



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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**Three Hawai'i schools honored with awards for outstanding
beautification efforts by the Cooke Foundation**

Schools on Hawai'i Island and O'ahu awarded a total of \$15,000

HONOLULU, HI — The Hawai'i Community Foundation, on behalf of the Cooke Foundation, is pleased to announce the recipients of the Cooke Beautification Award for Public Schools. Founded in 1920, the Cooke Foundation supports community endeavors that make a difference in the betterment and welfare of the people of Hawai'i.

The \$5,000 Cooke Beautification Awards are typically presented every two years to recognize local public and charter schools for completed beautification projects that better their school environment and significantly enhance the school's overall appearance and ambiance. The awards represent the work of the entire community, as the planning and execution of the project must engage students in a meaningful way, and parents, faculty, staff and community members should be involved. The award monies may be used in any way the schools choose.

Since 2008, the Cooke Foundation has awarded a total of \$145,000 to 29 public and charter schools across the state. This year, 12 applications were received, all from worthy projects enhancing their schools and learning communities.

"It is such an inspiration to see the creative hearts and minds of students at work producing beautiful and inviting spaces in which to learn and play," said Greg Wrenn, president of the Cooke Foundation and coordinator of the Beautification Award program. "It has always been our premise that a beautiful environment at school is conducive to learning and encourages respect for one's school, respect for others and respect for oneself. We are so proud to support these schools in a small way and recognize the students and their communities for their hard work and impressive achievements."

The recipients of the Cooke Beautification Award for Public Schools for 2025 are:

Innovations Public Charter School (Hawai'i Island): Honored for a project transforming an underutilized section of its middle school campus into a thriving edible garden filled with native plants and locally cultivated crops. Led by IPCS' experienced garden teacher and with support from IPCS faculty in environmental science, agriculture, and project-based education, 70 middle school students and 75 parent volunteers constructed raised planter beds and planted kale, peppers, herbs, and other vegetables; planted papaya, pomegranate, banana, and dragon fruit trees; and constructed an imu. The gardens not only serve as living classrooms and beautify the campus, but the produce is also harvested and sold at 20 farmers markets, with proceeds going to the gardens' ongoing maintenance and improvements. Innovations director Jennifer Hiro says, "Innovations seeks to create a learning environment that reflects attention to detail, tailored care, and intentional purpose in the function and service of each element students interact with. This focus ensures everyone who enters campus feels cared for, welcomed, and supported. The outdoor environment sets the tone for a collaborative, caring community of learners."

Kalāheo High School (O'ahu): As an expansion of its Hawaiian Studies program, Kalāheo students and faculty teamed with cultural practitioner Keahi Pi'iohia and Paepae O He'eia, and members of the community, to build a 400-square foot traditional Hawaiian hale on the school campus. The work included moving rocks donated by a local quarry and building rock walls, debarking and lashing logs, preparing the leaves for hanging, and lashing them to the structure. The hale is named Hale Kaleilenaokealoha, which means "Yellowing Lei of Love," a nod to Hauwahine, the guardian of nearby Kawainui Marsh, and to the lei of people and communities that came together in aloha to bring the project to fruition. Tara Gumapac, Kalāheo teacher and project coordinator, says, "Hale Kaleilenaokealoha is the first legal indigenous structure on a Department of Education campus. It would not have been built without the 'ike, or knowledge, of our Master Hale Builder Keahi Pi'iohia, along with the support of our administrators at the time, Resha Ramolete and James Rippard, as well as our faculty, staff, students, community, and our community partner organization, Paepae O He'eia. We hope it serves as a pu'uhonua for our students—providing a safe place for them to learn, take a break, or relax."

Mountain View Elementary School (Hawai'i Island): Students worked with faculty, staff, community members, and members of nonprofit organization Estria Foundation's Mele Murals program to create a new mural based on the story of Ko Pele Huaka'i 'Ana, or "Pele Finding Her Forever Home." During the creative process, the students visited Volcanoes National Park, where to their surprise the volcano had become active, bringing Pele's presence even closer into the project. The process of making the mural included oli, meditations, *kilo* (observation), and the students' reflections on the story. The final event unveiling the mural brought the project full circle, as students shared what they had learned by planning and creating the mural. MVES principal Adria Medeiros says, "We are honored to continue our relationship with the Estria Foundation and Mele Murals Program. Our keiki have grown so much through their experiences each year, through each art installation, and through each opportunity to learn from these aina-based experiences. Mahalo to the Cooke Foundation for your acknowledgement and support in our school's efforts to beautify our campus through this unique opportunity!"

*****VISUALS*****

Images for grantees can be found at [the following link](#).

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About the Cooke Foundation, Limited

Established in 1920, the Cooke Foundation, Limited supports worthy endeavors in the community that the family feels will make a significant difference in the betterment and welfare of the people of Hawai'i. In 2024, the Foundation awarded grants totaling over \$1.5 million to Hawai'i nonprofit organizations in the Arts, Culture, and Humanities, Human Services, Environment, and Education sectors. The Hawai'i Community Foundation is the Cooke Foundation's grants administrator. For more information about the Cooke Foundation, please visit www.cookefoundationlimited.org.

About The Hawai'i Community Foundation

The vision of the Hawai'i Community Foundation is to create an equitable and vibrant Hawai'i in which all our Island communities thrive. With our more-than-108-year history, our trusted expertise, and the generous support of donors, we are working to address the root causes of our state's most difficult challenges, including expanding access to affordable housing, conserving freshwater resources, and ensuring the healthy development of Hawai'i's young children. We focus our efforts through the CHANGE Framework, which identifies six essential sectors affecting the overall well-being of these islands and their people. HCF works in communities across Hawai'i, with offices and staff located statewide. In 2024, HCF stewarded more than 1,160 funds, established by individuals, businesses, and organizations who share our passion for a better Hawai'i. We distributed over \$172 million in grants to the community from funds at HCF, contracts, and private foundations statewide, including scholarships assisting more than 1,100 Hawai'i students. For more information about HCF, please visit Hawaiicommunityfoundation.org and follow our social media channels on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube.