

Mary Ann Ku'uleialoha Punua

MARY ANN KU'ULEIALOHA PUNUA ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

REASON FOR THE GIFT

This endowment is established by Victor Punua in memory of his late wife, Mary Ann Ku'uleialoha "Ku'ulei" Punua. Ku'ulei felt without proper and continuing education one could not move ahead in life. In honor of Ku'ulei and her values, Victor established this endowment to provide scholarship opportunities to students throughout the University of Hawai'i System because there are so many students who deserve to further their education but are unable to meet the financial obligations.

ABOUT THE HONOREE



Ku'ulei Punua was born on March 30, 1934 in Ho'olehua, Moloka'i. At barely one and a half years old, she began to learn the hula from her Auntie Lei Pahukoa Lewandoski on Maui. At age 3 Ku'ulei's mother, Violet Jesse, took her to formal training in hula kahiko from Auntie 'Iolani Luahine and Auntie Hoakalei Kamau'u. Ku'ulei danced for Kent Ghirard's Hula Nani's where she had the opportunity to meet many movie stars such as Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra. She also gave private lessons to John Wayne during his filming of "Donovan's Reef."

Ku'ulei graduated from St. Andrew's Priory in 1953 where she met her beloved, Victor Kaleikaimana Punua, on a blind date at a senior prom in 1951. It was love at first sight and they were married two and a half years later on September 19, 1953. They moved to Kaua'i the following year where Ku'ulei started teaching hula. She dedicated her life to the perpetuation of the hula as a respected Kumu Hula of Halau Hula O Ku'ulei Punua, teaching on Kaua'i for 50 years, as well as producing Polynesian shows on Kaua'i for over 30 years with her husband and family.

Ku'ulei loved to teach the hula to everyone and always said that "anyone can learn to do the hula." She shared her passion and aloha with people from around the world taking Polynesian shows to Canada, Idaho Falls, Idaho, Seoul, Korea and San Francisco, California, as well as Tahiti, New Zealand, Japan, and other countries where she performed for notables such as Prince Akihito, now Emperor Akihito of Japan.

Ku'ulei felt it was important to keep well-informed of the changes in life and led by example, teaching her students to be their "best" as well as the importance of a good attitude. She loved her family, church, her children, hula, and donated her time teaching hula at her alma mater St. Andrew's Priory in Honolulu and Wilcox Elementary School in Līhu'e, Kaua'i. She loved to dance the hula. It was so much a part of her life. She loved children and extended this love to all her students who loved her in return.