



*Senator Sakamoto and Fred Ballard at the
Oahu Veterans Groundbreaking on January 22, 2005*

Oahu Veterans Center

The Oahu Veterans Center/Council (OVC) was founded in 1992 and is an organization comprised of representatives from many, if not all the veteran organizations on the island of Oahu, who meet monthly for mutual benefit. The Center is the home to some 31 local veterans groups that use the facility free of charge for meetings or just a place to hang out with other veterans, military widows, veterans who are attempting to adjust to life after combat, families separated by deployments, and is an advocate for veteran rights and benefits. The Center and its staff have especially dedicated themselves to two organizations: The Wounded Warriors Project (Transition to civilian life) and Operation Home Front (Aid to families, while the military members are deployed).

As stated earlier, the Oahu Veterans Council was formally organized in 1992. After 10 years of effort, the Council has seen their dream come true with the construction of the Oahu Veterans Center within the Foster Village Community on 1298 Kukila Street. It all started with a \$2.8 million grant from the State of Hawaii to design and construct a Veteran's center. After years of trying to find a suitable location, the Council was able to sign a long term lease with the Foster Village Community Association.

The mission of the Oahu Veterans Center is to:

- Provide Advocacy services for veteran's rights and benefits.
- Preserve the memory and pride of those who served in the U.S. armed forces.
- Honor their sacrifices of our veterans
- Promote and foster understanding and unity of veterans, civic organizations and the community regarding veteran's benefits.

Ground breaking for the veteran's center in Foster Village was held on January 22, 2005 with the construction of the first phase, which included a meeting hall, restrooms and some office space and scheduled for completion by October 2005. The Center's master plan also calls for phase 2 to include another hall, a kitchen, and dining facilities for private events. Further expansion of the Center would include phase III with plans to construct meeting rooms with a projected cost of \$3.8 million. Fund raising efforts by the Center with strong funding support from the Legislature are under way for the completion of phase II. Lobbying efforts are also underway for State funding of Phase III expansion of the Center.

The ground breaking ceremony on January 22, 2005 was the culmination of a "9-year quest by the Oahu Veterans Council for a center for veterans" on comments expressed by Fred Ballard, a long time advocate for veteran's affairs. He and his wife Sandy Ballard chaired the building committee overseeing the construction of the Oahu Veterans Center located in Foster Village and continued to assist in the operations and management of the Center. Sandy Ballard works as the Executive Director of the Center and Fred as the Secretary for the Council and working with veteran groups.

The Center's history began in the early 1990s when members of the Oahu Veterans Council, which was created to advise the Mayor on Veterans' issues, determined that local veterans' groups needed a place to call their own. A \$2.8 million grant from the state provided funding for Phase I of the project for the construction of the building, but it would be a decade before construction began, as agreements on land swaps between the state and the Navy failed to materialize. Finally, on the suggestion of Sandy Ballard, the Council would negotiate with the Foster Village Community Association about taking over its community center, which was in a state of dis-repair. The Council offered to take over management of the nearly three-acre site and to build a new center in exchange for free use by the community. The Association agreed with the Council's proposal and gave a 55-year lease for \$1.

On July 10, 2003, John Drake, President Pro-tem for the Foster Village Community Association along with Fred Ballard, Secretary for the Oahu Veterans Council briefed the Aliamanu/Salt Lake/Foster Village Neighborhood Board Number 18 on the partnership between the Foster Village Community Association and the Council for a 55-year lease for \$1, the construction of Phase I- estimated to cost \$2.8 million, a veterans center with a pool and the assurance that the center will be shared with the community and a space for the Association office. In response to questions, the consultant, Ron Foster for Pacific Planning showed plans to upgrade the facility and they assured the Board, among other matters, that:

- The Council will maintained the area, put in a play ground and resurface the basketball court.
- That an application for P-2 zoning to a R-5 land, a Conditional Use Permit, and a draft Environmental Impact Statement would be submitted, as appropriated.
- That the City's DPP would hold a hearing in the Fall and a CUP hearing later.

On May 13, 2004, an update on the Oahu Veterans Council's application for a Conditional Use Permit and building plans was presented to the Aliamanu/Salt Lake/Foster Village Neighborhood Board by Robin Foster, Bill Brooks, and Fred Ballard. Questions, answers, and concerns followed. The respondents stated that the Oahu Veterans Council would be the ones to maintain the facility.

Phase I of the Oahu Veterans Council building program including a meeting hall, restrooms, and some office space was completed in 2005.

The Oahu Veterans Council/Center has about 31 member veteran organizations, representing about 113,000 veterans in Hawaii. Most of these organizations now have a place they can call home to conduct their meetings and social events. However, in an effort to better service the veterans, the Council embarked on a fund raising drive to take in \$1 million dollars for **Phase II** to include another hall, a kitchen, and dining facility for private events.

In the 2005 Legislative Session, Senate Bill No. 1823 was introduced by Senator Sakamoto with Senators Espero and Nishihara to appropriate funds in the amount of \$850 thousand with matching dollar-for-dollar basis by the Oahu Veterans Center at Foster Village for the construction of Phase II of the Oahu Veterans Center at Foster Village. The bill was subsequently passed out of committee and referred to the Ways and Means Committee for further consideration. Similarly, a companion bill, HB 1633 was introduced by Representative Ken Ito and others to appropriate \$850 thousand and HB 1343 was introduced by Representative Lynn Finnegan for the same amount.

In subsequent actions, the 23rd Legislative Session of 2006, HB 1900 HB1 SD1 CD1 funded \$850 Thousand for the Design, construction, and equipment for **Phase II** Improvements at the Oahu Veterans Center at Foster Village. Upon release of funds by the Governor, the final construction of Phase II was completed on April 30, 2006.

The next phase of the Oahu Veterans Center will encompass the construction of offices for the various groups and a small museum to display artifacts and historical records of veteran groups from Oahu. The estimated cost of Phase III is between \$3 and \$4 million.

Senator Sakamoto in his Legislative Update for 2005 announced the introduction of legislation of Capital Improvement Projects, including a measure for \$850 Thousand for the Oahu Veterans Center at Foster Village. Senator Sakamoto, upon receipt of notification of funding for the Oahu Veterans Center announced in his 2006 Legislative Update for 2006 of various funding projects honoring veterans, including the \$850 Thousand for construction and equipment for Phase II at the Oahu Veterans Center.

In the meantime, the Oahu Veterans Center continued to be widely used by veterans groups, the Foster Village Community Association, the State Legislature, and our Congressional delegation. For example, on August 21, 2007, U.S. Senator Daniel Akaka, in front of a standing room only crowd of veterans, conducted a U.S. panel hearing relating to VA care and Benefits in Hawaii.

On October 17, 2007, Senator Sakamoto and Representative Lynn Finnegan along with Barry Fukunaga (DOT Director), Brennon Morioka (DOT Dep.Dir of Highways), Russ Saito (Dir. DAGS), Larry Reifurth (DCCA), and Adj. General Robert Lee (DOD) conducted a community conference. On May 29, 2008, U.S. Senator Daniel Akaka held a field hearing on Federal Workers' Pay.

One of the missions of the Oahu Veterans Center is to be an advocate for veteran's affairs. On February 07, 2009, Fred Ballard, President of the Oahu Veterans Council testified in opposition to Senate Bill No. 112 Relating to Establishing a Veterans' Services Task Force stating that the establishment of another task force "is unnecessary and redundant".

The Oahu Veterans Center founded in 1992 and located in Foster Village is a fully functioning facility servicing some 31 Veterans groups on Oahu upon the completion of Phases I and II. The remaining Phase III construction with plans to construct office spaces and meeting rooms is estimated to cost between \$3 and \$4 million dollars. The Center/Council would be conducting fund raising efforts and will be lobbying the State Legislature for support in the 2009 and 2010 Legislative Session. In the meantime, the building permit for the construction of the Veterans Center is still active until 2010.

While the center is used predominantly by the veterans and veterans' organizations, the Foster Village Community Association is another beneficial user of the facilities, in accordance with the terms of the agreement with the Center. In fact, the playground equipment for use by the children of veterans and the Foster Village Community Association has been purchased and is in process of being installed by the Veterans Center. Other periodic and recurring usages of the center include: monthly meetings and other recreational activities by the Foster Village Community Association, Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, Naval Facilities Engineering Command Pacific, Joint Venture Education Forum, Hawaii National Guard, Hawaii Congressional delegation, and other community members for social events and parties.

As a related matter, the construction of the Foster Village Roundabout located at the intersection of Ala Napunani and Likini Streets to relieve traffic congestion to the Veterans Center and the residential areas continue to be discussed by the community. Historically, the Aliamanu/Salt Lake Foster Village Neighborhood Board No. 18 on April 11, 2002 voted to approve the construction of a Roundabout on a temporary trial basis. Discussions, pro and con on the viability of the Roundabout were raised again on October 9, 2003 of the board with a motion to reconsider the previous board decision to approve. The motion failed. The Roundabout issue still remains. Councilmember Romy Cachola's office has been working with the City's Department of Transportation Services for continuing resolution to the Roundabout issue.

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