

In Memoriam



Sue D. Cooley
1923-2017

The following remarks are from the board members who knew Sue the best...

At a football game a number of years ago, many will recall that Sue Cooley attended with Roy ('60) and I. The game was a heartbreaker. The Lunas were down by almost 40 plus points and fought their hearts out. The game ended at Lunas 39 and "other team" 43. I am not sure of the actual score anymore, but it was a heartbreaker. As we left the field and walked past the locker rooms, we could not have felt

sadder. But then we heard the Lahainaluna “Boys” singing their Alma Mater in rich, smooth voices filled with pride. They may have lost, but they were proud of the fight and proud of their commitment to their school.

We all had tears in our eyes as we walked to our car.... Sue, Roy & I. We were proud of Lahainaluna. We were proud of who they were as young men. We were proud that they had fought a valiant battle, lost, but could still sing their Alma Mater in Hawaiian as was part of their custom at this difficult time. One of those "chicken skin" moments.

Lahainaluna Football was making men, it was different than we knew and it meant, and means, more to The West Maui Community that I could have realized before that time.

Something happened on that day that inspired Sue D. Cooley to work with The Lahainaluna High School Foundation, in an effort to bring a sports facility to Lahainaluna. Sue has always called this a community effort and was proud that the community came together, with each person contributing what they could. Most of us did not really understand what was happening or how much it meant for our community and most did not see “the bigger picture”.

Betty Sakamoto



Sue presiding over the coin toss at a home football game

We were saddened to hear of the passing of Sue Cooley, the inspirational and philanthropic woman who touched the lives of so many on Maui and on the mainland. Here, her awesome generosity paved the way for the Lahainaluna High School Foundation (LHSF) to build the first multi-purpose stadium for the West Maui community on the campus of Lahainaluna High School. Although Maui was a 2nd home

for Sue, she is a wonderful example of someone who truly gave back to her communities.

Though small in stature, she had a gigantic heart. Initially her large donations were known only as coming from an anonymous donor, then she accepted the notion that she could “go public,” hoping to encourage others to contribute to the stadium project. A blessing and groundbreaking was held in February of 2010 and by August the field became a reality for the school’s physical education department, its many athletic teams, cheering squad, and marching band, color guard/dance ensembles to practice, rehearse and play on. There was much more to complete -- an arrival building, restrooms, press box, and oh yeah – bleachers! It would take several more years & millions later before Lahaina had its first “under the lights” night game in 2015.

Sue Cooley was honored in 2012 by LHSF as a “Legend of Lahainaluna,” joining others who have been bestowed such an honor. In November 2014 Hawaii’s Board of Education presented her with a proclamation expressing gratitude for her generosity to LHS, which was at that time in excess of \$7 million.

On ESPN’s SportsCenter, January 20, anchor Neil Everett provided a fitting tribute to Sue whom he had also become close with. He noted that this sweet gal “fell in love with Lahainaluna and Maui fell in love with her” and that she deserved a “shout out for all she’s done for the 808 and especially Lahainaluna. ... Sue Cooley no-ka-oi”

Although Sue’s physical presence is now gone, she was and will forever be an angel. Her spirit will remain with us always.

One of my experiences with Sue will be forever etched in my memory. Michael Orr had crafted beautiful signage for the Sue D. Cooley Stadium, and of course Sue did not know about that. On November 1, 2014, we had a workday at the school with the football team, basketball team, boarding department, LHSF and community members. Sue was in town and Roy and Betty Sakamoto, along with Mitch Mitchell were going to bring her come up to the school. Betty called and was quite nervous about what Sue might think about the name of the building which was not know by Sue, and Betty wanted to make it a very positive experience. Sue arrived and Lanny helped her into a golf cart. He aligned the cart with the building and the students gathered in front. Sue put her hands up to her face in astonishment when she saw the sign. I don’t think there was a dry eye in the house. The students sang the alma mater and then Sue was escorted through the arrival building and out on to the field. While she was making her way through the arrival building, she looked at me and said “this is the greatest day of my life”. That was really something and I will always remember that day.

Aloha ‘oe.

Rob Shelton



(L to R) Mike Nakano and Sue

On the night of February 18th, a few hours before she passed, Betty Sakamoto presented Sue Cooley with the Division II Football State Championship ring that was personalized just for her at her home in the state of Washington.

On one side of the ring is the name “Cooley”. Below her name is an image of a football helmet with the number “1” on it to match her Lahainaluna football jersey that is framed and hanging on her bedroom wall. On the bottom of the ring, below the helmet, her position on the team is inscribed “Mom”, as she called the players on the Lahaina Big Boys team, Lahainaluna Junior Varsity and the Lahainaluna Varsity team, her “boys”.

Her name will be remembered for generations to come through the name of a facility at Lahainaluna, called the Sue D. Cooley Stadium. Furthermore, she will always be number “1” in our hearts and minds. Our players, past, present and future, will always remember her as “Mom”. Being a true Mom to her boys, she provided them with a home along with her love for them. This home would have never been realized without Sue financing about 83% of the cost.

We will truly miss her.

Lanny Tihada



(L to R) Sue, Lanny Tihada, Betty Sakamoto at a Legends of Lahainaluna event.

The entire story about Sue Cooley and Lahainaluna High School reads like a script to a great movie. No one could have ever imagined that a simple chance encounter with a football game, a loss, and the singing of the alma mater would forever change the history of Lahainaluna. But it did.

And it did in such a way that it continues to amaze me every time I'm up there. Because it's more than a stadium. It is truly the gathering place for this town, our hale punana, our House of Gathering. The pride of ownership that exists with the people of this town, not to mention the sheer joy of having a place of our own is having a tremendous effect for our Westside community. And not only for sports. This last graduation was the first time we were able to use the stadium for that event and the crowds were beyond what anyone ever expected. One estimate put it at 4500 people! I think it was at least that many. Finally, a facility to allow everyone who wanted to attend graduation could finally go.

I feel both fortunate to have been a part of this project and blessed to have been at the right place at the right time to offer my assistance, as one of many, in stewarding this life changing experience that will forever change the course of history for the Oldest School West of the Rockies.

Mark Tillman



Without her generous gifts and personal support, my very existence as the Foundation's Development Coordinator, then as its Executive Director, would not have been possible. I have been more-than-fortunate to have come to this place and to have had the opportunity to come know those who have gone to, and who are currently attending this school. The generosity and feelings they have for this place make them very special people.

And then there is Sue Cooley. A part-time resident, with no previous ties to this place, but who has made an everlasting impression that will live on. What can you say about someone who made the dream of having our own stadium a reality... a dream that would not have come to fruition without that very special person, who was touched by this unique place and the special people who live here?

The only thing that eclipsed her generous philanthropy was her ever-present smile.

Jeff Rogers



Jeff and Sue, with her ever-present smile, at a stadium work day.

Click the link below to view the

[ESPN SportsCenter Dedication by Neil Everett](#)



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