



HAWAII EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
Ke'ena Ho'omalu Pōulia O Hawai'i

# Laulima

*Working Together*

A Quarterly Newsletter for Our Partners and Community | Ianuali/January 2025



Community Outreach's team of six grew from its first hire in May 2023. L to R: Malia Masoe, Richard Largo, Hau'oli Keawe-Aiko, John Vierra, Julien Canizzaro, Puanani Akaka.

## Building HIEMA's new branch, from the roots up

When HIEMA Administrator James Barros took the agency's helm in February 2023, he saw a glaring weakness. HIEMA needed a community outreach team.

"We need resilient communities that can develop their own plans, do their own assessments, and lead community

recovery during a disaster," says Administrator Barros.

"Right off the bat, I wanted someone who is focused on building communities and reigniting the HHARPs (Hawai'i Hazards Awareness & Resilience Program)," a localized community resilience

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## HR lands talent at career fairs

HIEMA's Human Resources team has had success at career fairs recently, with three employees and one volunteer onboarding as a result of HIEMA visits to UH-Mānoa, Hawai'i Pacific University, UH-West O'ahu and the Blaisdell Center.

"Attending these fairs was a great way to meet candidates," said Rebeca Osorno, HIEMA's HR Manager, "and to share HIEMA's vision of a ready and resilient Hawai'i. In fact, these fairs helped us recruit several new employees recently."



Yadi Valdez and Rebeca Osorno

HIEMA seeks recruits in varying disciplines including business, finance, public policy, information technology, and political science.

## Administrator's Message

By James DS. Barros

Aloha,

2024 is in the books, and what a busy and productive year it was at HIEMA! Our focus continued to be on the recovery efforts on Maui, especially on vital public assistance projects. We hired significant new talent to sharpen our procedures, processes and policies. We activated or postured 37 times this year, including each county.



There is no "down time" at HIEMA, even in "blue skies." We continually drive forward. Every day, we work to increase our local communities' capabilities, strengthen our public and private partnerships, build communication, and exercise our responses.

In this issue of *Laulima*, we are happy to share two new columns. **Island Report** features correspondence from our indispensable county partners, in a friendly "pen pal" style. And in the **Stormy Weather Book Club**, HIEMA staff offer recommendations of books that have stuck with them over the years, emergency management-related or not.

We can't do this without you - emergency management is a kākou effort! I am excited for all that HIEMA will accomplish in 2025. Mahalo!

Notably, UH-West O'ahu already offers a program in Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management.

## A deep history of Hawai'i's 'mystery island'

*Ni'ihau: The Last Hawaiian Island*  
- by Ruth Tabrah

Review by Puanani Akaka, HIEMA  
Community Outreach

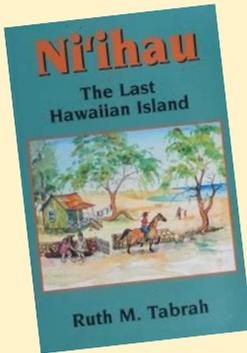
Why a book about Ni'ihau, you ask? So many of us forget it's there. Its moniker as a "mystery island" or "forbidden island" has a tendency to make us dismiss it from everyday thought.

But it is, and always has been, a part of our state, our history and our culture.

It is where Pele first alit on Hawaiian soil and where the goddess Laka first taught hula. But, due to her isolation, Ni'ihau has become a "cultural pocket," retaining something of what was so nearly lost in the rest of the islands in the ensuing decades. Yet, after being in near-isolation for 200 years, it now has a solar farm. And one wonders how it will change what the Robinson family tried so hard to preserve.

Ruth Tabrah's book is a fascinating foray into the history of the island and the life of the people. She captures a lot of detail (and admittedly, I am unsure how much is fact and how much is "embellishment"). Regardless, it doesn't detract from the story arc of the island. It's an easy read, from Ni'ihau's first ali'i to the "opening" of Ni'ihau in 1987. From the Battle of Ni'ihau in World War II to modern times, I found myself not quite being able to put it down.

With the advent of the solar farm, it will be interesting to observe the



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## As debris cleanup ends, historic Lahaina properties are tagged for preservation

By Zeph McKee, HIEMA Operations & Debris Task Force Deputy

Several government and non-government entities work together to preserve historic and cultural resources during debris removal in Lahaina. In total, 29 properties have been identified for preservation. HIEMA coordinated for volunteers from the Structural Engineers Association of Hawai'i and the American Institute of Architects to perform bracing and shoring recommendations for 15 historic properties damaged by the fire, of which eight were qualified by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

The Lahaina Restoration Foundation braced and shored several buildings, including the Baldwin Home and Master's Reading Room. USACE performed shoring measures on the Goo Lip Furtado block and at a few stable structures at Hale Aloha. While much of the Baldwin Home area may not be salvageable in its current state, the basement area will be preserved. Any demolished building materials such as coral stones or lava rock will be washed and stored for use in reconstruction efforts.

During the debris removal process, the State Historic Preservation Division (SHPD) is responsible for



consulting on properties that are part of the Hawai'i register of historic places and for helping with the inadvertent discovery of burials during debris removal. SHPD works with FEMA's Environmental and Historic Preservation team to make sure that sufficient care is taken to avoid unnecessary disturbance of archaeological resources while the USACE removes debris. During debris removal, local native Hawaiian organizations such as Nā Aikane o Maui oversee operations and can stop work if they feel that work is dangerous to the culture or history of the property.

The final debris removal phase is disposal. HI-EMA, County of Maui, and FEMA worked together to identify a site close to Lahaina where non-asbestos materials could be stored before being transferred to a permanent landfill. We decided on a

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**Hawai'i Island** — Aloha, friends, Civil Defense has been busy these past months, including managing some extreme weather events. With the



Talmadge Magno, HCCDA

Hawaiian Volcano Observatory, we monitored the eruption in Napau Crater from Sept. 15-20 for threats to the community. No private property was impacted. On Nov. 4,

Hawai'i County experienced a heavy downpour starting the wet season. Windward areas received 11 inches of rainfall in 24 hours, resulting in flooding and road closures.

We've been engaging with our neighbors, holding our Disaster Preparedness Fair in Waimea that brought together 500+ public participants and over 30 organizations from county, state, federal, and NGO partners. We also put on a tsunami exercise with DOT airports and DOE schools in Keaukaha, simulating evacuations.

Civil Defense hosted an EOC orientation for the Mayor's Office and new County administration. And with support from HIEMA, we hosted incident command training to over 35 participants.

We are looking forward to our work in the New Year.

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**Kaua'i** — Aloha from the Garden Island of Kaua'i!

The Kaua'i Emergency Management Agency has recently completed work

with the Department of Defense Innovative Readiness Training



Elton Ushio, KEMA

Program on two 2024 military support missions. This work included assessments of various shelter facilities, and updating our Emergency

Operations Plan annexes, focusing on wildfires and dam safety.

Speaking of dam safety, we also recently participated in the 2024 FEMA Planning for Dam Emergencies Collaborative Technical Assistance Program. This was a great program for KEMA and our key partners from DLNR Dam Safety and Kaua'i's local dam owners and operators.

On behalf of our entire County of Kaua'i team, we wish you and your 'ohana a Happy New Year! Mahalo!

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**Maui, Moloka'i & Lāna'i** —

Aloha mai kākou,

In January 2024, I was honored to be selected as the new Administrator of the Maui Emergency Management



Amos Lonokailua-Hewett, MEMA

Agency (MEMA). With 25 years of service in the Maui Fire Department, retiring as a Battalion Chief in 2019, I bring a deep commitment and aloha to this role. My vision for

MEMA is to strengthen Maui Nui's resilience through inclusive community engagement, education, and collaboration.

I am dedicated to building trust, improving efficiency, and embracing innovative tools and technology to

better serve our 'ohana. Together, we are working to prepare and protect our island home, ensuring a stronger, safer future for all. I'm grateful for the opportunity to work alongside each of you and look forward to all we will accomplish together in 2025.

Me ka ha'aha'a,  
Amos Lonokailua-Hewett

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**O'ahu** — Aloha from Honolulu. The City and County of Honolulu Department of Emergency Management



Jennifer Walter, DEM

(DEM) has some new faces! First, we reintroduce our Acting Director Jennifer Walter. Jennifer served as Deputy Director under Hiro Toiya and stepped up when he

left the City to join FEMA. Additionally, Ian Keogh and Kristeen Chu joined our team as staff officers specializing in Infrastructure, Mitigation, and Recovery and Training and Exercise, respectively.

In recent months, we have been working on updating our Local Hazard Mitigation Plan which is due to be published early next year. We are looking for community input as we draft the plan. Visit our website at [honolulu.gov/dem](http://honolulu.gov/dem) to take our survey about hazards in your community.

We look forward to getting out into the community in the new year! Last year, we attended many community events and public presentations and are excited to do even more in 2025! You can request DEM's participation in an event or add events to our community calendar on our website.

From the entire DEM team, we wish you happy holidays and a safe and happy new year!

*"Debris Cleanup" continued from page 2*

state-owned plot of land in Olowalu, six miles from Lahaina. The County of Maui recently acquired a permanent space in

Pu'unēnē that will serve as the final resting place for the debris once the landfill is completed.

The Lahaina debris removal project is nearing its end. All 1,390 residential

properties have been cleared, with 127 out of 148 commercial property cleanouts complete.

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impact of that on the island's way of life. Preservation of language and culture is imperative; but the natural progression of it must also be allowed. Things cannot survive if they're not allowed to change. I hope someone will document this new chapter in our sister island's history.

## 'Our Iceberg' fable helps us act and adapt to change

***Our Iceberg is Melting: Changing and Succeeding Under Any Conditions***  
- by John Kotter

Review by Matthew Wall, HIEMA Resilience

On its face, this book is a fable about a colony of Emperor penguins

# Stormy Weather BOOK CLUB

discovering that their home iceberg is catastrophically melting. It tells how this discovery is made, eventually recognized by the colony, and how they address the issue by using named penguins to interact and talk story. At its core, this book discusses how an organization and its leaders can address nay sayers, organize to seek solutions, assign roles, develop trust, and successfully implement the chosen solution. The fable uses the situation and the

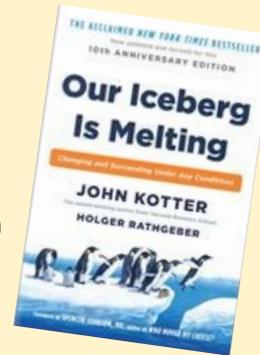
penguins to illustrate the author's "Eight Step Model of Change."

Why am I recommending this book? It goes back to who we are—emergency managers—and what we do. HIEMA's mission is "*To help the Hawai'i 'ohana prepare for, mitigate*

*against, respond to, and recover from disaster.*"

Fulfilling our mission requires us to be able to successfully recognize, communicate, adapt to and act in changing conditions. If we can't adapt to meet changing needs, then we fail in our mission. This book is a

usable reference tool written in an easy and understandable structure.



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certification program developed by HIEMA and the Pacific Disaster Center that was deployed in 2014 but had recently been neglected.

That leader is John Vierra, previously a tenured faculty and division chair at Honolulu Community College's career and technical education (CTE) program. Vierra signed on in May of 2023. Today, his community outreach team stands at six full-time employees, all working to develop emergency capabilities with local communities, businesses and non-profits.

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Community outreach "is more than going to the community fair on the weekend," Vierra says. "Community outreach is really anyone that could possibly be involved in emergency management. We have our HHARP communities, our public-private partners, the business EOC

(emergency operations center), our student tsunami ambassadors.

"As division chair of the CTE program, I was overseeing not just education but industry partnerships," he says. "A huge part of the everyday function was asking 'Are we connected with industry?' That allowed me to really see the required connectivity" for effective communities.

After 15 years in higher education, Vierra says he was drawn to HIEMA because "the mission is so strong. I was looking for a bigger mission."

Administrator Barros says, "I needed that person who could motivate people and bring excitement to the process. John's passion is contagious. And I think we can see that excitement throughout the team, the passion for community."

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In the brand-new department, "we have had to stand up all our programs from nothing," Vierra says. But nine months after the team was set in

place, HIEMA Community Outreach can look back at the heavy lifting of 2024 and ahead to action in 2025.

2024 included 650 out-of-office hours at 40 public events and ten speaking engagements. The HHARP 2.0 resilient communities program relaunches in January 2025. Ten HHARP communities have reconnected to HIEMA, with seven already recertifying. The Business EOC launches in March. Student tsunami ambassadors have been established, with more coming on board.

"Community outreach is prone to burnout," Vierra says. "We're on rotation to work on the weekend. We also have to make sure we're trained for activation. What people don't see is you working like a machine all week, and then you head out to work in public on a Saturday."

Despite the grind, Vierra remembers what keeps him and his team motivated: "It's the people. We believe in the mission and we believe in the people of Hawai'i."



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