

Memorial for fallen officers was lasting quest

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Joan Gribbin-Aiu tirelessly pursued her lifelong dream to create a memorial for Hawaii's fallen law enforcement officers despite an intense personal battle with a disease bent on taking her life.

Last year the Hawaii Law Enforcement Memorial Foundation, which Gribbin-Aiu founded, was successful in persuading the state to donate a parcel of land next to the Kalanimoku Building for the memorial.



Joan Gribbin-Aiu:
Despite a painful battle with cancer, she kept pushing for a law enforcement memorial

Gribbin-Aiu died Tuesday at the Queen's Medical Center following a six-year battle with breast cancer that had spread to her liver, vertebrae, rib cage, pelvic bone, skull and brain. She was 46.

Leaders in the law enforcement community said Hawaii could well have remained the only state without an officers' memorial if not for Gribbin-Aiu.

"It was her idea," said longtime federal law enforcement official Sydney Hayakawa, who recalled when Gribbin-Aiu and her husband, law enforcement officer Thomas Aiu, first enlisted him for his support. "I wouldn't ever have thought about it."

"Joanie knew the importance of having a place where officers, their families and the public could go to reflect and remember fallen officers, and she was instrumental in establishing and leading the foundation that will make the memorial a reality," said Honolulu Police Chief Louis Kealoha.

"Without her tireless efforts, we would not have made the progress we've made."

Gribbin-Aiu started the push for a memorial several years ago when she grew weary of hearing how officers' survivors had to travel to Washington, D.C., each May to visit a memorial honoring their heroes.

Among those dissatisfied with the situation was Gribbin-Aiu's daughter Tiffany Johnson. Johnson's father, HPD SWAT officer Bryant Bayne, was killed during a helicopter crash, part of a rescue operation at Sacred Falls in 1995.

Hayakawa, who joined the memorial foundation board, said Gribbin-Aiu kept focused on making the memorial a reality even when it became obvious to everyone around her that she was in great pain.

"She was walking with a limp and sometimes a cane," Hayakawa said. "I mean, how could you not be encouraged and inspired? You could not say no."

Born in Philadelphia, Gribbin-Aiu moved to Hawaii as a child with her family and spent most of her life here.

Lifelong friend Sara Daly said Gribbin-Aiu constantly put her family, friends and even strangers before herself.

"Throughout her battle with cancer, she was always doing something for one of the kids' classes or sports groups, or for her family or friends," Daly said. "If she found that someone was just diagnosed with cancer, she would talk to them to help them adjust. She would not slow down, even on those days that the pain should have kept her in bed."

With the land for the memorial secured, the foundation is now focused on raising construction funds. The foundation still needs about \$500,000 before construction can begin, Hayakawa said.

For her efforts to create a memorial, Gribbin-Aiu was selected one of the Star-Advertiser's 10 Who Made A Difference in 2010.

Besides her husband, Gribbin-Aiu is survived by sons Wyatt K. Aiu and Weston M. Aiu; daughters Tiffany K.K. (Bayne-Aiu) Johnson and Madison K.S. Aiu; mother Mary Rayco; brothers Mike, Joe and George Gribbin; sister Kim Ortega; a grandson; nieces and nephews; uncles and aunts.

Services will be held Jan. 28 at Sacred Heart Church on the grounds of Maryknoll Grade School on Dole Street. Visit from 9-11 a.m. Mass at 11. Celebration of life at 1 p.m. Aloha attire.

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