

ALL THE King's Men

BY THOMAS WILMER

Hawai'i, like the rest of Polynesia, was once ruled by councils of chiefs and was not a monarchy until much later in Hawaiian history. In Hawai'i, the Ali'i-nui (supreme ruler) had his own council of chiefly advisors called 'Aha 'ula. The term 'Aha 'Ula was one steeped in kaona (metaphor), with "aha" meaning cord or rope, and sometimes prayer, and "ula" (red), referring to the sacred royal blood ties that united this circle of distinguished men. After uniting the Hawaiian Islands, King Kamehameha's 'aha 'ula was composed of the most powerful and highest-ranking ali'i (chiefs) in the land.



These revered leaders of ancient Hawai'i governed their people with wisdom in the ways of living pono (with respect and righteousness) and in harmony with the land. The ali'i could be identified by their colorful 'ahu 'ula (feathered cloaks) and mahiole (feathered helmets). As time passed and the value of living in harmony with the land slowly began to fade, so too did the forests and the endemic bird species that called these forests their home. Until recently, you could only see these rare feathered artifacts in museums and, unfortunately, the environmental wisdom and practices of the ruling chiefs has now been relegated to the history books.

That all began to change a few years ago when a renaissance of aloha 'āina (love the land) began to take root. It was the perfect confluence of like-minded souls with a passionate understanding of the life of a tree and its critical value to the world's

ecosystem. In 2013, Isadore Sharp, founder and chairman of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, had just mandated a worldwide mission to plant ten million trees. 7,500 miles away in Hawai'i, Jeff Dunster and his partner, Darrell Fox, were in the midst of ramping up their non-profit Hawaiian Legacy Reforestation Initiative (HLRI) with a goal of planting 1.3 million Legacy Trees—one for each man, woman, and child in Hawai'i. A subsequent meeting of these minds in 2014 at the Four Seasons Resort Hualālai set in motion the first of many hotel partnerships with HLRI that have expanded across the state.

As a homage to the original stewards of the land, work began on a series of 14 capes, representing each of the Hawaiian leaders depicted in the painting, Aha'ula o Kamehameha

Exact replicas of these incredible works are being meticulously recreated (each one taking over a year to produce). When completed, the total 'aha 'ula collection will consist of 14 cloaks to represent each of Hawai'i's high chiefs. The first four have been completed and are on display at 'Alohilani Resort Waikiki Beach, The Kahala Hotel & Resort, Four Seasons Hualālai, and the Hawai'i Convention Center.

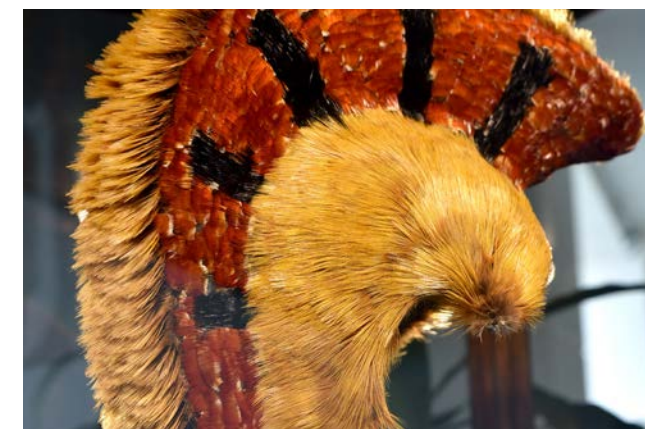
Kunuiākea, by Brook Kapukuniahi Parker, an artist and Hawaiian historian, to represent HLRI's and its Legacy Partners' commitment to support the restoration of Hawai'i's forests, endangered birds, and other species.

Uncle Earl Regidor, Four Seasons Resort Hualālai's ambassador of Hawaiian culture and history, recalls, "I had goose bumps when Dunster told us this reforestation project was located on the flanks of Mauna Kea, as I grew up on the Hamakua Coast in Umikoa just a stone's throw from this Legacy Forest. This historic forest was once the personal property of King Kamehameha the Great, Hawai'i's first King."

Since 2014, Four Seasons Resort Hualālai, where the replication of the Golden Cloak of Kamehameha is on display, has already sponsored more than 50,000 koa Legacy Trees, with guests offered an optional daily surcharge to help fund the reforestation initiative. Uncle Earl says that some guests make a family adventure to the Legacy Forest to plant their own trees. "It is so cool. We're helping our guests make memories and give a gift that will reach beyond this generation and into the next—it's truly a legacy. As a toddler, one might accompany their parents on a Legacy Tree planting and then return as an adult years later to show their own children the family's Legacy Tree."



Uncle Earl Regidor, Four Seasons Resort





Teri Orton, Hawai'i Convention Center's General Manager

Hawai'i Convention Center hosts the replica of the cape and helmet of Hawaiian High Chief Kekūhaupi'o. Teri Orton, Hawai'i Convention Center's General Manager, says, "Less than ten percent of Hawai'i's old growth forests remain, so we made a commitment to partner with HLRI to engage sustainably conscious hotels, restaurants, and retailers that want to help preserve our natural resources by sponsoring Legacy Trees. Our goal is to plant one million trees on Oahu and the Island of Hawai'i."

Orton cites collective power group visits, such as the recent American Dental Association (ADA) conference, that brought more than 16,000 delegates from around the world to Hawai'i and notes that associations like the ADA are always looking for ways to actively participate in community engagement projects. "Today's visitors," Orton explained, "want more than just sun, sand, and surf. They truly want authentic, meaningful experiences and to get involved in the local culture and to give back. Planting trees is essential to keeping Hawai'i a world-class destination. Forests clean the air, filter our water, and sequester carbon, all while helping to ensure the health of our reefs. This reforestation project is ideal as it can be as simple as sponsoring a single tree."

Orton recounts a memorable group visit to the Legacy Forest at Gunstock Ranch on the North Shore of Oahu and watching the tears stream down the participants' faces through the emotional process of planting trees in memory of loved ones. She adds that it is amazing to know that you can return years later and revisit the forest to find your fully-grown tree. "What makes this project so unique is that each tree is planted with an RFID chip so people can track their specific tree's growth online via Google Earth after they return home and for years to come."

Orton planted her first Legacy Tree on Mauna Kea and her second at Gunstock Ranch. She shares, "It was such a moving, emotional experience to go out there and actually plant your tree and dedicate it to a loved one." She says, "We're planting trees that are native to our island so our children's children will have something to come and physically look at, to touch, and feel, versus having to look it up as a historical footnote on the Internet."

The Kahala Hotel & Resort General Manager Joe Ibarra says, "The hospitality industry has a kuleana (responsibility) to take care of this 'āina—this land." The Kahala Hotel & Resort formed a partnership with HLRI to plant 200,000 endemic Legacy Trees as a part of their guest experience and displays the cape and helmet of Hawaiian High Chief Ke'eaumoku Pāpa'iahiahi in the lobby. Ibarra notes that it's planting trees is an excellent way to engage with guests, as members of the staff lead group visits to the Gunstock Ranch reforestation site.

"One day, I accompanied a group and I planted a tree in memoriam of my mother who had passed away just days before. It was so touching to know that her tree would be there for maybe more than the next 100 years." Ibarra shared, "The tree planting process was very spiritual for me as it included saying an oli chant asking for permission and then washing your hands over your tree as you put part of your soul into the tree. It was an amazing, uplifting experience—something I will treasure forever. We have this precious opportunity to plant something that is unique to these islands as we bring back something that has nearly vanished."



Joe Ibarra, The Kahala Hotel & Resort General Manager



Matt Grauso,
General Manager at
Alohilani Resort Waikiki Beach

Matt Grauso, General Manager at Alohilani Resort Waikiki Beach says that in conjunction with the hotel's grand opening last year, "We announced a partnership with HLRI to plant 100,000 trees, and to date we have generated more than \$230,000 for the Legacy Forest." In further commemoration of this special occasion, HLRI's most recent commission,

the 'Ahu 'Ula O Kiwalaō, was also unveiled at the ceremony.

Grauso notes that his hotel guests exhibit a palpably positive sense of being part of a project that is making a marked difference in the ecological evolution of Hawai'i. He added, "In addition to funding tree plantings, many of our guests sign up for their very own tree planting experience and plant their personal Legacy Trees at Gunstock Ranch."

Grauso says that each guest is told the story of the hotel's reforestation partnership at check-in and the response has been wildly successful. "I think this is so encouraging how the public consciousness of environmental issues has evolved in such a positive way. It's not just the awareness, though, it is the action that is a result."

The success of this project is due (in part) to the ability to directly connect visitors with Hawai'i's rich history and the understanding of the critical role of the 'aha 'ula in caring for the environment. How does one begin to tell such a story? Respect the land and respect all life, as the alii once taught their people. With the return of Hawai'i's forests also comes the return of the special wildlife found nowhere else on earth.

It has been nearly 200 years since the last of these cloaks were seen in public, and most have been locked away in museums and private collections. These chiefs may no longer be with us but through the work of HLRI and featherwork master, Rick San Nicolas, and renowned artist and historian, Brook Parker—both descendants of King Kamehameha the Great—visitors to Hawai'i are getting a rare glimpse of history and are learning how the ancient Hawaiians overcame many of the same problems we are dealing with today—namely, how to manage our natural resources to provide for today's generation, while preserving these same resources for the generations yet to come.

Once this connection with the past is made, guests intuitively understand that by planting their Legacy Tree, they have become part of Hawai'i's culture and history. They know that their contribution forever ties them to Hawai'i and that they have become part of the solution.



One Legacy Tree's contribution to the environment:

GENERATES
13,000
pounds of oxygen

SEQUESTERS
8,200
pounds of carbon dioxide

RECYCLES
200,000
gallons of water

*"We don't inherit the land from our ancestors,
we borrow it from our children."* Native American Proverb