GOOD NEIGHBOR

Roger Bong



Photo courtesy Mark Kushimi

Last month, wildfires ravaged more than 50,000 acres of the greater Los Angeles area — an all-too-familiar reminder of how devastating these incidents can be for people, especially those still reeling from the 2023 Lahaina wildfires.

To show support for L.A. residents impacted by the wildfires, record label Aloha Got Soul released the benefit project *For Our Friends: A Disaster Relief Compilation* on Jan. 19. Since then, AGS has raised $1,400 for nonprofit We Are Moving the Needle's MicroGrant Fund for Wildfire Relief.

The digital-only release on Bandcamp features 52 musical artists, most of whom are from Hawai'i.

"We wanted to do something to help raise funds for those affected by the wildfires," says AGS owner Roger Bong. "It's across the Pacific from us, so it's not like our community on the ground here in Honolulu, but we're still very much connected to Los Angeles because of the music industry."

This isn't the first time AGS has supported others in times of need. The record label also held a fundraiser and donated to those impacted by the Lahaina wildfires.

Bong emphasizes the power of music and its ability to inspire others in difficult times.

"It stays with you, too. A song can really last a lifetime (and especially) when it reaches the right listener at the right time," he adds.

Only a few artists wrote songs specifically in response to the L.A. wildfires, while the rest created or chose songs that really spoke to what they were feeling at the time.

"Not everything speaks specifically to the grief or the devastation that's happening or not every song here is trying to be some kind of inspirational, motivational piece," he says. "If you're going through something as devastating as what's happening in L.A., what's happened in Lahaina — you don't want to always be reminded of it 24 hours a day because that's really taxing on your health.

"That's where some of the songs on this compilation are just like normal songs. And, for me, it speaks to just the fact that even though things are so difficult … it's still important to have kind of a sense of just normalcy wherever you can get it."

Through *For Our Friends,* Bong says artists were able to make a greater impact than any of them could have accomplished alone.

"It shows that we care and we're here to support as much as we can, even if we're so geographically removed from the rest of the world," he says. "It goes to show just how meaningful our efforts can be when we come together to do something. I hope it makes waves far beyond just these shores. We want to bring as much attention to what's happened in L.A. Also, of course, Lahaina, and then also, just shine a light on all these incredible artists who have created something with so much heart and soul and meaning."

To support *For Our Friends,* visit alohagotsoul.bandcamp.com. For more info on We Are Moving the Needle, visit wearemovingtheneedle.org/lawildfireresources.

— Allyson Pang

GOOD FRIENDS

Su Shin



Photo courtesy Hawaiian Telcom

Having grown up in Mayor Wright Homes, Hawaiian Telcom president Su Shin knows firsthand the myriad challenges faced by many families in underserved communities. One of those issues is the lack of access to reliable high-speed internet, which is pertinent for educational resources, employment opportunities and other essential services. This is why she and the Hawaiian Telcom team — alongside federal, state and county leaders — continue to work tirelessly to complete their goal of transforming Hawai'i into the first fully fiber-enabled state by 2026.

"Our goal is to enhance connectivity, drive economic development and create opportunities for the people of Hawai'i," says Shin, who was featured on *MidWeek*'s Feb. 10, 2021 and May 24, 2023 covers. "This mission has been driven by the understanding that connectivity is crucial for Hawai'i's growth and prosperity."

The transformation would entail a comprehensive infrastructure upgrade during which 6,000 miles of fiber cables would be installed across all islands. Hawaiian Telcom started its fiber network in 2010 and has since made significant strides, having fiber-enabled 60% of the state. It completed its fiber expansion on Lāna'i and the topside of Moloka'i in 2023, will be finalizing Kaua'i by this month and plans to fully fiber-enable Maui by year's end. Shin estimates the remainder of O'ahu and Hawai'i island will be completed by the end of 2026.

By the time the initiative is complete, Hawaiian Telcom — with the aid of its employees, government officials, community organizations and technology partners — will have invested $1.7 billion.

"About 90% of this investment comes from Hawaiian Telcom's private funding," Shin notes. "However, we would not have reached this point — or be able to fully fiber-enable the state — without financial support from the government, which accounts for the remaining 10% or just over $100 million."

Shin says that achieving full-fiber connectivity would bring numerous benefits to the Aloha State, including fostering economic growth through the attraction of new businesses, enhancing educational opportunities through improved access to online resources and supporting vital services like telehealth.

"Ultimately, it would elevate the quality of life for all residents," she adds.

"I encourage everyone in our community to support our mission," she concludes. "Together, we have the power to create a brighter future for all of Hawai'i through enhanced connectivity. Your involvement and feedback are essential as we move forward."

— Jocelyn Lansangan