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Historical perspective adds to Hulihee palace plantings

BY CAROLYN LUCAS-ZENK | WEST HAWAII TODAY

Tending her family's garden made 12-year-old Shady Shirai feel right at home while planting native and culturally significant flora on the Hulihee Palace grounds.

But these plants serve a different purpose, they're part of a living memorial to the Hawaiian royalty who vacationed here and they are an educational public display.



Monday morning, Shirai and eight other Innovations Public Charter School students began planting this garden, located between the palace and Kuakini Building.

More than 20 seventh- and eighth-graders in Innovations' Garden Program, a three-month elective led by teacher Krista Donaldson, have been working on this garden since November.

Sally Inkster, director of the palace grounds, wanted to replant the area with plants that would have been present during the eras of King Kalakaua, Queen Kapiolani, Queen Liliuokalani and Princess Kaiulani.

"A lot of native and culturally significant plants have been lost," she said. "I wanted to help bring some of them back and showcase

them in a royal setting."

Inkster envisioned the area being part of a palace grounds tour, which would share stories and facts about the myriad varieties of plants, flowers, shrubs and trees. For instance, she said Queen Kapiolani planted the palace's famous banyan tree in the 1880s. It was reportedly a cutting from the Iolani Palace tree, which was a cutting from an ancient tree in India. She hopes the tour will be available in the fall.

Inkster thought the garden would be an ideal school project and proposed the idea to Donaldson. The students first visited the area, noted the growing conditions and began researching plants to determine which were suitable.

Thirteen-year-old Keahi Pi said there are many plants that played essential roles in Hawaiian culture for food, fiber, tools, building materials, medicine and art. Through his research, he learned not only does pikake smell good, but Princess Kaiulani named the flower after her beloved pet peacocks.

His favorite plant, which will be planted near the palace's caretaker residence, is pohuehue, or beach morning glory. He said Hawaiians used it for various medical solutions, such as healing broken bones or treating sprains. What he liked most about the indigenous plant is how surfers slapped its vines in the ocean to convince the seas to provide good waves for the day -- something Pi tries now when he goes to the beach.

The students compiled their research, as well as submitted a list of plants and design plans to Inkster for approval. The only plant not approved was the crown flower. Originally from India, Inkster

said it was a beloved and symbolic flower for Queen Liliuokalani, as well as a favorite for lei. However, crown flower is also the favorite food plant of caterpillars, an insect Inkster doesn't want munching voraciously on the palace's plants.

The March tsunami uprooted and destroyed several of the plants in the garden site, making it easier for the students to remove unwanted plants like spider lilies and ferns. Ten types of plants will be placed in the approximately 20-foot by 5-foot site, including akia, ilima, ko (sugar cane) and nanu (*Gardenia manii*). Many of the plants were donated by Amy B.H. Greenwell Ethnobotanical Garden and Donaldson, who has a commercial gardening business. A few were purchased using funds from the Kauhahao Memorial Fund, Inkster said.

Once the plants are in the dirt, the collaboration will continue. Inkster plans to seek grants to pay for signage and pamphlets to explain the Hawaiian, scientific and common names of each plant, their characteristics and "invaluable" uses. Innovations students will help with this part of the project next school year, Donaldson said.

"We always take from the Earth and this project allows us to give back to it," 12-year-old Will Wong said. "It's important that youth are involved because it shows what we can all do, not just seventh- and eighth-graders, when working together toward a common cause."