NOURISH 'OHANA

ATHLETE CAUSES

Full Circle

Looking back to pay it forward, Kamalani Dung pitches in for Hawaii's hungry communities p.6

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An undeniable desire to serve with servant hearts

On March 6, Gov. David Ige confirmed Hawaii’s first case of what was then called the new coronavirus. An O’ahu man, who was a passenger on the Grand Princess cruise from California to Mexico, fell ill after flying home.

It was later confirmed that he had been exposed to other infected passengers on his trip. Five days later, on March 11, COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic in the United States.

The holiday season is now upon us, and March now feels like an eternity ago for most of us. Our hearts and prayers go out to families and friends whose lives have been impacted by the health crisis. The virus has lingered far longer than any of us could have imagined. In the process, it has taken a devastating toll on human lives, Hawaii’s healthcare system and our local economy.

According to the University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization (UHERO), Hawaii’s economy won’t see any “meaningful” recovery until the middle of next year. Even with the reboot of Hawaii’s visitor industry on Oct. 15, UHERO doesn’t expect gains in tourism until at least the second half of 2021 – after a vaccine is potentially widely available.

Yet despite these enormous challenges and the inevitable long road to full recovery, we keep pushing forward.

There is still much hope and positivity in this place we call home. I’m not surprised – it is who we are. You keep us inspired. Our gratitude for your support and commitment to our community never wanes – no matter what the circumstances.

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The people of Hawaii are one ‘ohana. Hawaii Foodbank provides food so that no one in our family goes hungry. We work to gather food and support from our communities. We then distribute food through charitable agencies to those in need. Our mission is from the heart, and we will fulfill our mission with integrity, humanity and aloha.

Nourish Our ‘Ohana is the official newsletter of Hawaii Foodbank. This publication serves to thank our donors and inform the public about Hawaii Foodbank events, volunteer opportunities, community partnerships and more. If you do not wish to receive a copy, please email donorservices@hawaiifoodbank.org or call 808-954-7853 to have your name removed from our mailing list.
Please know, every decision we make is fully aligned with our goal of earning and maintaining your trust in our mission. From a protocol perspective, Hawaii Foodbank continues to carefully monitor and comply with COVID-19 guidelines. As Hawaii Foodbank supporters, you have our commitment that we won’t let our guard down prematurely. We recognize we are still in the midst of a pandemic, and the virus is still active in our communities.

Our COVID-19 protocols will continue to evolve as we adopt additional best practices. We have successfully and safely distributed more than 20 million pounds of food to our communities since mid-March, and we understand the needs are not going away anytime soon. Until then, we will manage expectations and prepare accordingly for what the coming weeks and, likely, months ahead will look like for our organization and the families who depend on our services.

Over the last nine months, we have received inspiring messages of encouragement and appreciation from the community we serve, and we have witnessed countless examples of heartfelt support and generosity. In turn, our team has responded with innovative initiatives, flexible ideas and new programs. We have adjusted and adapted – motivated by our mission-based work and an undeniable desire to serve with servant hearts.

To our devoted Hawaii Foodbank employees on O’ahu and Kaua’i, I cannot say it enough: I am so proud of you. I remain comforted daily by your consistent, thoughtful, dedicated efforts.

Together, we will #RiseResiliently.

With respect and aloha,

Ron Mizutani,
Hawaii Foodbank President and CEO
Drafting change, building nourishment
15th annual Canstruction® goes virtual, raising more than $59,000 for Hawaii’s hungry

Each year, AIA Honolulu’s Canstruction® competition brings together teams of local architects and allied design and engineering professionals – inviting them to put their building skills to the test and create giant canned sculptures in front of a live, public audience. The event has raised more than 400,000 pounds of food over the past 14 years.

This year, the highly-anticipated annual event was set to take place at Kahala Mall. But, as was the case with many events this year, circumstances changed. In accordance with social distancing mandates and public safety precautions, 2020 saw the first-ever virtual Canstruction®. This year, five teams – Bowers + Kubota & Belt Collins, Ferraro Choi & Nordic PCL, G70, HDR and Swinerton Builders – each received 500 cans of Vienna sausage and one hour to build mini designs. Teams worked one at a time, over two days, in a safety bubble. The public was then invited to watch time lapse videos of the teams building their structures and cast their votes online. This year, one vote was counted for every dollar donated to Hawaii Foodbank. On top of that, Brent Tokita, president of RMA Architects Inc. and former AIA Hawaii state council president committed a $10,000 match to all the funds raised by AIA Honolulu and those who vote in the People’s Choice Award competition.

Altogether, the virtual event raised enough to help provide food for nearly 150,000 meals. Mahalo nui to the organizers, participating teams, volunteers and all those involved in making this year’s Canstruction® a success. Hawaii Foodbank is incredibly grateful for this generous display of flexibility, creativity and kindness.

Groceries that give back
Check-Out Hunger this season with Hawaii Foodbank and Hawaiian Springs Water

Shoppers can help put food on the table for hungry Hawaii residents this holiday season with Check-Out Hunger. Hawaiian Springs Water is sponsoring this year’s campaign and generously kicked things off by donating 90 cases of water to Hawaii Foodbank. Check-Out Hunger takes place Nov. 2, 2020, through Jan. 15, 2021, at Times Supermarkets, Tamura’s Fine Wine & Liquors and Tamura Super Market.

“We’re so grateful to Hawaiian Springs Water for stepping in to support this signature holiday fundraiser,” said Beverly Santos, director of food drive and events. “Their generosity helps underwrite the costs of the program, so that we can put more food on the table for Hawaii’s families.” Check-Out Hunger makes it easy for everyone to make a major difference by giving the gift of food this holiday season. All shoppers have to do is tear off a bright-green coupon at check-out, and the selected total is added to their bill. They can tear off a coupon to feed a child breakfast for a week, a senior lunch for a month or a family dinner for a week.

“We are so excited to be this year’s Check-Out Hunger sponsor. This year has hit more local families harder than ever before. We know that so many people are relying on Hawaii Foodbank to feed their families, and we hope our partnership can help those in need,” added Heather Pence, vice president of sales at Hawaiian Springs Water.

Contributions made on each island will remain on that island in order to assist local keiki, kūpuna and families in need. Since its launch in 1993, Check-Out Hunger has raised more than 3 million dollars.
Pop-up Food Distributions
New food assistance opportunities available

In response to the ongoing food assistance needs across O‘ahu and Kaua‘i, Hawaii Foodbank is establishing new community partnerships, as well as working with its existing network of food partner agencies, to deploy new methods of food distribution. A series of Pop-up Food Distributions have been established to provide emergency food, fresh produce, and other items to vulnerable households who have been affected by COVID-19.

“Even with the reboot of our visitor industry, the demand for food assistance remains extremely high,” said Ron Mizutani, president and CEO. “We are on pace to distribute more than five million pounds of food in the last two months, alone. Thousands of families are still struggling every day, and we don’t anticipate the needs slowing down in the coming months.”

These additional food distributions will target residents of specific island communities. Pre-registration will be required for each distribution, and recipients may register at HawaiiFoodbank.org/pop-up. Once registered, a confirmation ticket will be provided via email, and it must be presented at check-in along with a valid government-issued ID. Due to safety concerns, no walk-up clients will be allowed.

The Honolulu Police Department and the City’s Department of Transportation Services will manage traffic and ensure the safety of those receiving food, volunteers and the surrounding communities. The Department of Emergency Management will also assist with traffic plans and logistics.

The Pop-up Food Distributions are in addition to Hawaii Foodbank’s regular food assistance opportunities. These include food pantries, soup kitchens, ‘Ohana Produce Plus and more. To find help near you, please visit HawaiiFoodbank.org/help.

University of Hawai‘i Athletics
University of Hawai‘i Athletics held a contactless, drive-through food drive to provide some extra help to the 1 in 6 Hawaii residents struggling with hunger amid the pandemic. UH coaches and student athletes were on-hand at the Stan Sheriff Center to receive the food and say, “Mahalo.” In just four hours, the food drive collected more than 2,000 pounds. The food drive was part of UH’s #BowsTogether theme that focuses on rebuilding and unifying our community through areas such as health and safety initiatives, social justice reform, community service, and economic development programs.

Kamehameha Schools
The “Students Give Back” Club at Kamehameha Schools collected 360 pounds of food and hand-delivered it to our Kaua‘i warehouse. When asked about their motivation, the students responded, “We wanted to help, and we hope this inspires other young people to do the same.”
2020 is proving to be one doozy of a year; the highlight, of course, being COVID-19. I can’t think of one person in my life who hasn’t been affected by this pandemic – lending support to the claims that this novel coronavirus may just be the greatest equalizer our generation has seen.

It’s easy to look around and see how COVID-19 has brought out the worst in some people. Stories of hoarding, xenophobia and looting all come to mind. But the optimist in me would like to believe that these are exceptions. Although devastating, COVID-19 isn’t the first crisis or even pandemic our world has ever endured. And history has shown: the worst situations can bring out the best in people and their communities.

This could not be more evident in how the people of Hawaii have responded to this adversity in the last several months. I had the privilege of volunteering at one of Hawaii Foodbank’s Pop-up Food Distributions at Aloha Stadium – where an estimated 4,000 Hawaii households were served with produce, dairy, noodles and meat products from various donors.

I wanted to do my part to give back to my community during this difficult time and was prepared for a long, hot day of physical labor. What I wasn’t prepared for was what my community would give back to me. I was overcome with humility, gratitude, hope, strength, trust, faith and the truest form of aloha I’ve felt in a long time. It was amazing to see the army of volunteers come together so quickly and efficiently – with every volunteer in place and a place for every volunteer. The unity I felt was palpable, and the mood was kept upbeat and light with music, dancing, conversations, laughter and encouragement.

A woman I spent some time breaking down boxes with shared that she had just lost her job of 15 years and was filing for unemployment for the first time. She very well could have been one of the cars in line, but she was alongside me volunteering and offering encouragement to those we were serving. “I’ve always wanted to get involved with Hawaii Foodbank,” she said. “And now I have the time.”

It’s hard to grasp what hunger multiplied by 4,000 households looks like. To be honest, I was there – and I’m still in awe of what was accomplished that day (which was only one of many large-scale distribution events Hawaii Foodbank has spearheaded since the onset of COVID-19).

Yes, the sea of cars was overwhelming at times, and the line was endless and constant. But so were the words of gratitude, tears of joy, sighs of relief, shakas and smiles shown by each recipient. During this time of uncertainty, there are three things I am sure of: Hawaii’s people are resilient, masks can’t hide smiles and – if COVID-19 is the “great equalizer” – aloha is an even greater unifier.

I was overcome with humility, gratitude, hope, strength, trust, faith and the truest form of aloha I’ve felt in a long time.”
Looking back to pay it forward, Kamalani Dung pitches in for Hawaii's hungry communities

Story by RON MIZUTANI
Photos © ATHLETES UNLIMITED LLC, 2020

Professional softball player Kamalani Dung has experienced many highs and lows in her 23 years of life, and she’s grateful for each and every one of them. Kamalani has traveled the globe playing the game she first learned at the age of 10, living out her dreams while enjoying the world’s different cultures and all that they have to offer.

But life wasn’t always this wonderful.

“All of us hit low points in our lives, and that’s the important story I’d like to tell,” reflects Kamalani. “I’ve experienced rock bottom, but I’ve learned – it’s nothing to be ashamed about.”

Kamalani and her siblings grew up in a humble home in Wai’anae with their parents Honey and Lance. The couple worked hard to give their children a good life, including a

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good education. Kamalani was accepted into Kamehameha Schools as a kindergartner. Her daily routine included a 4 a.m. wake-up call and a two-hour bus ride to school.

“My childhood was awesome. At the time, I didn’t really realize what was happening; as far I knew, life was good,” says Kamalani. “We didn’t mind eating saimin for dinner or lunch. We shared what we had and didn’t think twice about it. It’s only when I looked back and saw how fortunate other people were did I realize things were different at our home.”

Life really changed at home when Kamalani entered high school. Her parents separated, and her mom encountered health challenges. The hardships and adversities intensified.

“There were times when we slept in our car. There were times when we relied on other people for food, money, shelter and a living room floor to lay on. But those moments – they made me the person I am today,” says Kamalani. “I come from a place of being grateful for all of the small things that a lot of people take for granted. Those times were terrible, but – even when we were hungry or didn’t have a place to sleep – we smiled through it all.”

Softball was Kamalani’s outlet, and she was darn good at it. While she credits her father for teaching her the game, she admits she also learned to pitch watching YouTube videos. Kamalani was a four-year varsity starter and captain at Kamehameha, where she led the team to three championships. College coaches started calling her the “YouTube” pitcher after learning she was self-taught.

Kamalani signed with Fresno State and went on to lead the Bulldogs to a Mountain West Conference Championship as a true freshman. The following year, she was named the Mountain West Pitcher of the Year and was an All-Mountain West First Team selection after winning 26 games with 218 strikeouts.

Her success continued in 2017, when the hard-throwing right-hander transferred to Cal Berkeley, where she won 19 games in her first season with the Bears – including the first perfect game of her career.

Kamalani battled injuries during the first half of her senior season but still ranked 10th in the Top 25 Names in College Softball. The Puerto Rican Women’s National Softball Team eventually extended an invite to join them, and Kamalani responded by leading the team to its first gold medal at the Central American Games in more than 20 years.

In 2020, Kamalani signed to play professionally with National Pro Fast Pitch’s Los Angeles-based California Commotion. She also signed on to take part in Athletes Unlimited’s inaugural softball season.
Then, COVID-19 hit — but Kamalani and Athletes Unlimited hit back. After a summer that saw the cancellation of most sports events, Athletes Unlimited’s innovative softball league model enabled players and teams to compete safely at Chicago’s Ballpark at Rosemont.

For Kamalani, the added spotlight presented an opportunity to demonstrate more than just her athletic prowess. Understanding her responsibility to make a difference, Kamalani saw it her kuleana to provide a voice for those suffering with hunger back home.

“Since I have a voice, it’s important that I use it and let as many people know there’s always a way — and you’re not alone,” says Kamalani. “I think it’s important for Hawaii organizations that are doing amazing work just like Hawaii Foodbank to be put on the national level. If I’m playing on ESPN and CBS Sports every weekend, why not showcase such an amazing organization like Hawaii Foodbank? They’re doing something that means so much to so many people, especially right now during the pandemic.”

Kamalani has taken it one step further by choosing to team with Hawaii Foodbank through the Athlete Causes initiative.

“At the end of the year, you partner with a charity of your choice,” explains Kamalani. “I’m getting a bonus depending on where I fall on the charts. However much my bonus is, Athletes Unlimited will match half of it and donate it to a charity of our choice. I chose Hawaii Foodbank. This is a full circle moment for me.”

Full circle. Because she’s been there. She’s lived it and seen it first-hand. For Kamalani, Hawaii Foodbank’s mission is personal.

“Someone once said, ‘Be the person you needed when you were younger,’” reflects Kamalani. “I’m going to carry that for life. It’s one of my favorite quotes, and I’ll always try to live up to it. I want to be the person that gave me the extra push that sent me in the right direction. Hopefully, I can do the same for many other Hawaii athletes and many other Hawaii families.”

Her message to those enduring the many challenges created by the global pandemic is one of hope and undeniable support.

“You may not have shelter over your head. You may not always have food in your pantry. But know — there’s always someone who is rooting for you,” says Kamalani. “I hope putting on display my support for organizations like Hawaii Foodbank will let young people and families know people are here to support you — no matter what your current situation is. Things will get better.”

The name Kamalani means royal or heavenly child. How very appropriate for this young professional athlete who is a true gift to the world from Hawaii.
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