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CRAIG T. KOJIMA / CKOJIMA@STARBULLETIN.COM

Joe Sokia, Don Chinen, Shelley Hata, Lyanne Nakamura, from the Windward District Department of Education, Kathie Wells, and Andy Sulzer, from Hardware Hawaii, set up the paint on Wednesday donated by Hardware Hawaii to Windward public schools.

Woman helps give fresh look to isle schools

Her idea spurs a gift of paint from Hardware Hawaii

By Rosemarie Bernardo
rbernardo@starbulletin.com

Two years ago, Kathie Wells read a newspaper article about teachers having to spend their own money to purchase supplies for school projects.

That did it. The Kailua woman was fed up with negative reports about the public schools and decided to do something on her own: coordinate donations of supplies to the schools in the Windward District.

Three months ago, her idea led to a welcomed gift for schools islandwide: Hardware Hawaii donated more than 5,000 gallons of paint valued at more than \$100,000 to the state Department of Education.

"I was just overwhelmed," said Wells.

Employees from 20 Windward public schools picked up gallons of paint Thursday from a warehouse. On Sept. 12, employees from other school districts islandwide will be able to pick up the nearly 4,000 gallons left. Hardware Hawaii also provided a tinting machine and two paint specialists to train custodians on how to blend colors.

Cory DeJesus, administrative services manager for the Windward District office, said the donation will help reduce the amount of school renovation work to be done by the state Department of Accounting & General Services.

With this paint, school custodians will do simple paint work rather than have DAGS employees come to the schools, DeJesus said.

"When you're in an environment that is bright, cheerful and clean, students will be able to feel better about themselves and learn at the same time," she said.

For nine months, Hardware Hawaii's Vice President Dave Purington searched for a way to donate paint to the state Department of Education when the company decided to sell only one brand of paint.

"I'm a parent with children in public schools and am aware of how much they struggle," Purington said.

DAGS lacked the storage space for numerous gallons of paint, DeJesus said. A colleague notified Purington after he noticed Wells' advertisement in MidWeek requesting various items for schools in the Windward District.

"She understood what we were trying to do," Purington said of Wells.

Through the help of Wells' ex-husband, Wayne Olival, one of his friends provided a vacant warehouse to store paint.

"I got the right people behind me now," Purington said.

In September 2000, Wells founded the grass-roots program called Community Helping Schools. Wells contacted facilitators at the Parent Community Networking Centers of Windward public schools and asked them to create wish lists. Teachers were asked what kind of items were needed. Wells posted an advertisement in MidWeek of items requested for the designated schools.

Soon after its inception, a flow of supplies from staplers to bookcases were donated to schools in the Windward District.

"I could not believe the amount of donations that came. It showed people really care," Wells said.

Periodically, Wells continues to post advertisements in MidWeek to help change the negative perception of Hawaii's public schools. She hopes to obtain more volunteers and grants so the program can cater to schools statewide.

"Life is a bunch of small steps. You can make a lot happen," she said.

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