Students Connect To Nature At Maunalua Bay

BY ALLYSON PANG

During spring break, middle school students participated in nonprofit Mālama Maunalua's annual five-day Tree to Sea Camp by learning the science, culture and ecosystems of the Maunalua Bay area in East O'ahu.

From restoration projects to testing weather data machines and drones, students also learned traditional skills like making paipo, or traditional Hawaiian body boards, and star navigation.



A group of middle school students who participated in nonprofit Mālama Maunlua's Tree to Sea Camp. **PHOTO COURTESY LAURA BAILES**

While some students were new to the program, some were returning — like Aila Carr.

"I decided to participate in the camp because I loved it last year," Carr says. "I loved learning about the bay and how to better care for it. I also really enjoyed all the leaders and the kids were all nice, too."

Carr's favorite part of the camp was making the paipo.

"It was great to learn how to make something that's been made and used for so many years," Carr says. "I loved that we got to make it with other people. I thought it looked amazing in the water when we got to use them."

Camp co-director Laura Bailes says the camp fosters a space for students to grow and build confidence in themselves while furthering their empathy, leadership and teamwork skills.

"For many students, this is one of the few times they are truly immersed in the natural environment, learning directly from the 'āina and the kai (ocean), not from a textbook, but through real world experiences that they can see, feel and be a part of. This kind of learning is not only more impactful, it's also more memorable," says Bailes, who is also the education and outreach coordinator of Mālama Maunalua.

Educators Lance Genson Mahi La Pierre and Vincent Baron introduced students to both Hawaiian and Filipino cultural concepts and instru-





ments, spirituality and forest resources used in ancient times to now.

"It is extremely important for the haumāna (students), and all who live in our islands, to have these kinds of experiences in the ocean and in the forests in order to develop and nurture a relationship with 'āina, feel comfortable in these areas, and value these spaces and places," Mahi La Pierre and Baron say. "We are a part of 'āina from mauka to makai, it is a part of us, we are 'ohana. We should get to know, grow closer and care for 'āina like one would care for a family member."

Bailes adds, "Maunalua Bay is both ecologically rich and culturally sacred, and giving students the opportunity to engage with this environment, while learning directly from the expertise of our amazing community partners who mālama this place, is incredibly special. It's in these moments that students not only learn about the world around them, but also begin to understand their place within it and how everything is inherently connected, from Tree to Sea."

Read more about this year's Tree to Sea Camp at bit.ly/4lljSeP.

Mālama Maunalua also announced that its summer intern applications are open to eligible students or recent graduates until April 18. The program runs June 9-Aug. 16.

Interns will work on projects such as coral and native algae restoration, green infrastructure and stormwater runoff, education and community outreach, and social media management and design.

Apply at malamamaunalua.org/internships.







Students removed invasive mangrove from Paikō Lagoon Wildlife Sanctuary to restore important wetland habitat for native waterbirds in Maunalua (above) and worked with Maunalua Fishpond Heritage Center to clear the 'auwai (ditch or canal) at Kaulauha'iha'i Fishpond (right). **PHOTOS COURTESY LAURA BAILES**



