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# We Are Oceania Newsletter

*March 2016, Honolulu, Hawai'i*

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**W**elcome, Aloha, Alii, Hâfa Adai, Lenwo, Kaselehlie, Mauri, Mogethin, Ráán Ánnim, Iqkwe, and Wenimwemi Rewe!

Second issue? Yes! It is! On behalf of the We Are Oceania (WAO) and the Partners in Development Foundation (PIDF) Team, I would like to welcome all of you to our second WAO newsletter. I also want to thank you for your overwhelming support for our newsletter and our initiative.

So please enjoy the second issue of our newsletter, and don't hesitate to contact us if you have a story or service you want to share in our next issue.

Kinissow Chaapwúr, Meral Ma Sulang, Kalahngan, Komokar, Kom̃mooltata, Ko Rab'a, Kulo, Tubwa Kor, Si Yu'us Mâ'āse', and Mahalo,

—Jocelyn Howard, *Director of We Are Oceania*

## A Message from our Parent Organization

*Aloha e Na Hoaloha o WAO!* I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the WAO March Newsletter and to invite you to partner with Partners in Development Foundation in the building of this important organizational resource for the people of Micronesia. PIDF is privileged to be a mentor to the leaders of WAO and to help them develop a first class team of professionals to assist the Micronesian community in meeting the social, economic, educational issues it faces. PIDF has worked for almost twenty years in building effective programs for the children and families of Hawaiian communities and we are excited to work with the leaders of WAO to develop a stand-alone organization that can do the same work in the communities of Oceania.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter and also think about how you can join the work of WAO! We look forward to your support and partnership in the many

areas of the organization's outreach. Blessings to you and yours! *Me ke aloha piha!*



—Jan E. Hanohano Dill, *President of Partners in Development Foundation*

## WAO Volunteers

### Yu Suenaga

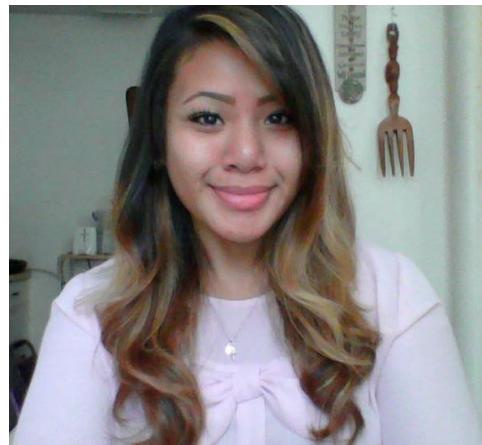


*Media Volunteer, [ysuenaga@hawaii.edu](mailto:ysuenaga@hawaii.edu)*

Yu Suenaga is from Chuuk and graduated from Xavier High School in 2006. Since then he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Japanese Language and Literature at UH Mānoa. Currently, he is a

Graduate student at UH Mānoa in the Center for Pacific Islands Studies program. His work in the program is focused on the Chuukese community and their experiences living in Hawai'i and telling of their story. Yu is also the co-founder of the Micronesian media group *The Fourth Branch* (TFB), a media outlet which aims to bridge Micronesians at home and abroad. He has been a volunteer at WAO for about three months doing mostly media work. He filmed a PSA for WAO's recent fundraiser and has taken photos at WAO events. Yu also has done some media consulting and has helped with setting up some events. ■

### Faith Loeak



*Marshallese Outreach Volunteer, [floeak@hawaii.edu](mailto:floeak@hawaii.edu)*

Faith Loeak was born in the Marshall Islands and moved to Hawai'i when she was just 9 months old. She graduated from Roosevelt High School in 2014 and is now a sophomore at UH Mānoa working on a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. At WAO, she participates in outreach efforts, making flyers, and volunteers her time for the various events and activities that WAO puts on. Outside of WAO, she works at the Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i as a Health Connector Outreach Specialist and is also President of the UH Mānoa Micronesian Connections Club. ■

## Bradley (Brad) Rentz



*Technology Volunteer, rentzb@hawaii.edu*

Brad Rentz is originally from Cincinnati, OH and graduated from Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI with a BA in Linguistics and German Language and Literature. He was also a volunteer teacher with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps-International at Pohnpei Catholic School in Kolonia, Pohnpei from 2011–2013. Brad is currently a PhD student in linguistics at UH Mānoa where he researches Micronesian languages. At WAO he helps promote the program's online presence by maintaining its website, newsletter, and email subscriber lists. In December he redesigned WAO's website. ■

## WAO Updates

### Capacity Building

WAO recently hired a VISTA volunteer who is currently being trained. He will help with the Youth Summit and No Vote No Grumble programs. We also submitted grant applications to help fund WAO in the future.

### Past WAO Events

WAO partnered with NO Vote No Grumble in March to help Micronesian US citizens to register to vote. WAO also participated in training programs at UH's William S. Richardson School of Law about issues facing Micronesians in Hawai'i and at the State

Department of Health about Waiver Case Management. We also had visits this past month from some of our funders and representatives from the Federal Reserve Bank and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

## Health Insurance

The open enrollment period of the Affordable Care Act for this year has ended. However, you may still enroll though if you have a "Life Changing" circumstance (ie., marriage, birth of child, divorce/separation). Come see us if you think that applies to you. We are still available to help if you have questions about your existing health insurance plan or want information about how to enroll next year. Also visit [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov) for more information.

## Volunteers

We are currently looking for more volunteers at WAO. If you have time to spare and would like to help us out, we would love to have you join us. If you are interested, please send us an email or stop by our office. ■

## The Fourth Branch–Micronesia

*This section is sponsored by The Fourth Branch–Micronesia ([www.tfbmicronesia.com](http://www.tfbmicronesia.com))*

### The FSM Consul General in Hawai'i: Kandhi A. Elieisar

Kandhi A. Elieisar is from Namoluk and Kuttu Islands in Chuuk State and a citizen of the Federated States of Micronesia by birth. After graduating from Xavier High School, he went to various colleges and universities in Kansas City and California. He eventually graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with a BA in Sociology. He then attended graduate school in public administration at California State University, San Bernardino.

- **TFB** = The Fourth Branch
- **KE** = Consul General, Kandhi Elieisar

**TFB:** What is the job of a Consul General?

**KE:** Generally, the principal role of a Consul General, as the highest ranking consular official, is to oversee and manage the full range of functions of the Consulate General as spelled out in Article 5 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (VCCR) including carrying out instructions from home government on policy, political and ceremonial representations.

**TFB:** What is the function of a consulate? What services does it provide for citizens?

**KE:** Article 5 of the VCCR detailed these functions, but the general consular functions entail promoting and protecting the interests of the Nation and its citizens in the cultural, economic, social and political spheres; assisting in securing citizens documentations and acting as notary public, helping and safeguarding the interests and rights of citizens who are subjects of law enforcement, jail and judicial authorities, extending assistance to foreign visitors, vessels and aircrafts, and performing any other functions instructed from home government within limits of international and local laws. Accordingly, the services undertaken by the Consulate General are as follows: makes representations with federal, state and local leaders including in formal ceremonial events, attends outreach programs sponsored by partner organizations, churches and government agencies; conducts outreach programs to citizens throughout the Aloha State aimed at making them aware of the functions of the Consulate General, updating them on developments in home government and exchanging or listening to their concerns and views; provides assistance to citizens in applying for social security benefits, renewing passports, notarizing documents, drafting powers of attorney, securing birth certificates, disseminating information, fetching electronic I-94s; assists in facilitating elections and advises citizens of important events and developments in their

host communities including non-citizens on visitation and commercial matters; and assists citizens in getting health, interpretation and medical assistance including those in jail, detention, and correctional facilities.

**TFB:** The office has regular park cleanups during the weekends, what is the message for these cleanups?

**KE:** The Consulate General fully supports citizens' participation in voluntary charitable, humanitarian and civil activities such as the cleaning of parks, cemeteries, highways, streets and recreational areas. After all, citizens are the main beneficiaries of these public spaces. And we continue to encourage cleaning sponsorship of these public areas that have been adopted by citizens. Besides these, the Consulate General adopts the Magic Island for cleanup on a quarterly basis or every three months, with the latest one being done on August 8, 2015 normally on the last Saturday of the third quarterly month. It is our aim that through these voluntary works on behalf of citizens, we hope to demonstrate token appreciation and gratitude to host communities for welcoming citizens into their homeland and sharing these facilities with us. We also hope to promote a positive constructive image of ourselves as responsible, caring and civil people given the preponderance of negative stereotypes and discrimination against Micronesians.

**TFB:** Hawai'i has been for many years a popular destination for Micronesians, mostly FSM citizens, to move to. Many come here to work, study, and for health issues, and other opportunities. Is there still a rise in FSM citizens coming to Hawai'i? How many citizens live here now?

**KE:** Absent a reliable and accurate tally of out-migration of citizens into the United States, what we gathered from a few surveys conducted on citizens particularly residing in the State of Hawai'i is that we have about fifteen (15) thousand FSM citizens only living in the Hawaiian Islands, a significant increase from about nine (9) thousand found in the Levin-Hezel Survey of 2010. There is indeed

a steady upward trajectory of migration for citizens visiting relatives, seeking medical treatment, finding jobs, attending schools and joining the U.S. Armed Forces.

**TFB:** Healthcare has been an ongoing concern for our citizens. What is the status of affordable health-care for our citizens?

**KE:** Health-care and its affordability has been a perennial concern for Micronesians, particularly for those who cannot afford medical treatment for lack of a health insurance and/or income. A roller-coaster journey defines a predicament of health care eligibility and access for Micronesians, whose genesis can be found in the 1996 Welfare Reform Act passed by the US Congress. Since then, citizens have been subjected to the benevolence of the State of Hawai'i in affording them health care insurance, which it did so generously in the initial stage subsequent to the passage of the Act through Medicaid eligibility. It was the State's economic downturn during the Lingle Administration that citizens were relegated to the Basic Health Hawai'i (BHH), which was insufficient to cover more expensive drugs, necessary doctor visitations and sophisticated clinical procedures. Winning a trial court decision restored their Medicaid eligibility but was later purged when the US Supreme Court upheld the appellate court decision granting full legal authority to the State to decide eligibility. This was followed by the introduction of the Affordable Care Act or Obamacare, where most citizens were taken off from Medicaid except the ABDs and making health care insurance plan a commodity to be purchased on the market through the Hawai'i Health Connector. Given that many Micronesians are in the lower echelon of the economic ladder, many are unable to pay the required premiums and co-pays to assure continued eligibility for health insurance, albeit perceived as low out-of-pocket expenses. Exacerbating the situation is the lack of understanding of the benefits and plans of the health insurance providers, the confusion and inconvenience of enrolling with limited enrollment periods, fewer kokuas or helpers and insufficient or incomprehensible notices. The indebtedness of HHC and its eventual bankruptcy ne-

cessitated assumption of the entire system through a federally-run health insurance whose enrollment period begins in November 1, 2015. Meanwhile, Micronesians struggle to make ends meet, with stories of deteriorating illnesses or perhaps even death for some due to inability to pay for those who have health care insurance and those who have no insurance at all for one reason or another. Many will have to wait to re-enroll in the new system, which we hope is affordable.

**TFB:** What illnesses are FSM citizens coming here to find treatment for?

**KE:** The most common ailments that citizens have are non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases and cancer. NCDs are in epidemic proportion in the entire Pacific island region, and citizens' migration overseas stem from lack of qualified medical practitioners and appropriate medical treatment technology at home.

**TFB:** In 2010, Basic Health Hawai'i (BHH) was implemented. A State run health-care program created specifically for COFA migrants that did not cover many important treatments such as chemotherapy and dialysis. How did this affect our sick citizens? Did any COFA citizen die as a result of the implementation of BHH?

**KE:** I have learned anecdotes of citizens receiving minimal care or foregoing medical treatment due to insufficient benefits afforded to them under the BHH. While statistics would be needed here, it is conceivable to believe that citizens' health can only be deteriorating, especially for those with chronic illnesses, if the number of doctor visits is reduced, access to expensive clinical procedures is curtailed, and purchase of needed drugs is limited. Deaths are also possible.

The interview will be continued in the April issue... ■

*This interview was first published online on October 21, 2015.*

## Upcoming Events

### Events on O'ahu

For more details about these events, check out our website: <http://www.weareoceania.org/events>.

- 3/19 Celebrate Micronesia Festival, 10am–4pm, Honolulu Museum of Art School. There will also be voter registration at the event.
- 3/20 Celebrate Micronesian Women, 1pm–4pm, Honolulu Museum of Art School
- 3/24 WAO is partnering with Legal Aid at 9am to talk about Fair Housing Issues at St. Elizabeth's

## Micronesian Artist Spotlight

### The Monkey Gate

By Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner

I.

My uncle tells the story  
of being lost in the Honolulu airport  
how he fished out a wandering airport employee  
and asked him if he knew where the Micronesian  
gate was  
The man smirked through blue uniform  
You mean the monkey gate?

Blood rushing beneath his  
face blank and unchanged he turned  
and jogged in the direction the man had pointed

II.

Alarms sound off  
Three o'clock in the morning our bodies buzz  
from cramped beds pull-out couches and flowery fu-  
tons

we rise  
shove swap meet t-shirts frozen steak  
macadamia chocolates and extra cases  
of our lives into solid trustworthy  
coolers snapped shut and bound with  
luminescent strands of tape  
We pack  
everything  
into battered mini vans and bucking SUVs  
And as we sail along blank roads  
we watch the landscape of apartment complexes  
that loom above dozing bars, blinking 7 11s and  
mini marts

*Karuji leddik ne. Wake her up.*

Our eyes flicker open to muttering cousins  
The harsh lights of the Honolulu Airport  
flood through the milky translucence of the window  
as we drain our belongings from slide and shut doors  
we chatter away nerves  
rumbling and rolling in our bellies  
At the check-in gate  
Kosraean brothers argue over coolers that weigh too  
much  
a Pohnpeian suit urgently checks his watch while  
bony kneed brown children run leap across  
carts and piles of suitcases coolers boxes guarded  
by graying Chuukese and Marshallese women  
Whole families crouch and recline on the linoleum  
floor  
We slide our slippers off  
We make ourselves comfortable prop up our feet  
The line to check in is long and  
bag check even longer  
Saying good bye are one arm hugs and tears  
sweating slow off our skin  
And we are sad to see each other leave  
And we are happy to see each other leave  
We wave to the airport employees  
We thank them  
for handing us our tickets and carry-ons



and with upright backs  
We smile  
stroll  
past security

## Artist Biographies

**Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner** is a Marshallese poet, writer, performance artist, and journalist. She received her MA in Pacific Island Studies from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and is currently teaching at the College of the Marshall Islands.

**Yvonne Neth** was born on the island of Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) to Pohnpeian and Chamorro parents. She spent her growing years both on Pohnpei and on the island of Saipan in the Northern Marianas. Yvonne attended university in Honolulu, majoring in cultural anthropology, and also earned her FAA Commercial pilot's license during her years in Hawai'i. She is currently the Vice-Director for Island Research and Education Initiative (IREI), a not-for-profit non-governmental organization dedicated to producing culturally-relevant educational materials for Micronesia's students and conducting anthropological, environmental, and geological research in the region. You can view more of Yvonne's artwork at [www.yvonneneth.com](http://www.yvonneneth.com). ■

## News from Back Home

### FSM Resolution to End the COFA

*By Martin Moore III*

The nineteenth Congress of the Federated States of Micronesia proposed a resolution requesting the president of the Federated States of Micronesia to terminate the amended Compact of Free Association with the United States no later than 2018 (C.R. No. 19-155).

The Compact of Free Association, also known as COFA, was first signed by both the Federated States

of Micronesia and the United States of America in 1986. Under this agreement the United States can provide U.S. financial assistance, defense of the FSM and other certain operating rights within the federation. In return, the citizens of the Federated States of Micronesia qualify for noncitizen immigration status allowing them to live, work, and study within the United States without the need of a visa and are also eligible for certain federal programs and benefits. This agreement promotes U.S. national security measures as similar agreements are made with the FSM neighbor island nations of the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau.

The resolution was introduced on November 19, 2015 by Senator Isaac V. Figir from Yap and was supported by both Chuuk state Senators Bonsiano Nethon and Robson Romolow. Resolution 19-155 was proposed for several reasons. Within the resolution it states that United States officials view the Compact of Free Association as an act of charity to the Federated States of Micronesia. In addition, the resolution states there have been drastic, unilateral budget cuts for available financial assistance to the Federated States of Micronesia. Lastly, the resolution mentions that the U.S. Committee on Appropriations recommended to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to impose a pre-screening process for those leaving the FSM and entering the United States.

This proposed resolution brings forth many unanswered questions which especially affect FSM citizens living abroad. One of the largest unanswered questions is immigration status. Currently under the COFA, FSM citizens have free access to the United States. If the Compact were to end, it is unclear what its impact on immigration would be. The financial component of the COFA was set to end in 2023, yet the treaty between the two nations was to remain intact. This proposed resolution calls for termination of the Compact of Free Association no later than 2018. ■



*Outer Island Woman*, Artwork © 2016, Yvonne C. Neth





*We Are Oceania* (WAO) is a program of *Partners in Development Foundation*, a 501(c)(3) non-profit public charity.

WAO's mission is to empower our Micronesian community to navigate success while honoring the integrity of our diverse heritage.

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WAO is funded by the US Department of the Interior and the Hawai'i Department of Labor and Industrial Relations. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the US Department of the Interior, the United States Government, or the State of Hawai'i.