

# EDUCATION THE PACIFIC WAY

## Fostering Connections Between Family, School, and Community

By Paul Dumas

The August issue of this publication opened with some wise words from a Pacific educator. "Being together, participating on the task," he wrote, is the Pacific way of teaching. This issue of *Pacific Educator* is dedicated to the many ways in which Pacific families and communities support their youngsters' education by being together and participating on tasks. It is also dedicated to Martin Weirlangt, who wrote these words.

Martin joined PREL's staff in Honolulu in September 1999. He came to us from the Federated States of Micronesia, where he had served for eight years as the Pohnpei DOE's Science Specialist, and on the Pacific Mathematics and Science Leadership Team. In his time at PREL he was loved and respected for his integrity, his dedication to family and community, and his vision for Pacific education. When he passed away July 31 after a long struggle with cancer, it was a loss that affected us deeply.

In a story published June 16 in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, Martin talked about his extended family and the difficulty of maintaining Micronesian cultural values and beliefs so far from home. While he hoped that by relocating to Honolulu he would be able to provide his six children with educational advantages, Martin also questioned whether Hawai'i schools were meeting the needs of Micronesian students. In addition, he and his wife Beauty worried about the extent to which their children would be exposed to drugs and alcohol abuse in Honolulu, and how this would affect their expectation that their children would grow up to be responsible citizens.

Martin and Beauty helped their children face these challenges while maintaining their first language and respect for Pohnpeian culture through a combination of focus on family, religious faith, and community support. Through a Micronesian organization known as the Friendship League, the Weirlangts helped organize events to celebrate Micronesian culture at McCoy Pavilion in November 2001 and at the Bishop Museum in June.

In the pages that follow are stories that celebrate efforts like Martin's and Beauty's to maintain and honor native cultures (see "Cultural Learning at Ka'ala," p. 12); describe ways of maintaining and developing culturally diverse students' first language skills (see "Parents and Bilingual Learners," p. 8); and talk about how to build bridges between schools and the communities of which they are a part (see "PIRC Parental Involvement Fund," p. 7; "Le'atele's Success Story," p. 5; and "Pacific CHILD," p. 10).

These stories build on the recognition that is central to Martin's legacy: that educating our children is everyone's business, and that developing respect for and understanding of Pacific cultures must be at the heart of Pacific education at home, at school, and in the community.



Photo courtesy of George F. Lee/Honolulu Star-Bulletin

▷ The Weirlangt family. From bottom right: Martin, Beauty, Ku'uipo, Shawnty, Maureen, Arlene, and Kenmore.



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## Relocation Notice

The Honolulu office of Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) will relocate to Pioneer Plaza from January 2, 2003. PREL's new address will be 900 Fort Street Mall, Suite 1300, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813. Phone and fax numbers remain the same.