Message from NHCOE Director
Winona Lee, M.D.

Welcome to the first Native Hawaiian Center of Excellence (NHCOE) newsletter. I am still in awe of what has been accomplished thus far in the 2 years of the grant. NHCOE funding makes it possible, but it is the people that MAKE IT HAPPEN. We hope this newsletter provides a snapshot of the exciting activities and events of our students and faculty. As you will notice, it truly “takes a village” and the success of NHCOE is dependent not only on our faculty and staff, but also on the unique partnerships and collaborations within the Department of Native Hawaiian Health and the community. The theme of this first issue is “New Beginnings.” In the spirit of this theme, we welcome article ideas and submissions for future issues. Mahalo for your continued support of NHCOE!

Name our newsletter challenge!
This newsletter needs a name! Please submit ideas to nhcoe@hawaii.edu no later than June 15th. The winner will receive a fantastic mystery gift!

Planting Preservation
By Kerri Wizner

Rick Kaponowaiwaiola Barboza from Hui Ku Maoli Ola shared his wealth of knowledge about the Native Hawaiian plant community at a lunch-and-learn on May 3rd. He is a regular speaker every 2nd Tuesday of the month in the JABSOM Native Hawaiian Healing Garden (Mala Lapa‘au).

Approximately 100 native Hawaiian plant species no longer exist in the wild, and only a handful have been saved in cultivation. Of the remaining 552 Hawaiian plant species that are rare, 150 have fewer than 50 individuals remaining in the wild, and those numbers are decreasing every year.

Rick and business partner, Matt Kapaliku Schirman, combined

Mohala ka pua, ua wehe kaiaoa
The blossoms are opening, for dawn is breaking. One looks forward with joy to a happy event.
they have degrees in zoology and Hawaiian studies from UH Manoa, respectively, and turned their passion for plants into a company that helps preserve Hawaiian endangered plants and their places in cultural practices.

They started collecting plants on their own time in college. After realizing the community had a desire for native Hawaiian plants, Rick and Matt began Hui Ku Maoli Ola and started growing for the masses. With the fast-growing market for native plants and the help of large retail buyers, Hui Ku Maoli Ola was able to expand their operation to include: providing over 100 native Hawaiian plants to the public, restoring degraded native habitats, removing invasive species, landscaping, and educational services including lectures, guided tours, and educational native gardens.

Hui Ku Maoli Ola and their partners are hopeful that through teaching and public awareness these endemic and native species will thrive for the next generation to enjoy and embrace.

Check out their nursery in Kane‘ohe or their website http://www.hawaiiannativeplants.com

‘Ohi’ a lehua - *Metrosideros polymorpha*

Endemic Metrosideros are found on all of the Hawaiian Islands, and four out of five of the species can be found on Oahu. The red, and less common yellow blossoms are used to make tea and leis. Their branches are also home to a multitude of insects, birds, and importantly the endangered Hawaiian tree snail.

‘Ohi’ a are extremely variable and are found growing in multiple elevations and environments. They are the first plant to grow after a lava flow, have a low nutrient need, and their complex root system allows them to survive in low water conditions. The roots also help support the ecosystem around them because their fibrous roots help prevent soil erosion as well as filter ground water.

Please join us in the mala lapa‘au every 2nd Tuesday from 3 to 5:30 pm with guest speaker Rick Kaponowaiwaiola Barboza, co-founder of Hui Ku Maoli Ola, a leader in growth and education of native Hawaiian plants.

This year, Hawai‘i’s Na Hoku Hanohano nominations will include one of JABSOM’s very own graduates and current NHCOE fellow, Dr. Malia Lee.

“A doctor is in a unique position of needing to meet a person, develop a trusting relationship, and quickly gather and understand details in the lives of strangers,” Malia said. This relationship became a muse for Malia to compose a collection of songs in her first album, “Eyes of a Stranger,” which addresses various aspects of life, despair, suffering, resilience, and faith.

The album has been nominated into the category of “Religious Album of the Year” and offers inspiration in the face of self-doubt, tear, loss of a loved one, homelessness, and the difficult decision of abortion. There is also a song inspired by Hawai‘i’s own Saint Damien, entitled ‘Holy Man,’ in which she gives a voice to people suffering from Hansen’s Disease who had been cast away to the remote peninsula of Kalaupapa.

“Eyes of a Stranger” can be found online at CDBABY.com and on iTunes and will soon be available at Na Mea Native Hawaiian Bookstore.

For more information about the 2011 Na Hoku Hanohano awards visit http://www.alohavalley.com/blog/na-hoku-hanohano-awards.