

CONGRATULATIONS TO 'OLELO ON ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY

September 19, 2009

The ability of Oahu's 'Olelo Community Television to effectively meet community access needs was the subject of a Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs (DCCA) hearing on September 15, 2009 at McKinley High School. 'Olelo is the recipient of "Public, Education and Governmental (PEG)" access fees collected by Oceanic Time Warner Cable. The DCCA expects to issue a decision by October 23, 2009.

Oceanic Time Warner is currently negotiating a new agreement with the DCCA for a franchise that will allow it to continue to offer cable services on Oahu for the next ten or more years, beginning January 1, 2010. At stake is how 'Olelo is funded and supported. The public demand for community television on Oahu is at an all-time high. In its 20 years, 'Olelo has broadcast a total of more than more than 50,000 hours of original local programming. This year 'Olelo will air more than 6,300 hours of programming on six channels.

The high volume of community programming means 'Olelo is bursting at the seams. During Oceanic's current contract, public demand for community access channels grew from half a channel to six, and from one facility in Kakaako to eight centers. 'Olelo provides television channels for local programs, and equipment and facilities for producing those shows. Thousands of Oahu residents have been trained at 'Olelo. Each year 'Olelo works with about 250 non-profit organizations and community groups to help them get their message out.

The newest facility, located at the State Capitol, enables lawmakers to promptly get information out to the public in time for civic engagement. Over 9000 government program hours have aired in the last five years. I have enjoyed informing Hawaii residents about important issues on 'Olelo during the last ten years. My current show, *Espero Conversation*, airs Sunday nights at 9:30 pm on Channel 54.

'Olelo's active outreach also brings media training to public, charter, and private schools on Oahu. Through its six school-based facilities, 'Olelo has provided media training to 31% of elementary, 66% of middle, and 87% of high schools on Oahu. The fortunate schools that have an 'Olelo site are King Intermediate School, Waianae High School, Jarrett Intermediate School, Waipahu Intermediate School, Leilehua High School, and Kahuku High and Intermediate School. In 2003, 'Olelo began a Youth Xchange statewide student video competition as a forum for young people's input on important topics of the day such as drunk driving, suicide, drugs, health, and the environment. In 2009, 565 entries were submitted, a clear indicator of the enthusiasm our youth feel about being able to express and share their ideas.

Six 'Olelo channels air more than 6,300 hours of community produced programs each year. Channel 49 (FOCUS) gives viewers an up-close, in-depth look at their community and coverage of the state Legislature. Channel 52 (O'AHU) shows local entertainment, recreation, arts, and sports. Channel 53 (NATV) features the diverse ethnicities and cultures of Hawaii, the Pacific, and the world. Channel 54 (VIEWS) fosters civic awareness with grassroots community

issues, City Council and Neighborhood Board meetings, and political discussion. Channel 55 (TEC) and 56 (TEACH) are partnerships with the University of Hawaii, state Department of Education and Hawaii Association of Independent Schools, and offer educational programming.

With all of the great interest in producing and viewing community programs, 'Olelo needs public support. Part of the discussions being considered by the DCCA is how much funding 'Olelo will get. 'Olelo derives its income from the 3% Oceanic Cable collects from its customers for PEG access. The DCCA capped and diverted PEG access in 2000, with the result that over \$5 million has been diverted away from 'Olelo. All of 'Olelo's training, facility use, airtime, and other operating expenses are supported by the roughly \$3.5 million it receives from Oceanic, after the \$1 million it gives to the University of Hawaii and Department of Education for the educational programming on 'Olelo's TEACH and TEC channels.

'Olelo also seeks provisions enabling it to keep pace with technologic advances. Among the key requests are live teleconferencing and cable casting abilities at each of the 'Olelo Community Media Centers, additional channels, and Video-On-Demand services via cable, especially for those who are less likely to use computers or have internet access.

Twenty years ago Hawaii's leaders envisioned an engaged community empowered by PEG access. Today 'Olelo is a national leader and role model, and one of the largest PEG access organizations nationwide. Its community media services remove the barriers of time, distance, and transportation to help people communicate and share their stories with government and each other. I and other members of the Hawaii Senate signed a letter of support to the DCCA in strong support of 'Olelo's effort to continue to provide valuable public media access.

Keali'i Lopez, 'Olelo's President and CEO, envisions a future in which it is an integral part of every Oahu community, enabling and empowering people to be heard on important issues. In envisioning 'Olelo's future, I think it can go even further. Imagine the richness of offerings if 'Olelo joined with some of the other over-3,000 media access organizations across the country. Take the health care debate. In 1974 Hawaii became the first state to require employers to provide medical insurance for their full-time workers. Throughout the years, the Legislature passed other laws toward the goal of universal access. With our extensive experience, our debate on national reform is surely much different from that in other states. If 'Olelo coverage aired via a national PEG network, residents of other states could hear of the outcomes of our reforms, and vice versa. The same is true for any issue that government could consider.

Think of how our tourist industry would benefit. Visitors come to Hawaii because films and television showcase our island beauty. Since many 'Olelo programs feature Hawaii's lovely scenery and people, making these shows available to other states would enhance Hawaii's exotic allure as a visitor destination. Think of how much fun it would be to watch local sports coverage of your mainland cousins, nieces or nephews, if a national PEG network was begun.

A hearty congratulations to 'Olelo on its 20th anniversary, to Keali'i Lopez for her dynamic leadership, and all the staff and volunteers that have contributed to its success. 'Olelo has truly given life to its mission statement: *When Our Voice Thrives, So Does Our Community.*