

HOUSING:

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Kaloko Heights Community Development, and manager Hawaii Island Community Development Corporation anticipate completion of the Kaloko Heights Affordable Housing Project in the fourth quarter of 2024. Families could begin occupying units in early 2025.

The target population for the project is low-income households with children and families at-risk of or currently experiencing homelessness, or transitioning out of an emergency shelter or transitional housing program.

Coastal Construction Co. is the contractor. Property management will be provided by Hawaii Affordable Properties.

Funding for the affordable housing project is derived from tax-exempt bonds, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), HOME, Housing Trust Fund, and project-based Housing Choice Vouchers.

Another critical component in getting the project off the ground was the construction of a new sewer line to service the affordable housing units, as well as the 1,300-unit market-rate development planned by RCFC Kaloko Heights LLC. Without a connection to the existing sewer line near the West Hawaii Civic Center, neither project could progress.

To facilitate the costly improvements,



Officials and dignitaries break ground Friday on the Kaloko Heights Affordable Housing Project. LAURA RUMINSKI/WEST HAWAII TODAY

Hawaii County partnered with RCFC Kaloko Heights LLC to implement a Community Facilities District and issue just over \$13 million in Special Tax Revenue Bonds to finance the project. The bond, which will not affect the County's creditworthiness or bond rating, will be repaid in full through owners within the market-rate development.

"This innovative funding mechanism allows the Kaloko Affordable Housing Project to move forward now to provide much-needed affordable housing on Hawaii Island. Reaching this milestone and marking the start of construction of this long-planned affordable housing

development would not have been possible without this partnership," said Hawaii County Office of Housing and Community Development Housing Administrator Susan Kunz. "This type of private-public collaboration is what is needed to ensure every Hawaii Island resident has a safe place to call home without having to choose between paying rent and other necessities."

Akaka said the location chosen for the project is a very special place.

"It is special to give this place for affordable housing for our families," he said. "It will be a safe place for all."

DONATION:

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perfect passes, punts and kickoffs to any precise spot on the field. Players can practice catching perfect spirals or end-over-end "kicks" at any speed or distance from five yards to 80 yards. The JUGS Football Machine comes with its own transport wheel, making it easy to move to any spot on your practice field.

Urgent Care of Kona Director of Marketing said two of the clinic's employees are Waverider graduates, and when discussion arose as to which team would get the machine, it became apparent Kealakehe was the number one choice.

"We are grateful to receive this generous donation," said Jones.

Urgent Care of Kona was established in 1994 and was the first clinic to open in Kona. They offer a variety of medical services and accept most private insurances. They are open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

For more information visit urgentcareofkona.com

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PRINCIPAL:

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videos, eBooks and educational software students can access at home and on campus.

"We started small with a pilot of 12 students, and with this money, I'm hoping to expand it," she said. "We'll be able to help more kids and get parents more involved in their learning."

Improving access to resources has been a priority for Beck since she started teaching in Ka'u in 1992.

"There was still a sugar plantation then, so everything here was in town," she said. "But in 1996 when the plantation closed, there was a mourning period where people didn't know what they were going to do."

Looking for work, families left for Hilo or Kona, while others moved to Ocean View for affordability.

"About three-quarters (of students) still come from Ocean View, so they have long drives, and many of their parents work in Kona, so they have to get to the bus stop by themselves," she said. "Our number one struggle is chronic absenteeism because of how far our students travel."

But distance isn't the only challenge.

Nearly 37% of Ka'u residents live below the poverty line, with a median household income of \$43,697, compared to the state's average of \$84,857. And only about 12% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.

To help, Beck prioritizes community-based experiences to prepare students for life after school.

She helped establish a grant-funded program where students participate in paid internships with local businesses, a dual credit program with Hawaii Community College where students earn between 12 and 24 college credits, and a Career and Technical Education, or CTE program, where students develop their own businesses on campus.

In 2020, students launched businesses for lilikoi butter, carved ohia and wooden jewelry using supplies from campus.

Her leadership also revamped the school's agriculture program, which includes a native plant nursery, livestock, macadamia nut trees, and a farm manager position.

"The kids really learn about sustainability here," she said. "In Ka'u, there's not many job opportunities, so if you can

self-employed and give back to the community, that's the real goal."

Students learn conventional, hydroponic and organic farming techniques to grow carrots, lettuce, kale, pumpkins and more.

"Kids take what they grow home, or we take it to the senior center," she said. "We even sell to KTA."

Students have access to a commercial kitchen and an imu (oven) where they prepare food from the garden for concessions during athletic games.

Those games take place in the school's state-of-the-art gym, a \$17 million structure finished in 2014 that doubles as a shelter for earthquakes, tsunamis and when vog levels are too high.

The school recently opened an "innovation lab" as well, with 3D printers, computers, a green screen and other technology.

"Our test scores might not look like other schools," Beck said. "But we have these work-based experiences, the dual credits, the industry certifications."

Beck thanked the 51 teachers on staff for their support, as well as an office crew that consists mainly of alumni.

"It's a lot of work and our



Principal Sharon Beck talks about programs at Ka'u High and Pahala Elementary School while giving a tour on Wednesday, April 26, 2023. KELSEY WALLING/TRIBUNE-HERALD

students come with many challenges, so our teachers and staff work hard," she said. "We're really a team, we're family."

The feeling is mutual.

"I've worked with Sharon for the last 17 years, and she's always backed teachers and supported us in any way she can," said Matt Roddy, a physical education teacher at Ka'u High. "The kids really like her, too. She's fair to all of the students and always supports them with whatever needs they have."

Gia MarajaLove is a CTE teacher on campus who also spoke highly of

Beck's leadership.

"Sharon is such an empathetic person, she puts herself out on behalf of the students and teachers," she said. "She's also a very people-oriented person, which I think is priceless when you're a principal."

Beck is looking ahead at future projects and goals for the campus, including a preschool coming in 2025. She also hopes to secure funding for a new building for middle school students.

But challenges remain, like the school's status as a Comprehensive Support and Improvement school,

or CSI, which means it performs in the bottom 5% of the state.

The status requires the school to draft 30-, 60- and 90-day plans that the DOE reviews during monthly visits.

"We'll keep doing these plans until we're out of that CSI level," Beck said. "But, really, these kids are amazing, and these programs give them the confidence in themselves, and in their learning, to help them develop a path for their future."

Email GrantPhillips@hawaiitribune-herald.com.

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