

## RAISE YOUR HAND

# Remembering Lanai's

*Students join an effort to properly identify and honor buried veterans*

By Jayde Fernandez  
and Isabel Campbell



Just a few miles from the coast of Maui lies the rather secluded island of Lanai.

This close-knit, little island of approximately 3,000 people offers a unique sense of community.

Only local businesses serve our island. The complete absence of chain restaurants and megastores means no McDonald's, no Walmart and no Starbucks.

Of the 141 square miles in barren fields, there are only 30 miles of roads and not a single traffic light within sight. Our towers are pine trees, our walkways are patches of dirt, and our traffic is a row of five cars.

This small island has been referred to as "The Island Lost In Time."

WHILE THE world outside seems to spin at an alarming rate, the island's calm and serene nature makes it seem as if time moves slower. When you walk here, you walk along with the island — slow and steadfast.

However, our island isn't the only thing that is lost. Our past has also been lost in time. Of the 956 gravestones located on the island, approximately 26

belong to fallen veterans. However, half of those gravestones neither properly identify the veterans nor give them the tribute they rightfully deserve.

Historically, specifically during the Vietnam War, the bodies of fallen servicemen and veterans were returned to the island. Yet, as a result of the island's recurring economic downfalls, many residents did not have the time or money to give these individuals the proper burial they deserved. Thus, instead of names, dates or meaningful inscriptions, only coarse numbers etched in crumbling stone identify these veterans. These numbers offer little to nothing in commemorating the livelihoods, stories and memories of such courageous individuals.

Since 2008, Ms. Pat Niibu of Lanai High and Elementary School has led a project in hopes of tackling this issue. Each Veterans Day, she and a group of her stu-



Jayde Fernandez, left, and Isabel Campbell are senior and junior students, respectively, at Lanai High and Elementary School.

dents visit and clean the gravestones in the cemetery.

This year those efforts increased exponentially as we now clean every Thursday afternoon.

After being given a \$1,000 grant from the Center for Tomorrow's Leaders, the school and community are eager to complete a full restoration project, including a board with a list of the names and stories of the veterans' lives.

With renewed motivation, our participants are interviewing seniors and families to contribute to the compilation. More than three times a week, students and members of the community will go to the graveyard to maintain the stones and grounds.

# heritage, values

*"Raise Your Hand," a monthly column featuring Hawaii's youth and their perspectives, appears in the Insight section on the first Sunday of each month. It is facilitated by the Center for Tomorrow's Leaders, a local nonprofit working at the high school level to engage, equip and empower Hawaii's homegrown future leaders to start making a difference now. For more, see [www.CenterForTomorrowsLeaders.org](http://www.CenterForTomorrowsLeaders.org).*

The existing efforts to clean the graves coupled with the restoration of lost stories is an extension of the spirit of community and camaraderie.

AS RESIDENTS of Lanai, we take great pride in our intimate community where everyone is considered

family.

We are a community where everyone is more than just a familiar face: an embodiment of heritage, legacy and values of their loved ones.

Nevertheless, as a place that thrives on celebrating that heritage, failure to acknowledge an entire community of people who are no longer with us does no justice for them and for ourselves. To reinstate forgotten names is our moral obligation.

Although the island of Lanai may be symbolically lost in the greater world and in the grander scheme of things, to lose a piece of ourselves — our own history — would be more than just a grave injustice.