

15th Wing

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Posted 6/7/2010 Updated 6/8/2010 Email story Print story

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6/7/2010 - JOINT BASE PERAL HARBOR HICKAM, Hawaii -- It was another record setting year at Ho'omaluhia Botanical Gardens as Hickam children landed 732 fish.

Keiki, the Hawaiian word for children, caught 283 more fish this year over last year's record-setting 449 fish at the 11th Annual Keiki Fishing Tournament, hosted by Friends of Hickam, June 2 at the Ho'omaluhia Botanical Gardens. What started as a suggestion a little more than 11 years ago has become a legacy for the Friends of Hickam.

"The main purpose was to get Hickam families together for an outdoor event to promote family welfare," said Kyle Nakamura, Friends of Hickam keiki fishing tournament co-chairman. "It's part of the Hawaiian Aloha spirit. It all comes from the heart."

The keiki fishing tournament is right in line with the Friends of Hickam mission. They serve as facilitators between Hickam Airmen and the Hawaii community. They seek to support, promote and foster stronger community relations.

"Anytime you have an event that drives people away from their work stations and to their families is a great day," said Chief Master Sgt. Craig Recker, 15th Wing Command chief master sergeant. "This is a long running tradition and every year we draw more and more families. It's a great opportunity for our Friends of Hickam to invite our Air Force families out here and we can enjoy a day of fun and sunshine. It's a great thing for our kids to come out here and bring their parents with them."

Chief Recker said this is a welcomed event each year because Airmen and their families are dealing with more and more deployments year in and year out.

"As an Air Force, we continue to be busier then we have ever been and unfortunately our families sometimes pay those prices," he said. "So when we can tear away from our duty sections and spend a little time with our families, it's a win for us and a win for our families. We can't pay them back for all they sacrifice for us."

The epicenter of the day was focused on the children and the time spent with their families. From food to entertainment, the children and their parents were treated to a full day of fun in the sun in the valley of the Koolau Mountains.

The children and their parents arrived at the gardens to the wafting aroma of pizza and hot dogs. They filled their bellies and washed it down with a cold drink, but it was the lake down the hill that they kept looking at ready to get their hooks wet. All the ingredients were donations of time and money from all over Oahu.

With anticipation at its highest, everyone hiked their way around the reservoir to the fishing grounds. At the waterside, more than 150 hooks hit the water almost simultaneously. Between clapping cheers when someone pulled in a fish and the dreaded "Ahhhh" when the big one spit out the hook, children stood on the edge of the lake eyeballing their bobbers intently, anticipating it disappearing under water.

"There are keiki here that have never caught a fish before and at first tug on the line, they will never ever forget it," said Steve Takekawa, Ho'omaluhia Botanical Gardens. "Friends of Hickam do a wonderful job. I most enjoy...the excitement coming off the bus. Even better, is when they are going home tired with smiles, especially on the little ones."

The odds were in the children's favor. Over the past three years, the children have set new records each year. In 2008, the number of fish caught totaled a then record setting 363 fish. Anticipating another record year, the children pulled in 449 fish in 2009. No one expected to more than double the amount caught from 2008.

The tournament was divided into boys and girls categories, and awards were handed out for most fish and the largest fish. Tournament winner for the boys was Ryan Strong, 10, who caught 28 fish, breaking last year's overall record of 21. For the girls, Kristina Poe, 12, made the most of her last opportunity by catching 27 on her way to being the girls champion and setting the mark.

"It was actually pretty cool," said Kristina Poe, 12. "This was my last year and I wanted to try and come out as good as I could. I did the best that I could."

This was her second time fishing in the tournament in three years, missing last year because of a trip back to the Mainland. In her first attempt, she caught the biggest fish at 12-and-a-half inches. This was her last attempt for two reasons: she will turn thirteen before the next tournament and her family is moving to a new assignment. She said this year was "amazing," especially getting to spend the day with her dad.

"Me and dad are like a tornado," she said. "Whenever were together it's like nothing can stop us."

At the end of the day, they were fished out, but not a single child walked away from their experience with empty hands. Though they were not going to be able to take the fish they caught home for dinner, each one received a door prize from the Friends of Hickam.

"It was fantastic," said Barbara Southworth, an Air Force spouse. "We had an absolute ball. Our goal was for everyone to catch a fish and we did more than that."


From fishing poles and tackle boxes to footballs and volleyballs, the Hawaiian isles will be a nice playground for the keiki's new toys.

"We just got here a couple of months ago and could not believe what a great opportunity this was," said Master Sgt. Mike Hammond, Pacific Air Forces Headquarters staff. "We are just very grateful to the Friends of Hickam and everyone who put on this great event. It's a great opportunity to come out here with the family and spend good time and win some prizes and catch some fish."

In an e-mail sent to the Friends of Hickam thanking them for a wonderful event, they detailed their children's experience saying it was the first time they have ever caught a fish. Though they have made two previous attempts in their young lives to catch a fish, they were skunked until this fishing tournament. Being new to Hickam, the letter said the tournament made their new assignment here feel more like home. Their youngest son wore the batting gloves he won as a prize to bed that night, still excited about having caught his first fish.

Editor's Note: Friends of Hickam would like to extend a heartfelt mahalo to the following individuals and businesses that have contributed their time and donated generously to make the Keiki Fishing Tournament a success. Click here for the full document

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Photos 1 of 11

JOINT BASE PERAL HARBOR HICKAM, Hawaii -- Tayona Thomas, 10, hesitates as she prepares to give one of the fish she caught a kiss before she releases it back into the reservoir during the Keiki Fishing Tournament, hosted by Friends of Hickam, June 2 at the Ho'omaluhia Botanical Gardens. Keiki, the Hawaiian word for children, caught a tournament record 732 fish. This is the 11th straight year the Friends of Hickam has hosted the event for more than 200 children every year. (U.S. Air Force photo/SSgt. Mike Meares)
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Friends of Hickam
Fishing Tournament
64
Ma Hammond
Age: 9 (F)







11th Annual Friends of Hickam
Keiki Fishing Tournament
175
Tayona Thomas
Age 10 (F)