

Home Away From Home

Marianist-run Chaminade University Welcomes All.

BY DIANE GUERRA



WHEN CHAMINADE University senior Dali Waltu visited home several

months ago, she hadn't seen her parents and four brothers in three years. Her family lives on the small Micronesian island of Pohnpei — more than 2,500 miles and a nine-hour plane ride across the Pacific Ocean from the university in suburban Honolulu. Although a lack of money kept Dali from visiting sooner, her homecoming was special. "Fifty people were waiting for me when I arrived," Dali says. "They were so impressed I was doing well in college. I'm the only one in my extended family to go this far. Many girls on my island are married as teenagers."

Dali has found a second home at Chaminade University of Honolulu. Established by the Marianists in 1955, it is the only Catholic university between the West Coast and the Philippine Islands.

She's found not only the emotional and spiritual support to thrive in a different culture far from home, but also the financial resources to graduate this year with a degree in religious studies. Dali plans to pursue a master's degree in education and teach in a secondary school on Pohnpei Island.

She often drops by the community houses of the Marianist brothers on campus for prayer services or conversation. "I can feel the welcome when I go to



Dali Waltu

their communities," Dali says. "It's like, 'hello, come on in!' I know what they value before they say anything."

BUCKING THE TREND

More than 90 percent of Chaminade students receive financial aid. This assistance is critical to the 25 percent of students who are indigenous Americans, including native Hawaiians and individuals from the Pacific Islands, like Dali. Neither her father, a fisherman, nor her mother, a midwife, completed grade school. They had little money to support her education. "I had \$80 in my pocket when I came to Hawai'i, and I thought that would buy all my books, clothes and food," Dali says.

Left: Brother Tom Spring with Chaminade University students, from left, Ryan Edgar, Dali Waltu and Malia Kipapa

Sandra Silve makes a puniu, a small Hawaiian drum that is tied on the thigh, at a Chaminade University workshop on Hawaiian culture.



“I think Jesus would be very comfortable on this campus.”

— Marianist Brother Tom Spring

“It’s a whole new definition of poverty for students from the Pacific Islands,” says Curtis Washburn, director of Chaminade’s Academic Achievement Program. “We’re often talking about a family with 12 kids and no money. The courage it takes for them to leave their families with no money and no support, well, they’re just courageous kids.”

An article on college accessibility in the May 25, 2004, issue of “The Honolulu

Advertiser” praises Hawaiian institutions like Chaminade for bucking the national trend by increasing assistance to students from low-income families. The article says the biggest obstacles for these students are diminishing federal aid, a shift in federal resources from grants for the poor to loans for middle-class students and hefty tuition increases in many states faced with economic downturns.

Despite these trends, Chaminade’s tuition for undergraduate students grew at a compounded annual rate of only 3 percent from 1995 to 2002. “Because we serve students of modest financial means, we work hard to keep our tuition increases in check,” says Marianist Brother Bernie Ploeger, Chaminade’s executive vice president and provost.

In addition to aggressive aid programs and tuition controls, the university is a “native Hawaiian-serving institution,” making it eligible for certain federal grants that encourage enrollment by underrepresented populations. It also is a Title III school, which means a certain percentage of students are first-generation college students or come from low-income families.

Malia Kipapa’s family goes back generations in Hawai‘i. The Chaminade senior hopes to attend graduate school in environmental studies or law school, but her primary goal is to “give back to my people.” Malia says, “It hurts me to see my own people in their native land, living in poor conditions. So, I encourage my fellow Hawaiians to continue their education.”

Malia has received financial aid from Chaminade, as well as federal scholarships for native Hawaiian students. She and her five sisters are from the island of Hawai‘i. Her father did not graduate from high school. “I’m very motivated,” she says. “I won’t take no for an answer.”

Despite their financial assistance, Malia and Dali work hard to pay their living expenses. Besides carrying 18 hours this semester (with a 3.4 GPA), Dali works 32 hours every week at a convenience store, volunteers with young adults with special needs and helps out at Campus Ministry. She has no car and often walks to work, an hour away by foot.

MARY’S WARMTH OF WELCOME

Respect for cultural diversity is a natural extension of the Marianist charism. “It’s about Mary’s warmth of welcome,” says Brother Bernie. “True education brings you in contact with humanity as it is. We have a much richer representation than if our campus were mono-cultural.”

Sue Wesselkamper, Chaminade president and the first woman to preside over a university in Hawai‘i, says the school offers a holistic education, where no single group is a majority and where different cultures are valued and affirmed. “We take students where they are and then get them the resources they need to develop their potential and thrive in a contemporary society,” she says.

“For such a small school, Chaminade

does a great job of handling diversity,” says Ryan Edgar, a senior in criminal justice who also is from the island of Pohnpei. “The Marianist brothers welcome us for who we are, and they don’t try to convert us. They treat us like family.”

Marianist Brother Tom Spring, who grew up in Honolulu and has been associated with Chaminade University

social justice to fabric arts to a special consortium that featured a different kumu each day. “These programs help us share our resources with the community and introduce our students to the richness of the native Hawaiian culture,” he says. “A Marianist university like Chaminade serves the needs of the whole student — mind, spirit and body.”



off and on since 1960, agrees. “We encourage our students to be faithful to their religious tradition, an attitude that flows out of the Marianist Catholic charism. I think Jesus would be very comfortable on this campus.”

FROM VALUES TO ACTION

John Keola Lake is Chaminade’s kumu-in-residence. As a kumu, or Hawaiian teacher, he encourages a greater understanding of native Hawaiian culture on campus and connects the university to such efforts outside the campus.

This past summer, Kumu Lake guided a series of workshops and seminars at Chaminade called, “See Hawai‘i Through My Eyes.” Topics ranged from Hawaiian

Malia believes it’s important to have a kumu on campus. “I think it’s good for students and faculty to learn more about our culture, to understand Hawai‘i is not just a vacation spot,” she says. “But we also must respect the culture of all the people here — Filipino, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Korean and Pacific Islander. We must not judge people by the way they talk or act or look.”

As a native Hawaiian-serving institution, Chaminade was awarded a grant to establish a Hawaiian Leadership Training Program, which includes four new courses that showcase traditional Hawaiian leadership practices. Henry Halenani Gomes, associate provost for the day undergraduate program, says the

John Keola Lake, Chaminade’s kumu-in-residence, blesses the E.L. Wiegand Observatory in August 2003.

university will make the program part of its regular curriculum when the grant ends.

Kumu Lake advises the Hawaiian Club, which is open to all students and sponsors community service, island tours, chanting, hula and attendance at Hawaiian conferences. The campus Samoan Club performs native Samoan dances and has won top honors in statewide competitions. Its members also are involved with singing and Scripture reading at university Masses.

Dali and Ryan belong to the Pacific Islander club. In addition to community service and social activities, the club helps students from the Pacific Islands deal with cultural and social differences.

“Coming to Hawai‘i is a huge culture shock for the Pacific Islanders,” Curtis

says. “English is not their native tongue. They think that because this is an island, it will be the same as home.” Pacific Islanders tend to be reserved and are reluctant to participate in class because of their cultural conditioning. “To them, speaking up is a sign of disrespect,” he says.

At the federally funded Academic Achievement Program, students can receive free tutoring, personal counseling and laptops on loan. The program is for first-generation college students, low-income students and students with disabilities. The best-attended events are trips to the opera and symphony. “Most island kids have never had the chance to go to something like an opera,” Curtis says.

Dali, shown below with Ethan Street, regularly volunteers with young adults with special needs.



A FAMILY FAR FROM HOME

This small university of about 1,100 day undergraduate students, about 1,100 students on military bases and 650 graduate students, is a perfect setting for the Marianist spirit of family.

“The brothers ask me about my Micronesian customs with genuine interest,” Dali says. “Marianist Father Ken Templin and the people at Campus Ministry are like my family. Chaminade is my place away from home where I feel included and supported.

“Three different times, money has been put into my account for my tuition. I don’t know who it was. I just know I have a lot of angels at Chaminade. I wouldn’t be here without them.” ■



Dali often joins the Marianists for community prayer; she’s shown with Brothers Dennis Schmitz, left, and Frank Damm.

The Marianists in Hawai‘i: 121 Years of Sacrifice, Service

Although Chaminade University of Honolulu was founded in 1955, the Marianists have a long and storied history in the Hawaiian Islands. Imagine the scene of Sept. 3, 1883, when eight Marianist brothers from the small Ohio town of Dayton disembarked from the *S.S. Mariposa* at the busy, modern harbor city of Honolulu. The population of 23,000 was an exotic mix of native Hawaiians, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Germans, Koreans and Americans. King Kalakaua and Queen Kapiolani ruled from Iolani Palace.

The Marianists had been summoned by another religious order to help with the newly founded Saint Louis College for young men. A Mass of “aloha” was offered by Father Damien de Veuster, SS.CC., well known for his work among the lepers banished to Molokai. Five Marianists were assigned to Saint Louis College; three went on to St. Anthony’s School on the island of Maui. “There is much good to be done,” wrote Marianist Brother Bertram Bellinghausen, director of Saint Louis College. “We are all very willing. May God, through the intercession of our good Mother, sustain our courage and bless our feeble efforts.”



Brother Bertram Bellinghausen (courtesy of the Marianist Archives, Cupertino, Calif.)

For more than 120 years, hundreds of Marianist brothers and priests have served selflessly in the Hawaiian Islands. Saint Louis College is today’s Saint Louis School in Honolulu, a highly regarded Marianist school for students in grades four through 12. In 1955, the Marianists founded St. Louis Junior College with 31 male students; in 1957, it became a four-year coeducational institution called Chaminade College. Graduate programs were added in 1977, and the name changed to Chaminade University of Honolulu. More than 30 Marianists live in three community houses on the shared campus.

In 1958, on the 75th anniversary of the Marianists’ arrival in Honolulu, Marianist Brothers Joseph Becker and Eugene Paulin published “New Wars: The History of the Brothers of Mary (Marianists) in Hawaii.” They wrote: “...

the axis on which (St. Louis College) turned is what the Society of Mary calls family spirit. It is the union of mind and heart arising from a respect and love for every student, because every student is precious in the sight of God.” ■