

Unsung Nā Me'e: The Plutas

By Jasmine Hanner, Content Coordinator
Photography by Chloe Cryan

Joseph “Joe” Pluta was recently named as one of the Maui Peace Heroes of 2019. Every year, The Maui Seasons for Peace organization recognizes 4 individuals and one organization in an awards ceremony. Their stated criteria for selection is that the individual or organization:

- Moves our community in the direction of peace through their practice of nonviolence
- Serves as an unsung ambassador of goodwill who unselfishly donates time, talent, energy and resources for the greater good
- Is generous at heart, doing deeds that often go unnoticed
- Is committed to making a positive significant difference in our community

Anyone who knows Joe will be nodding their heads crazily as they read about this fitting honor bestowed on one of the pillars of our Maui (and especially West Maui) community. Joe and his wife, Carole Joy, have been members of the Rotary Club of Lāhainā for decades (Joe 40 years, Carole 20 years), and together have been a strong presence in the West Maui area for many years. The hobbies they enjoy the most are church, volunteer work, supporting the local community, and following their favorite sports teams (mainly NFL and NBA). Joe and Carole Joy have a deep love and respect for the ocean, the ‘aina, and are both committed in serving Jesus Christ in their faith. Aside from endeavoring to share the love and light of Christ in their daily lives, they both also make a sincere effort in serving the Lord through their church, “Church on the Go, Inc.”

Church on the Go (COTG) is led by Senior Pastor Laki Pomaikai Ka’ahumanu, with Joe serving as president of the nonprofit organisation. Literally “on-the-go,” this place of worship doesn’t claim a physical place,

per se. Instead of an actual building, it’s primarily a TV ministry (available on AKAKU TV on Sunday’s channel 54 at 5pm) that also reaches out to the homebound, ministers to our prisons, and performs wedding ceremonies. A little-known yet incredible fact about Pastor Laki is that he is the great, great grandson of Queen Ka’ahumanu, wife of King Kamehameha, who was the first to historically unite the islands of Hawai’i under one kingdom. “For years and years, Pastor Laki has used his resources for the benefit of his fellow people who have needed his help and guidance,” Joe said admiringly. “His spirit of Aloha is unsurpassed, and his services are filled with his wonderful Hawaiian spirit, history and legacy, while supporting his wonderful work in our community, to help those who need it most.”

Carole Joy’s professional legacy began over 35 years ago as the founder and principal

insurance agent of Insurance Associates Maui, Inc. (I.A. Maui). After a long successful career, she sold her thriving business and passed the torch on to her daughter, Mahealani (Kalua) Strong, several years ago. Mahealani, Ikela Kalua, and Ezekiel “Zeke” Kalua are Carole Joy’s children from a previous marriage. According to Carole Joy and Joe, one of their greatest joys are their seven wonderful grandchildren. Mahealani and her husband Jamal have four children: Brianna, Shekainah, Jeremiah and Mariah Strong; and Zeke and his wife Kelly have three children: Kenny, Kaiulani, and Kolomona Kalua. Carole Joy is a proud long-time member of the West Maui Taxpayers Association in a family membership with Joe.

Joe graduated from UH Mānoa Shidler College of Business at The University of Hawai’i with a Bachelor of Business degree and a double major in Travel Industry Management and Real Estate in 1974. Just over a decade later, he was inducted into the “Hall of Honors” of the University Of Hawai’i School of Travel Industry Management. Joe twice served as the president of the alumni association of the School of Travel Industry Management, and is currently on the board of directors of Travel Industry Management International, Inc. (the Alumni Association) as the Maui island representative. For over 42 years, Joe has been a licensed real estate broker in the state of Hawai’i. To say he knows his way around Maui is putting it very lightly. But he considers his big family his greatest asset, and he loves visiting his mainland family whenever he can. His two daughters from a previous marriage, Jennifer Lynn (Pluta) DiGiacomo and Alexandra Danielle Pluta, both live in sunny California.





When they are not out campaigning for the community or working on a project, Carole Joy and Joe enjoy spending their rare free time at their home in Wahikuli...

One of the major accomplishments in furthering his “Betterment of Maui” agenda is the effort Joe has continually invested in pushing for a West Maui Hospital. The campaign to bring a much-needed hospital to our isolated West Maui community began over 20 years ago, and still continues today. “As we no longer have any official role in the West Maui Hospital and have been relegated to the sidelines, we can only continue to pray for the successful financing for the construction of this urgently needed facility,” Joe confided. His agenda doesn’t stop there, though. Joe is also a founding board member of the West Maui Improvement Foundation (an organization whose mission is to improve the West Maui Community by receiving and expending funds for the erection and maintenance of public buildings and services as well as community facilities such as our West Maui Hospital and Medical Center); and a founding board member of the West Maui Taxpayers Association (WMTA). WMTA’s many accomplishments include but are not limited to:

- Obtained a \$500,000 grant for developing the Lāhainā Skate Park
- Obtained a \$90,000 grant to improve Pohaku Park (S-Turns) in Kahana
- Lobbied for \$250,000 grant to improve the Lāhainā Youth Center

- Lobbied for the creation and completion of Nāpili Park
- Supported Affordable Housing approvals resulting in development of Front Street Apartments, Residences at Kahana Village, and upcoming Stanford Carr-Weinberg Project-Kahoma Village
- Successfully lobbied for the development of the Lāhainā Aquatic Center
- Original lobbyist for the Lāhainā Bypass
- Lobbied for the creation of the newly

- established Lāhainā Senior Center
- Privately raised funds needed to build Napili fire and ambulance station
- Lobbied for and is helping create the West Maui Emergency Plan (for more information visit www.westmaui.org/emergency-planning)
- Lobbied to update Lāhainā Civic Center to a full fledged safety shelter
- Lobbied for a Mā’alaea Emergency Assistance Vehicle
- Successfully lobbied for \$85,000 to



purchase two emergency vehicles to aid in transport of the H.I.T.T. team (Highway Incident Traffic Team)

- Successfully lobbied for the return of Maui County's Air Ambulance system

Where does Joe get the drive wake up every morning and put in the same, consistently powerful effort to tackle so many important issues for our people and island? "I don't know," he admitted. "But I think it's a combination of God helping me, and staying so busy that my PTSD can't overwhelm me." Joe served our country in the Vietnam war, in combat, and was diagnosed with a certified disability of PTSD (which he doesn't hesitate to talk about on his mission to help others). He went on, "Carole and I read a lot of devotions together every day... 24 books every day, with a paragraph from each. I've learned to cast my cares to Jesus. Whenever issues come up, I say, "Hey Jesus, catch!" He paused. "I just keep casting my cares to the one who can handle everything."

"Things have changed so much, everything used to be so macho... at least in Chicago it was [when he was younger]. You had to have your hair greased back, no hat. Haha! I was like a little Elvis." He



laughed. "But one of the things has always been ingrained in me is that there is no such thing as an unimportant person. God made everyone a masterpiece, including you. Every single living being is a masterpiece lovingly created by God. There are no "un-masterpieces". There is no limitation. Every single human being has unlimited divine potential. As a young man I had a lot of adversities in my life growing up without

a dad, and spending a year in an orphanage with my younger brother while my mom learned English." He contemplated that for a moment. "I didn't have a childhood, because I had to become an adult around 4 or 5 years old. But God has special care and consideration for people who don't have a father or a mother to take care of them."

Joe and others are still working to implement the West Maui Emergency Plan with West Maui Taxpayers Association. A recent meeting assigned people organizational positions on the emergency plan's chart. "A buy-in from the government would be great, so that we have a dedicated paid team like firemen or police," Joe said. "Volunteers are wonderful, but it's hard to ask someone to not take care of their family and property first in an emergency."

When they are not out campaigning for the community or working on a project, Carole Joy and Joe enjoy spending their rare free time at their lovely home in Waikeolu, occasionally going on a cruise (especially Tahiti or Alaska) or working out at the gym in Wailuku where their daughter Mahealani is a co-owner. They say they love their friendly, quiet neighborhood where "everyone seems to get along"! ●



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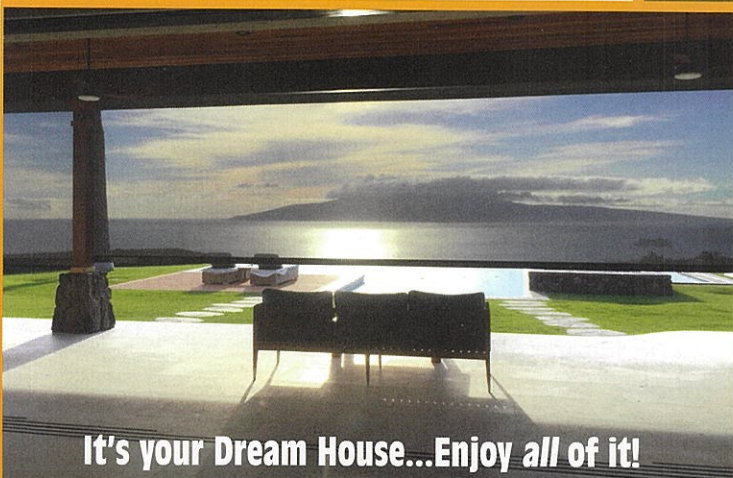
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Brazil Nut Caramel Bars



By West Maui chef Erin Dillon

“These Brazil Nut Caramel Bars hit the spot, with a rich earthiness from raw tahini, the natural sweetness of dates, a surprisingly herbal zing of rosemary... and of course you have to have the rich chocolate on top,” says local chef Erin Dillon. Erin’s recipe contains activated Brazil nuts. You can “activate” most nuts by soaking them in water and salt for 7-12 hours, then dehydrating them in the oven at a very low temperature (try 65F) to dry them out. This increases the nuts’ nutrient value while breaking down problematic compounds that can cause digestive problems. This recipe is lactose-free, gluten-free, and vegan.

Base Layer Ingredients

- 1 cup dates
- 1.5 cup activated nuts
- ¼ teaspoon fresh rosemary



Caramel Layer Ingredients

- 2 cups dates, soaked
- ½ cup raw tahini (or other nut butter)
- 2 tablespoons coconut oil
- Vanilla bean

Chocolate Layer Ingredients

- ¾ cup coconut oil
- ½ cup liquid sweetener (maple, agave, or honey)
- ¾ cup cacao powder
- 1 teaspoon coarse sea salt, to garnish

Instructions

1. Process the ingredients for the base layer and press mixture into a parchment lined 8x8 pan.
2. Process the ingredients for the caramel layer and spread over the base layer.
3. Blend the ingredients for the chocolate layer and spread over the caramel layer.
4. Freeze until solid and sprinkle with coarse sea salt. Slice, and enjoy! ●

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