

Woman advocates officers' memorial

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COURTESY MINAKO KENT

Joan Gribbin-Aiu, left, founder of the Hawaii Law Enforcement Memorial Foundation, at a fundraiser with daughter Tiffany Johnson. Johnson's father, police SWAT officer Bryant Bayne, was killed in 1995 during a rescue operation at Sacred Falls.

A longtime dream to create a memorial to honor Hawaii law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty took a major step forward this year thanks in large part to the efforts of Joan Gribbin-Aiu.

Gribbin-Aiu and her nonprofit Hawaii Law Enforcement Memorial Foundation successfully lobbied the Legislature to pass a resolution paving the way for land to be set aside for a memorial on state grounds in the Capitol District to honor the 60 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty in Hawaii since 1903.

Originally slated to go on the Diamond Head lawn of the Capitol, foundation board members opted instead to ask for a more quiet yet equally accessible location nearby. They got it—a tranquil, flat lawn area on the Diamond Head side of the Kalanimoku Building with a municipal parking lot across the street.

"It was her initiative that got us going," said Sydney Hayakawa, former federal security director for the Transportation Security Administration at Honolulu Airport and a member of the foundation board.

The foundation, which was founded by Gribbin-Aiu, held a 1,000-person gala benefit earlier this month to raise money for the project. The Legislature's resolution specified that while the state should donate the land, funding for the memorial needs to come from private sources.

THEY MADE A DIFFERENCE

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While the proceeds from the banquet and a silent auction have yet to be tallied, Gribbin-Aiu estimated the event got the group to about 20 percent of the \$1 million it believes is necessary to make the memorial a reality.

"The support from the community was unbelievable," Gribbin-Aiu said. While her group anticipated gaining support from the law enforcement community, people from all walks of life in Hawaii rallied behind the effort.

People couldn't believe there was no statewide memorial to Hawaii's fallen law enforcement officers, she said. "People always just assumed there was one," she said.

MANY PEOPLE stepped forward to buy \$2,000 banquet tables so families of the 60 officers killed in the line of duty in Hawaii could attend for free, she said.

Gribbin-Aiu started the push for a memorial several years ago when she got tired of hearing how the 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, Honolulu Police Department SWAT officer Bryant Bayne, was killed during a rescue operation at Sacred Falls in 1995.

Hayakawa was the federal Drug Enforcement Agency's agent-in-charge at the time. He recalls meeting Tiffany, who was then 7 years old. The image of the grief-stricken girl still haunts him, he said.

A bigger argument can be made that a statewide memorial should be established in Hawaii because of its distance from the mainland.

"A lot of us can't afford to go to Washington, D.C.," said Hayakawa, who's spent 39 years in federal, state and local law enforcement agencies.

One of five models designed by students at the University of Hawaii for the memorial was selected by the people who attended the gala. It still needs approval from the state Department of Accounting and General Services, Gribbin-Aiu said.

Meanwhile, she said, the group is gearing up for a huge fundraising effort in 2011.

Johnson struck a nerve with Gribbin-Aiu one day as they were discussing the plans for the memorial.

"When we visit Dad's grave, I can't help but be sad," Gribbin-Aiu said she remembered her daughter saying. "But now when I go this memorial, it'll be something to be proud of. Anybody's name can be on a headstone, but not everybody's name is on a memorial."

For more information and to contribute to the memorial fund, go to www.hlemf.org.

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