

Volunteers restore life to Kalihi park site

By Diana Leone

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Deep in Kalihi Valley, past the houses and churches, 16 youths and a handful of adults worked yesterday clearing rubbish from the future Kalihi Valley Nature Park.

The 100-acre site at the end of Kalihi Street is overgrown with bamboo and other non-native plants.

On it sits a run-down house that was packed with rubbish before volunteers cleared it out.

But the site also includes native Hawaiian-made rock-wall irrigation systems, hundreds of years old, that used to feed terraced farm lots.

The land that once belonged to Princess Victoria Kamamalu, a granddaughter of Kamehameha I, was once a women's hula retreat. Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services, a health center that serves valley residents, is leading the move to restore the land to its cultural and agricultural roots.

Plans are flexible according to continuing community input, but so far on the drawing board are plans for:

>> Community gardens, where people can grow their own food on small plots.

>> Restoration of Hawaiian agricultural terraces.

>> Hiking trails.

>> A caretaker's cottage, with attached environmental classroom.

>> A nature camp, with bunk and tent camping.

>> Native forest restoration.

>> A hula mound, for practices and performances.

>> Picnic areas.

The health center has a 20-year lease with the state to manage the land. Its active-living program coordinator, Gary Gill, is in charge.

Gill, a former city councilman and former deputy director of the state Health Department, is relishing the opportunity to create an oasis of natural beauty and healthful living. He hopes to complete an environmental assessment this month. A public meeting will be held as part of that process.

Yesterday, Gill supervised a work crew from Kalihi Valley's Teen PACT (Parents and Children Together) who carted away rubbish that included a rusted-out gas canister, car and boat parts, old metal shelving and even a small rowboat.

Next week, the rotted roof of the future caretaker's home and classroom will be demolished and taken away. Students from the Honolulu Community College carpentry program will build a new roof and make other repairs to the house this fall.

Please see Park, A19

Park: Ancient rock wall on land

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Pio Faamatua Jr., 10, didn't know until yesterday's service project was almost over that he was helping prepare a park that he and his friends can use. But he liked the idea.

"This land belongs to all of us, because it's state land," Gill told the group after they'd loaded a large trash container with debris and hiked to see the Hawaiian walls. On a map of the future park, he located the area the youth had been working on yesterday and showed how much larger the whole parcel is.

"O-o-oh," several said.

"I can picture a park in this area," said Sheri Liutolo of Palama, who had five children working yesterday at the cleanup. "It's exciting to know there was hula up here, that there are Hawaiian rock walls up here."

"Instead of being a mess, it can be something that folks can take pride in," said volunteer Nancy McPherson, a University of Hawaii graduate student in urban planning. "It will take a lot of hard work. They need more volunteers."

One group that's already on board is the Kalakaua Lions Club. Members participated in a workday at the site in April and the club donated \$10,000 to the park effort.

"It's going to be quite a thing when it gets through," former club President Larry Brezee said. "I think it's going to be good for not only Kalihi, but also the people of Hawaii."

BLESSING PLANNED

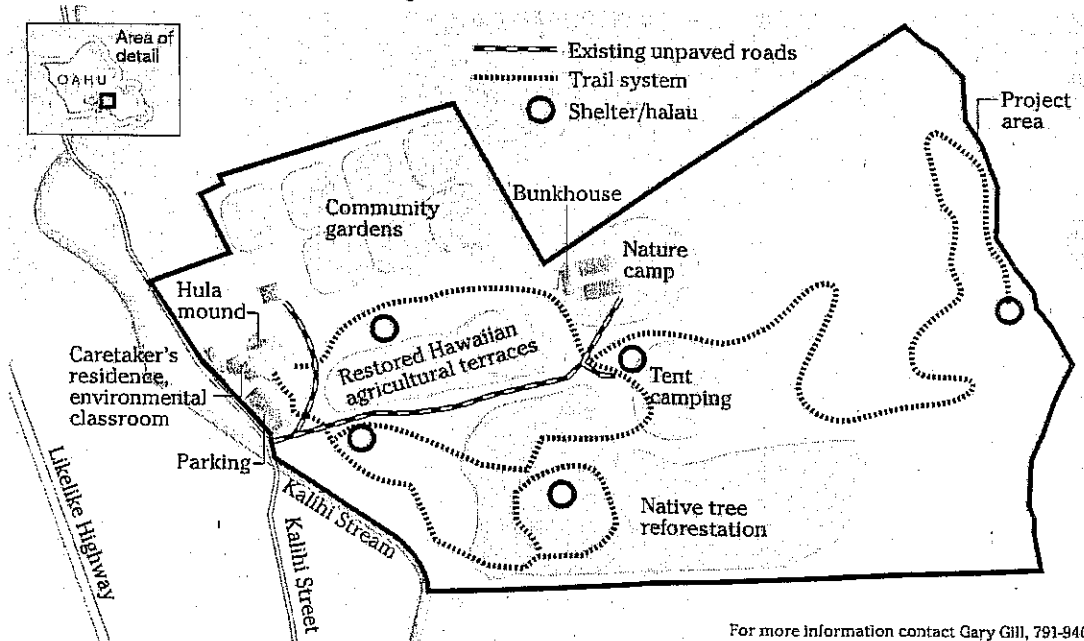
A blessing ceremony for the new Kalihi Valley Nature Park is being planned for later this month. For more information or to volunteer, contact Gary Gill at 791-9469 or GGill@kkv.net.



RICHARD WALKER / RWALKER@STARBULLETIN.COM

Volunteers helped clean the courtyard and driveway of a run-down home yesterday at the end of Kalihi Street, where area residents are pitching in to help turn it into a park. Daniel Vaina, 16, loaded trash bags into the back of a pickup truck to be taken down the road to a trash bin. To his right was Pio Faamatua Jr., Greg Andrasik and Levi Lemisio.

Proposed Kalihi Valley Nature Park



For more information contact Gary Gill, 791-9469

Source: Kokuia Kalihi Valley (which provides health services for Kalihi Valley residents)