



A Remarkable Man, an Extraordinary Legacy

**PMKCA and its members
commemorate David Becker.**

Ruth Bennett, for all members of the
Pa'auilo Mauka Kalōpā Community
Association

Communities thrive when there is a cohesiveness that can binds its residents together through good times and tough times. David Becker and the Hāmākua Times provided such a bond for many of us along our beautiful, but often overlooked, coast.

The Pa'auilo Mauka Kalōpā Community Association has published its newsletter in the Hāmākua Times for longer than most of us can remember, telling local stories and relaying important information to our neighbors and to communities beyond the scope of our association.

Dolores Ramos, our revered past President, now deceased, wrote articles for years. Joe Clarkson, who took over as PMKCA President from Dolores, kept up the practice of publishing newsletters in the Times from at least 2016 to the present. I started writing articles in 2018 as a way of contributing to my community, sharing the topics with Joe and Denning Powell.

David always welcomed our submissions, sometimes suggesting articles outside of our community's interests, and forgave us when we were beyond his publishing deadline. It mystifies me to this day how he and his staff managed to produce such an excellent paper, in thousands of printed copies, within the thinnest timeframes that we, contributors, sometimes gave him!





Local Talent: William (Billy) Dias
An elder statesman of leathercrafting just keeps on re-inventing.

by Debra Powell and Ruth Bennett, PFKCA Members

Something about the Hāmākua Coast attracts creativity. That's the working hypothesis, anyway. And here's get one more example: Billy Dias started off early in his artistic by decorating snowflakes, then morphed into leather work, and now he keeps up his leather journey with a splash in both leather and wood. A Renaissance man, right here in our midst.

Many of us in the Pa'auilo and Keolu communities know Billy from the days when he could be found at Leslie Corwin's "Aloha Hay and Cubes" food store in Pa'auilo (now owned by Manny Sosa). Billy was a fixture there, working on his leather products and repairing the tack and gear of his ranchers. On certain Friday evenings at Leslie's pedicab gatherings, Billy would bring his 12-string guitar and western band to entertain the local community. We were all invited to meet, share food, talk story, and hear good music. Billy was someone everyone knew: a multi-talented artist, craftsman, musician, a beloved member of the community.

He started off as a third-generation plantation worker and trainer of the family ranch horses, growing up well before the internet, and even before (gasp) smart TV. That generation – plantation workers, parishes – all were typically very good with their hands, and inventive, and adaptive. Where they saw a need, they created a solution. In our present time, Billy isn't going to be training any more horses, but he's still plenty savy, and he's carried that inventiveness and creativity on into a modern-day business, creating objects of beauty and utility from both leather and wood.

His leather-working inspiration



Billy Dias with granddaughter/colleague/co-worker Jackie Jordan.

they worked. Wasn't a big money-maker, but it was a lot of fun. Got me truly hooked on making art with my hands."

"Once that creative bug bites you, it's hard to say which way it's going to go. For me, it was shells to leather to wood. I love 'em all, still work with 'em all. And that's sort of the spirit of it, yeah?" he reflects. "So what if I haven't done it before... let's give it a shot and see what happens."

And therein, probably, lies the secret of his success over the years as a leatherworker. He has made products to cover a wide range of needs. He doesn't do sudden switch anymore, other leatherware and wooden products: stirrup covers, belts, leashes, and... bullwhips??? Yes, bullwhips.

Heems... we asked if he happened to make that halahala Indiana Jones used in those movies. "A missed marketing opportunity," he agrees, laughing. Then he goes into some of the intricate details of processing leather into woven saddle products like ropes and whips, how he forms leather pieces into precisely-thicknesses. He shows us a video of machinery he hand-made, as it slices those pieces into appropriately-sized cowhide strips.

Billy's descriptions are both detailed and fascinating, running from properly cutting leather to dyeing it properly. It turns out that sawing the strips – the last step, which takes one really long day for a larlat or whip – depends on the quality of each of the steps before it. And therein, probably, is another secret of this artist's success. "Just pure persistence." Billy agrees when we ask, "every step of a process, you gotta keep doing it until you get it right. Sure, you start with what everybody taught you, but you keep refining, making it better. All the time."



Evolution of a shell into an object of art, a line of interest that Billy still maintains.

...stroke of creativity originated even earlier. "I think I was in my early twenties when my artistic side started to take shape," he says. "I picked up a native cowrie shell and wondered what I could do with it. So I carved into the shell and noted its natural colors, then polished it. I tried a lot of things, and

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February Honoka'a Pool Update

by Sarah Anderson

Later in the afternoon on February 24 we received an email from Maurice Messina, Director of Parks and Recreation:

Hi Everyone,
Update:
Our technicians fixed up the pump, installed new Pool Link and programmed, cleaned & scrapped out chlorination tank, installed a new solar panel on chlorinator and pump and a new music pump.

Our pool staff will now monitor the chemicals to determine when they are up to speed. I'm planning to meet with pool staff tomorrow to get a full update on when we're ready to get (hopefully) back at the pool, get the facilities up and ready for use, and get you all back on the water!

Aloha,
Maurice

This is, of course, fabulous news! We want to thank Maurice Messina and Jeff Ochi and the P&R staff for continuing to work through the many obstacles that have come up throughout this process. We are pleased that our project models what can be accomplished with trust and hard work in a time of limited resources when there is collaboration between the community and the County.

Council member Heather Kimball has been key in facilitating the process a steady hand, communicative, practical and positive. We so appreciate the companies that have donated their professional services: Engineering Partners Inc., Matt Gravers, Architect and Breton Eberhard of Foods Construction. Huge mahalos go out to all the community members who have donated money to fund this stage of the efforts, as well as those who have

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We wrote about community issues and concerns – internet options, property taxes on agricultural property, invasive species endangering our homes, farms, and native forests. We spotlighted artists in our community – Billy Dias's leatherwork, Stan Gollaher's woodworking, Val Kim's photography, and others. We told the remarkable history of our own beautiful Kalōpā Park. We shared the inside stories of Pa'auilo businesses that serve the Hāmākua – the Pa'auilo Feed Store and Mother Nature's Miracle organic farm – and retold some of the history of Pa'auilo town.

We reported on wildfires and road washouts. We shared stories from the Covid19 pandemic years – the supreme effort to make some 12,000 masks, and the Honoka'a Peace Committee's "Feeding our Keiki and Kupuna" weekly food distribution effort which continues to provide over 400 meals every Friday afternoon.

We would have distributed our newsletters to the limited 130-140 people on our limited mailing list, but the Hāmākua Times gave us the opportunity to reach people from Kukuihaele to Ninole, through their mailboxes and post offices. I would hear from friends in Laupahoehoe how a newsletter's subject had informed them or touched them.

We have David, his staff, and his supporters to thank for this opportunity to make a difference, not just for our two communities of mauka Pa'auilo and Kalōpā, but for many other communities whose issues and interests are similar to ours. It deeply saddens us to have lost such a remarkable man who gave so much of his skills and talents to the Hāmākua Coast. We will be forever in his debt for making us proud of our history, our way of life, our resilience in difficult times, and our ability to celebrate our successes.

Here's to you, David, and to the legendary Hāmākua Times!

