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Life's a BEACH for volunteers

BY DIANA NOMURA

HAWAII KAI — When longtime friends Suzanne Frazer and Dean Otsuki began taking peaceful walks along Waimanalo Beach at the beginning of 2006, they observed things that were not so pleasant and paradise-like.

“I just couldn't believe all the marine debris on the shore that washes up,” Otsuki shared. “I started bringing a couple garbage bags with me to the beach. So while we were doing walks, I would pick up the trash, too.”



Dean Otsuki and Suzanne Frazer of Beach Environmental Awareness Campaign Hawaii are intent on keeping areas like Sandy Beach free of cigarette butts.

Oscar A. Hernandez photo

When the debris accumulated beyond what the two Hawaii Kai residents could handle, Frazer suggested they do a group type of cleanup. For a while, the two did such projects in conjunction with other organizations. Before long, however, they decided to launch the independent, nonprofit Beach Environmental Awareness Campaign of Hawaii (BEACH) last April.

Since then, the group's efforts have been almost non-stop. In fact, the next cleanup is scheduled from 3 to 5 p.m. this Saturday at Makapuu Beach.

“We are completely grass-roots volunteer, out-of-our-house-in-Hawaii Kai-run thing,” explained Frazer. “There's no money, but we try to run things as organized and professional as we can.”

So far, BEACH has worked with over 500 people, who have either participated in cleanups or helped organize them. “We don't have a formal membership, but people who care about the environment come to all our beach cleanups,” said Frazer.

One of the main purposes of beach cleanups is education. Before the actual project, Frazer and Otsuki inform community volunteers on the importance of their collective efforts.

“When (people are) out on the beach, they're doing more than just picking up rubbish,” Frazer explained. “They are clearing the beach of marine debris for a very important purpose — that is, to make sure that birds, marine mammals and humans are not affected by that debris in the future.”

BEACH is always looking for three types of volunteers.

One wants to physically participate in beach cleanups for a couple hours at a time.

The second is a support crew for those who don't necessarily want to participate in picking up marine debris but are happy to sit at a registration table, answer questions, and hand out garbage bags for a few hours.

The third is more of a long-term volunteer, who wants to get involved with BEACH and assist with organizing cleanups.

“The two of us have just put in so many volunteer hours on this work because the need was so great,” Frazer said. “We're trying to get to the point where we can get more helpers.”