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Divine inspiration

Community gets together to raise funds, renovate 156-year-old Hualoha Church in Kaupo

By EILEEN CHAO, Staff Writer

Churchgoers and volunteers who have worked tirelessly to restore the historic Hualoha Congregational Church in the southeast Maui village of Kaupo rejoiced during a blessing Saturday commemorating completion of the project.

The Hualoha Preservation 'Ahahui raised nearly \$80,000 in grants and donations from over 30 foundations, agencies and private donors, who wished to remain anonymous, organizers said. Those funds were used to strip and replace the flooring, change out the rotten wood in the roof and put in new shingles, make needed replacements to the bell tower and steeple, apply a fresh coat of paint to the inside and outside of the church and renovate all the bathrooms.

"It was just wonderful how everything worked out," said Carl "Soot" Bredhoff, who led much of the fundraising effort by applying for grants and sending out letters to friends and family. Bredhoff, who managed Kaupo Ranch from 1967 to 1982, also helped organize the last major renovation of the 156-year-old church in the 1970s.

"Just when we were about to run out of money, another grant would come through," Bredhoff said. Financing the repairs, which is often the most challenging aspect of any restoration project, came relatively easy. Bredhoff chalks it up to the spiritual and emotional connection people have with the humble church, located on the tiny Mokolau peninsula overlooking the ocean.

"Number one, it's a beautiful place ... but something about it is a very spiritual place (too). Something about it just kind of grabs everybody. They leave a little composition book there for people to write in, and people come from all over the world. It's amazing what people write," he said.

Built in 1859 by Congregational missionaries with the help of Native Hawaiians, Hualoha in its heyday hosted weekly Sunday services for about 200 people, Bredhoff said. By the time he came to East Maui to manage the ranch, the minister from Wananalua Church in Hana would come to Hualoha once a month to host a Sunday afternoon service.

The church had been out of commission since 2010 — except for a couple of weddings that were held on the grounds while the church was undergoing renovation — but members expect regular once-a-month services to resume soon, though no date has yet been decided. About 200 people gathered for the blessing and service Saturday to celebrate the new building.

"We had a lot of compliments from people all over Maui on Saturday, they're amazed at how beautiful it looks. ... Right now, the church looks brand new," said Kaupo resident and volunteer Sam Aina,



JONATHAN STARR photos

Top: Residents and members celebrated the completion of a four-year-long restoration of Hualoha Church in Kaupo. Organizers raised about \$80,000, which funded replacement of the floorboards, repairs to the roof, restoration of the bell tower and steeple and other improvements.

Bottom: Aunty Edie Kapiko of Keawala'i Congregational Church in Makena speaks to the crowd that gathered at Hualoha Church on Saturday.

who was baptized in the church in 1952.

"We wanted to renovate it hopefully for people in the Hana district to come back and have service once a month," he said.

The renovation effort began in 2011 at the behest of Stephan Lefebvre, a visiting French-Canadian who had come to Kaupo Ranch on a vacation to ride with the paniolos. During his stay, the cowboys told him about the ailing state of the church, and he promptly decided to abandon his vacation and enlist the help of Bredhoff and others like Jason Kidd, the minister of Wananalua Church in Hana, to help repair the floorboards and eventually, the rest of the

church.

Lefebvre died before the renovations could be completed, which stalled the effort for about a year, Bredhoff said. A series of contracting and building permit delays further lengthened the project's timeline, but in the end, "everything worked out."

"Akua was with us the whole trip. Weather-wise, when we were putting on the roof, we had no rain. Sorry Bobby (Ferreira of Kaupo Ranch). I prayed for no rain," Bredhoff said with a laugh.

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HUALOHA CHURCH photo

A contractor works to repair the roof of Hualoha Church in Kaupo.

Church

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Kaupo has been experiencing drought conditions that the National Weather Service said has decreased forage material for cattle.

Kaupo resident Jonathan Starr touted the volunteered efforts of Bredhoff, Aina and others in getting the church up and running again.

"It's really inspiring, the church looks beautiful. This was the largest gathering for a religious service in the community for many, many years," Starr said.

More than 75 volunteers helped strip out the old floor-

boards and install new ones, and most of the material was donated, Aina said. Crews from around Maui and off island would come and work twice a month on weekends during the initial phase, he said.

"I have 10 grandkids, and I'd like to see this carry on because when we were young, we were part of the church," Aina said. "I would like to see my kids and grandkids come down and help me clean the yard and get involved, and hopefully this church will be here for hundreds of more years."

For more information, visit hualohachurchkaupo.org.

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