. ... "My dad's the smartest person I know, so once I heard that he liked this school, I knew it was a good choice."

Both men said they were won over by the new campus, cutting-edge facilities, and caring and knowledgeable faculty, staff, and students.

"UH West O'ahu is an amazing school where the faculty truly cares about you — not just about your education, but your well-being as well," said Kamehalani, 45, a Honolulu Fire Department fire investigator.

Blayze enrolled at UH West O'ahu in summer 2021 and is majoring in Creative Media with a focus in Video Game Design and Development. He hopes to graduate in spring 2026.

Meanwhile, Kamehalani enrolled in fall 2021 after receiving an Associate in Applied Science in Fire and Environmental Emergency Response from Honolulu Community College. He is now majoring in Public Administration with an emphasis on Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management. He plans to graduate in fall 2023.

And for this Pearl City family, the UH West O'ahu connection will likely not end with the dad-son duo.

"I think this experience of me going back to school has inspired my whole family," Kamehalani said. "My wife Briana is currently a student at Leeward Community College, working hard to get a degree in liberal arts so she can transfer to UH West O'ahu's new pre-nursing pathway."

Also, daughter Kamri Rose, a high school junior, hopes to get a Justice Administration degree from UH West O'ahu.

"UH West O'ahu, for us, is more than just a school," Kamehalani said. "It's our 'ohana."



## Aloha mai kākou!

Do you remember the 1979 R&B hit from the vocal group Sister Sledge? Here are the lyrics (yes, sing along), "Everyone can see we're together as we walk on by. And we fly just like birds of a feather — I won't tell no lie. All of the people around us, they say, yeah, can they be that close? Just let me state for the record we're giving love in a family dose! We are family! I got all my sisters with me! We are family!" At the University of Hawai'i–West O'ahu, family is important to us. We are grateful to the families who support our faculty and staff, we welcome and appreciate the families of our students and alumni who support the value of life-long learning, and we take great pride in the accomplishments of so many of our extended UH West O'ahu family members.

In this spirit, this quarter's Kūkulu Kaiāulu Hō'ike Hapahā Makahiki (Quarterly Impact Report) Winter 2023 celebrates families who call UH West O'ahu home. Meet 'Ewa Beach couple Mavric Agustin-Carino (fall 2022 graduate) and his wife Rebecca Carino-Agustin (College Success Advisor); Michael Nii, 73, and his daughter Yvette Ross; Kamehalani Ortiz (Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management) and his son Blayze Ortiz (Video Game Design and Development) from Pearl City who will be soon joined by Blayze's sister, Kamri Rose; and finally, Abbie Kahula Reed, 63, a mother of four, grandmother of five, and fall 2022 student commencement speaker. Her daughter Kim Reed, on staff at UH West O'ahu, cheered her mother at graduation. Abbie shared, "UH West O'ahu is not just a convenient college for those living on the Leeward side. The people that come with the facility not only support our college experience, but become family. It is not just a place to learn. UH West O'ahu is a home away from home."

There are many ways you can support the power of life-long learning and join our UH West O'ahu family! As Sly and The Family Stone would say, "It's a family affair!" We hope that this issue of our quarterly report inspires you to think of how you might become more active in supporting UH West O'ahu's 'ohana of diverse learners!

E mālama pono!

Maenette K.P. Ah Nee-Benham  
Chancellor, UH West O'ahu

Winter 2023

# Kūkulu Kaiāulu *Building Community*

## Hō'ike Hapahā Makahiki

### Quarterly Impact Report



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## A father's encouragement

There was a special pair of classmates this past semester in University of Hawai'i–West O'ahu's Japanese 121: Beginning Practical Japanese I course — Michael Nii, 73, and his daughter Yvette.

"Being able to sit in the same class as my daughter was surreal," Nii said. "With 34 years separating us, it was hard to believe."

It was Nii — who had taken the same course years ago at Leeward Community College and who is already nearly fluent in Japanese — who suggested his daughter take the class. The recently married Yvette Ross, 38, is a chocolate sommelier at Mānoa Chocolate in Kailua. She wanted to learn to speak adequate Japanese to be able to communicate with the company's Japanese visitors.

So upon her dad's recommendation and encouragement, she enrolled in the UH West O'ahu course as a transfer student from UH Mānoa. And to support her, so did he.

The class wasn't Nii's first at UH West O'ahu.

"Being that my father was drafted into the Vietnam War right after high school, he didn't have the opportunity to pursue a college degree until after his celebrated retirement serving 27 years of active duty from the United States Army in 2008," Ross shared.



Nii enrolled at UH West O'ahu in fall 2019, partly because of its proximity to his 'Ewa Beach residence. He graduated in spring 2022 with his Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration with a concentration in Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management.

"I decided to return to UH West O'ahu this past fall 2022 semester to be with my daughter," Nii said.

The two thoroughly enjoyed their time together in Japanese 121 — developing their communicative skills and playing fun games with fellow classmates. Ross said the experience with her dad was great.

"He has always inspired me to keep learning," she said.



## A shared experience

The fall 2022 commencement was a momentous day for 'Ewa Beach couple Mavric Agustin-Carino and his wife Rebecca Carino-Agustin.

Mavric Agustin-Carino, 34, received a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Media with a concentration in Design and Media. He transferred from Leeward Community College in 2020 at the height of the pandemic. A former journeyman in the labor industry for almost a decade, he decided to go back to school to pursue a career he was passionate about. He is now a graphic designer, animator, and social media influencer.

The ceremony was also significant for Rebecca Carino-Agustin, 29, a College Success Advisor and First Year Experience Coordinator at UH West O'ahu. Carino-Agustin served as a fall 2022 commencement faculty marshal — a duty of honor and distinction. She was one of two marshals selected because of her significant professional achievements this year that included receiving the Dr. Ernest "Niki" Libarios Outstanding Filipina/o Faculty & Staff Award.

As a faculty marshal, Carino-Agustin had the privilege of an up-close view of her husband graduating.

"I tried not to get emotional when I saw him walking down the stage and shaking hands with Chancellor [Maenette] Benham," Carino-Agustin recalled. "To see him grow and navigate higher education in a way that I never had to really hit me in that moment."

Carino-Agustin also graduated from UH West O'ahu in spring 2015 when she received a Bachelor of Arts in Humanities with a concentration in English.

Throughout their journeys at UH West O'ahu, they found inspiration in each other and sense of belonging and purpose at the university.

"Having this shared experience with my wife is amazing," Mavric Agustin-Carino said. "She is the most hardworking person I have ever met and she continues to inspire me to this day as we both break barriers that previous and future generations of Filipinos usually do not aspire to."

## Bursting with pride

Kimberly Reed was bursting with pride as she watched her mother — one of two graduating students selected to address classmates and guests at the fall 2022 commencement — deliver a moving speech and walk across the stage to accept her diploma.

Abbie Kahula Reed, 63, a mother of four and grandmother of five, received a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Media with a concentration in Communications and New Media Technology.

"I knew mom set the bar high for herself to prove to her legacy that we can do it, too," said Kimberly, 39. "My tears were from realizing that all the hard work she did was for us and our future."

Five years earlier, the roles were reversed — it was Abbie who proudly watched her daughter Kimberly at UH West O'ahu's spring 2017 commencement, where she received her Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration with a concentration in Health Care Administration and a Certificate in Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management. Kimberly now works at UH West O'ahu as an administrative and fiscal specialist for Title III Grants 'Upena Moananuiākea and Wailau Ola Pathway.

Abbie shared how her daughter's graduation in 2017 played a part in her consideration to return to school in 2018.

"She inspired me," Abbie said. "If she could do it while managing a challenging career and two children on her own, then I knew I could do it, too."

For the two women, both Kapolei residents, UH West O'ahu was the right fit.

"UH West O'ahu is not just a convenient college for those living on the Leeward side," Abbie said. "The people that come with the facility not only support our college experience, but become family. It is not just a place to learn. UH West O'ahu is a home away from home."

