

U.S. ATTORNEY ED KUBO
PAHOA WEED AND SEED - GRANT ANNOUNCEMENT
Hawaii County Council Chambers
Monday, August 28, 2006

Aloha. Three years ago, I had the unique experience of visiting the town of Pahoia. At that time, I had heard that the town was seriously deteriorating with crime; that it was infested with drug dealers, and that its citizens were fearful of even being in town.

On that day, while still in my business suit, — Mitch Roth took me to Pahoia to see the area. At one point in the middle of town, Mitch pulled the car over when he got a cellphone call. During his conversation, a Pahoia gentleman walked up to my side of the car and offered to sell me drugs.

I looked at this gentleman with complete surprise, and asked him to repeat himself. He did. Although totally speechless, I declined his offer, and we then drove off.

In my mind, this event firmly convinced me that this neighborhood needed assistance to rid itself of crime and to reclaim their neighborhood.

One year later, Pahoia became Hawaii's only Neighbor Island - Federally Designated Weed and Seed site.

As you know, this designation allowed for more aggressive "weeding" of the criminal element in the area — providing them with special treatment in state and federal court.

But, this designation also allowed us to work with the community to encourage and assist them to "seed" the area with social events and programs, — and, this provides the community with a chance to reclaim and revitalize itself.

Weed and Seed is a strategy which brings together all sectors of our community — law enforcement, community leaders, businesses, educators, faith based organizations, volunteers, and many others.

We are all a team, — actively working together with a goal towards reducing crime and making our neighborhoods a safer place to live.

In Pahoia, it has made a remarkable difference and has increased their town's quality of life. Concerned Pahoia residents were at the heart of this revitalization and I want to thank them for their efforts.

Even though they were not initially funded, they embraced the Weed and Seed Strategy and vowed to make a difference in their community.

That is why it is with great pleasure that I'm able to formally announce that the Pahoa Weed and Seed Program has been awarded a \$175,000 grant to assist the site in its ongoing revitalization efforts.

[AWARD OF \$175,000 CHECK]

In addition to this money, I am also happy to announce that the Pahoa Weed and Seed Site will receive more than \$15,000 from the Hawaii-Project Safe Neighborhoods Program.

[AWARD OF \$15,000 CHECK]

These monies will further assist Pahoa in ongoing projects which are intended to make their community even safer.

Now, I would be here all day if I tried to thank everyone who has played a role in their success, but I do want to acknowledge:

Pahoa's Site Coordinator: Lon Brown
Steering Committee Chair: Lori Enriquez,
and Committee Chairs:

Rene Siracusa,
Madie Green,
Pastor Allen Tamashiro,
Ed Morris,
Kenn Nagasawa,
Lu Kahapea,
Blayne Hanagami,
Mary Hyslop, and
Denyse Temple.

And, I apologize if I missed any present or past chairs.

But, equally important, I would like to thank the man who made everyone from Hawaii to Washington stop and listen to the problems facing this island . . . Mayor Harry Kim. Thank you Mr. Mayor, for your leadership in our fight against drug abuse on this island.

My thanks also to Councilman Gary Safarik, who has been committed to Pahoa Weed and Seed from the beginning.

I would also like to thank Hawaii County Prosecuting Attorney Jay Kimura — and Police Chief Lawrence Mahuna for their tireless efforts, and in providing additional resources in order to make a difference in Pahoa.

Now, I am especially moved by the support shown by Prosecutor Kimura who diverted significant funds from his Byrne Grant to fund a Weed and Seed Site Coordinator position, and by Councilman Safarik who transferred funds from his Council Discretionary Fund to support Youth Development in Pahoia.

My thanks also go to the YMCA for joining the partnership and agreeing to be the Fiscal Agent for Pahoia Weed and Seed. At times, being the fiscal agent can be very frustrating, and I applaud them for their continued commitment.

Last but not least, I want to thank my representative for Weed and Seed on the Big Island . . . Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Mitchell Roth for his dedication and commitment to this community.

As you can see, this truly has been a team effort. And, I am so very proud of what Pahoia has achieved.

Prior to receiving their Official Recognition in 2004, they adopted and implemented the Weed and Seed Strategy . . . all of this with no money — but, with a great deal of determination and commitment.

Their accomplishments have caught everyone's attention, and I believe formed the basis for these federal grants.

Through sheer willpower, Pahoia has regained control over their community by successfully establishing (among other things):

- Neighborhood Watch Programs,
- Town Security Camera Systems,
- Inter-Faith Alliances,
- Youth Activities, and
- Youth Development and Work Development Programs.

I was also honored to assist in supporting the Pahoia High School Culinary Arts Program with Chef Sam Choy this past school year. Our anti-drug presentations to the student body at the school gym produced a lot of positive comments from the students and teachers who were there that day.

The Pahoia Weed and Seed Program has also sponsored a Job Fair, Get High on Life Fair, Summer Youth Concerts, and Beautification Projects.

Even in the face of continued vandalism, they have pushed onward and have not given up on their important community beautification projects. Clearly, this community has the pride it takes to succeed, and I applaud their efforts.

Thus, there is no doubt, I have the utmost faith that they will win their battle because it is very evident they are succeeding now in reclaiming their neighborhood and increasing their quality of life.

With all of this Federal Funding, the Pahoia Weed and Seed Program will continue to MAKE A DIFFERENCE, and I'm excited about the future projects that they are planning — and, I am definitely PROUD to be a partner in your efforts. Congratulations, — you definitely deserve it because of your hard work.

In closing, I want to again emphasize that as long as I'm the U.S. Attorney for Hawaii, our federal law enforcement will continue to make our presence known in Pahoia and on this island.

As a local boy, I have a vested interest in the quality of life here, and I intend to do all that I can to make the Big Island a safer place for our families, and for our visitors.

Thank you for having me this morning and thank you for coming. Aloha.