

Hawaii Reporter

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Intrepid Group Enjoys An Unusual Hawaiian Vacation

USS Battleship Missouri Shines Thanks to Enthusiasm and Elbow Grease from Pacific Island Institute's Eco Tourism Volunteers

By Juliette Dekeyser, 10/20/2009 1:42:58 PM



Most people think of a Hawaii vacation as the chance to lay on the sandy beach, under a palm tree, to enjoy the tropical breeze and warm sunshine. But there are those amazing visitors to the islands who come here to work and make Hawaii a better place in which to live.

Leslie Pelton knows about those generous-hearted people firsthand. As the program manager for Pacific Island Institute, a Hawaii-based ecotourism company, she hosts visitors who aren't in Hawaii to shop, relax or tour. They want roll up their sleeves and get to

work.

I recently spent the day with Pelton and a volunteer group who came to the islands to clean, polish, repair and restore the nation's treasured Battleship, the USS Missouri, which is based at Pearl Harbor in Honolulu.

As Woodry Lee, an Alabama resident, said: "WWII ended with the Battleship Missouri, which is why the vessel has deep, important meaning and is so historic."

Lee was one of 46 volunteers who attended the week-long program organized by Pacific Islands Institute with the assignment of: "All Hands on Deck: Maintaining the USS Missouri in Pearl Harbor."

Kevin Williamson, the director of volunteers for the USS Missouri Memorial Association, spoke about a great collaboration with Pacific Islands Institute and GE Eifun: "Non profit programs like ours cannot function without wonderful volunteers like these, who have been extremely helpful and productive over the years."

Rose Meece, a group leader for Pacific Islands Institute who coordinated this Mighty Mo service program, says the volunteers are "very intelligent, work extremely fast and always serve with a deep sense of humor."

Volunteers have multiple and sometimes tricky responsibilities to get the "Mighty Mo" spick and span, such as cleaning the GE electrical panels and bridge, painting the Ship's Officer Attendant lounge, refurbishing the hatch, archiving the blueprints and more.

For the most part, baby boomers make up the base of volunteers. Some are retired military personnel like Bob Wood, an engineer from Texas, who easily can explain to fellow volunteers how to use different machines. In this friendly atmosphere, Jean Sullivan, a volunteer from Pennsylvania, spoke about her unusual adventure: "The cruise is great and we have fun – as much fun as we can."



Volunteer Jean Sullivan

But why do these people pay their own way to Hawaii and spend their vacation fixing a ship rather than enjoying a surely well deserved luxurious vacation?

They all agree that the majesty of the Battleship overcomes other superficial preoccupations. Tom Hortel from Ohio and Fred Kurz from New Jersey say they work for a meaningful cause to relive history and give the next generation the opportunity to enjoy the ship and museum.

While taking photographs, Woods explained: "When I was a little boy, I didn't understand the reality of the war, but over the years, we have learned more and now I want to do something to preserve history."

This renovation work is very important for "the Mighty Mo." That week, many of the rooms were cleaned and the volunteers were gratified to see their work payoff.

PACIFIC ISLANDS INSTITUTE CELEBRATES TWO DECADES OF ADVENTURE AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Twenty years ago, Diana W. Lockwood founded the Pacific Islands Institute and it continues to help people today.

Pelton says her company can offer adventure and service to everyone who wishes to participate. "Nothing is impossible for us," Pelton says.



Leslie Pelton

She says Pacific Islands Institute strives to give people access to unique travel opportunities and to encourage global understanding through cultural exchange and appreciation of the natural environment.

The participants meet local people, get to know the local culture and help preserve nature.

Pelton says the institute has facilitated programs across the Pacific, from well-known island chains to remote atolls. Each destination provides specific culture and unique features.

Pacific Islands Institute also has teamed up with some of other travel organizations, such as Elderhostel Programs, Road Scholar Programs, Go Ahead Programs and National Parks Conservation Association.

ECO TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES ARE DIVERSE AND FLEXIBLE

Some of their ecotourism adventures include:

- “Oahu and Maui: Experience the Essence of Hawaii”, to learn how the islands were created, colonized by plants and animals, and discovered by Polynesians, Europeans, and others.
- “Arts with Aloha: Art and Culture” allows a visitor to discover Oahu's art, music, theatre and culture - where ancient Hawaiian traditions are perpetuated, but also where the ethnic diversity of the islands is evident in its visual and performing arts.
- “Hawaiian Water Adventure: An Intergenerational Marine Exploration”, allows grandparents to bring their grandchildren to explore Hawaii's undersea world. Local experts introduce them to Hawaii's diverse marine environment.
- “Exploring Hawaii's National Parks, The Big Island, Maui & Molokai:” Expert biologists, naturalists, and cultural interpreters will introduce participants to six of the seven Hawaiian national parks, so they can learn more about volcanic activity, view the impact of eruptions, and learn to spot marine life.

Pelton says one of her favorite programs is the national parks Elderhostel program, which is a 15-night program on Oahu, Maui, Kauai, Molokai and the island of Hawaii, called “Islands of Life in the Pacific Program.”

Pacific Islands Institute received multiple rewards for eco friendly actions, such as: the Hawaii's Living Reef Award and the Hawaii Tourism Authority's 'Keep It Hawaii' Awards, in 2006, and the Hawaii Ecotourism Association's Ecotour Operator of the year in 2007, just to name a few. The group is working to create more educational programs. Next year, the institute is planning an excursion to the island of Hawaii to focus on planet explorations.

To learn more about PII or join a group that will be traveling throughout Hawaii or the Pacific, visit: <http://explorethepacific.com/> or <mailto:info@pac-island.com/>

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