



Pa'auilo Mauka Kalōpā Community Association



July 2026 PMKCA Newsletter

(Look for PMKCA announcements following the article.)

Pa'auilo Volunteer Fire Company 8 Alpha

24 years of fighting fires on the Hamakua Coast and elsewhere.

Ruth Bennett
PMKCA President
www.pmkca.org



Company 8 Alpha was dispatched to a fire in Mauna Kea resort area on August 8, 2023

At 5:30 am on August 8, 2023, the Pa'auilo Volunteer Fire Company 8 Alpha, was called by the county Fire Department to fight a fire burning in the Lalamilo area. Under grueling wind-blown fire conditions, Company 8 Alpha was sent from fire to fire throughout the Waimea-Kohala corridor until midnight.

Jim Millar, captain of Company 8 Alpha, awoke the next morning to the news of the catastrophic Maui fires, driven by the same fierce winds and fueled by the same conditions that he and his team had faced on the Big Island the day before. The devastation and loss of life in Lahaina weighs heavily on his heart to this day.

It also fuels his commitment to take his auxiliary firefighting occupation seriously, as a service to his community. The Big Island fires that Company 8 Alpha fought on August 8 could easily have equaled the disaster of Lahaina. Jim, a long-time resident of mauka Pa'auilo and member of PMKCA, has been fighting fires with his Company since 2002.

Jim reports from his fire journal that between 2022 and 2025, Company 8A recorded 191 calls. In bone-dry 2025 alone, the company was called 85 times, sometimes assigned to a fire for weeks. As of June 15 this year, during a wet spring, the Company had recorded 20 calls.

A century ago, organized firefighting on Hawaii Island was the proprietary responsibility of the huge farms and ranches. A wildfire above Pa'auilo in the early 1900s, escaping mauka from fires intentionally set to burn cane field stubble, destroyed the first large-scale coffee plantation in Hawaii and burned unabated for months, due to lack of firefighting equipment and resources.

When the sugar cane companies collapsed in the 1990s, state and county agencies took on firefighting as a necessity for residents, but funding was always limited, and the fire risk always great.

Surprisingly, Hawaii County is the only county in Hawaii that officially sponsors Volunteer Fire Companies. Recognizing our island's size, geography, and fire-prone conditions, the county helped residents form and volunteer in firefighting brigades.

In 2002, two of our local community associations, (Pa'auilo Camp Community Association and Pa'auilo Mauka Kalōpā Community Association), pushed for a local Volunteer Fire Company. Dominic Yagong, our council representative at the time, escorted the request through the county channels and made it official.

Today, Hawaii Island has 20 volunteer companies, attached to local Fire Stations. They are staffed by residents in the areas they serve, trained and certified by the Fire Department.

Jim Millar has served as captain of Company 8 Alpha for the 24 years since its formation. Many on his team have also served for years and some have advanced to paid positions in the Fire Department. A constant for our Company 8A has been its mutually supportive relationship with the local Honoka'a-based county Fire Company 8.

Besides Capt. Jim, current members of Company 8 Alpha are Braiden Malicki, FEO (Fire Equipment Operator); Ana Kapihe, FEO; Wesley Murakane, FF (Fire Fighter); "TR" (Tariq) Odeh, FF; and Ryder Millar, FF. Their fire station is located just makai of the highway in Pa'auilo.



A recent award ceremony at the Pa'auilo volunteer fire station: From left, Joe Glory, Training Capt., Dan Volpe, Fire Chief. Certificates were awarded to: Ryder Millar, 15 years 8A; Angelina Rao Palma,

recruit 9B; Braiden Maliki, 5 years 8A; Wesley Murakane, 5 years 8A; Otis Machala, recruit 9B; Ana Kapihe, 5 years and FEO.

Many of us remember the Pa'auilo Fire in June 2021. On that windy late morning, a fire started in the eucalyptus forest makai of the highway east of Pa'auilo. In the 10 hours of uncontrolled fire, 1400 acres burned and many families and properties were endangered. It was touch-and-go all afternoon, but multiple Fire Department units, Volunteer Fire Companies, and heavy equipment operators were able to get the upper hand.



Paauilo fire in June 2021 burning on the edge of a dry field on Pohakea Rd.

Fire season is approaching. If you are interested in supporting our Volunteer Fire Company, or the VFC in your area, consider these opportunities:

- **Become a volunteer firefighter.** The county provides the training and certification required. Jim advises that volunteer firefighting is a serious commitment requiring some endurance and flexibility, but your neighbors will appreciate your service. See www.hawaiiicounty.gov/departments/fire/volunteer, or call Jim, 808 936-5867.
- **Keep your home fire resistant.** See www.hwmo.org for ideas about how to protect your home from wildfire. The ability for a home and its occupants to withstand a wildfire often rests on removing the burnable

materials and fire-prone access points that can ignite and reduce a house to ashes.

- **Join a Neighborhood Kinship Group.** A neighborhood that is prepared for emergencies by knowing and caring for each other, building communication networks and identifying residents' skills, resources and equipment, can help itself when outside help isn't available or is occupied elsewhere. (We are forming the first group now.)
- **Donate on behalf of your volunteer fire company.** When made through the **Sayre Foundation** (see below), you will help keep our volunteer firefighters outfitted, safe, and capable. This foundation was created as a memorial to the son of Laura and Frank Sayre and honors the firefighters who returned their son to them after a fatal fall from a trail. The foundation uses donations (some earmarked for individual stations and volunteer companies) to improve their firefighting and rescue capabilities.

As a retired volunteer firefighter said, looking back on 13 years serving with the Pa'auilo Volunteer Company, "Being a firefighter in Company 8 Alpha has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my entire life."

Donate to the
David R. Sayre Memorial Foundation
www.danielsayrefoundation.org
501(C)(3) non-profit
Specify "*Volunteer Fire Company 8 Alpha*"
(or your local VFC or Fire Station)
Mail your check to:
PO Box 1285, Kailua-Kona HI 96745

~~~~~ **PMKCA ANNOUNCEMENTS** ~~~~~

**Board of Directors Meeting**  
**Thursday, July 9, 2025, 6 PM**  
**At Denning's house – 44-3220 Kula Kahiko Rd.**

*(Members are welcome to attend.)*

***Mark your calendars!***

***PMKCA's Annual Potluck Picnic***

***Saturday, August 8, 2026, 11am to 2pm***

***New location:***

***Pa'auilo Park Pavilion***

*Makai of the highway on Paauilo Hui Rd.  
(below the baseball field)*

***Come early to sign in and greet your friends.***

***Bring a potluck dish, and maybe a Bingo prize.***

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