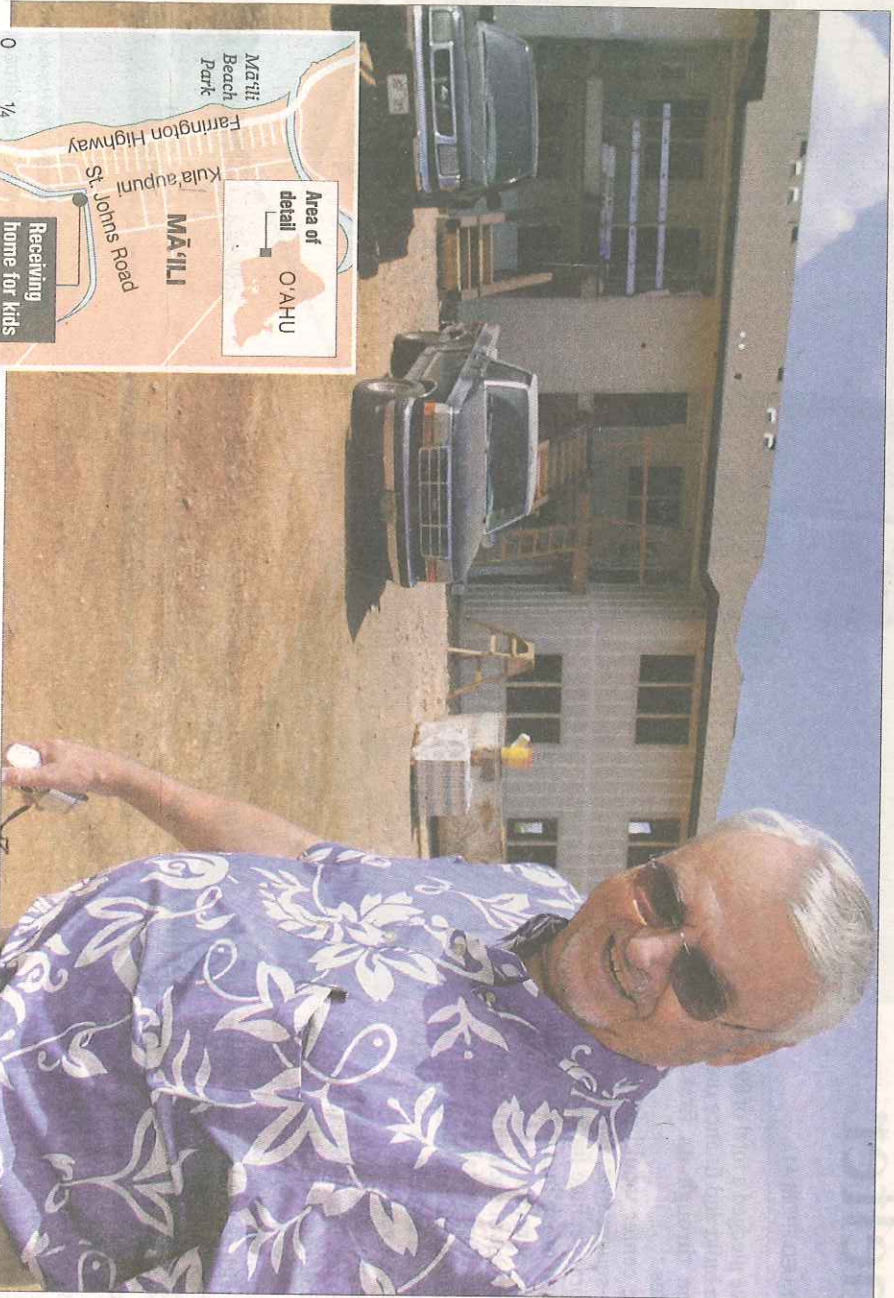
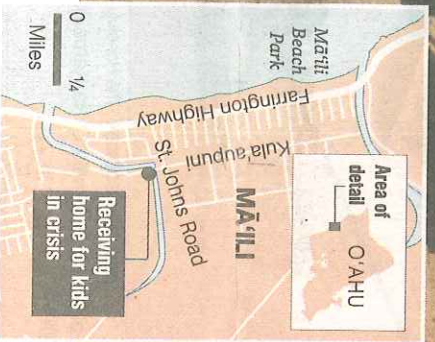


DEVELOPER A FRIEND TO KEIKI WITH NONE



RICHARD AMBO | The Honolulu Advertiser

Developer Michael Wood walks through the still-under-construction Villages of Māʻili, where a groundbreaking is planned this week for a shelter for abused and neglected children. Wood and his family have pledged \$9 million to build and operate the shelter.



The Honolulu Advertiser

HOW TO HELP

Although the Wood family is funding Hoʻomalulu O Na Kamaliʻi, the receiving home for children in crisis still needs contributions. Businesses and individuals who would like to donate money, time, clothing, bedding, furniture, fixtures, toys or computers can call Foster Family Programs of Hawaiʻi at 521-9531, ext. 224, or visit www.FFP.Hawaii.org.

Mike Wood had a sad childhood — and now he helps kids in crisis

BY WILL HOOVER

Advertiser *Waiʻanae Coast* Writer

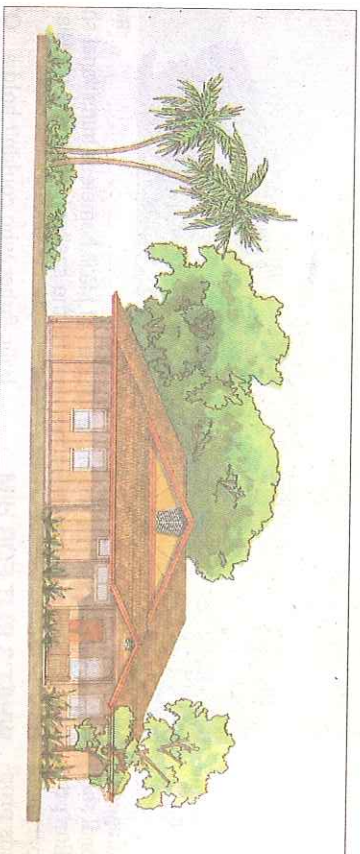
MĀʻILI — Ground will be broken here this week on a first-of-its-kind center for abused and neglected kids in Hawaiʻi.

The facility, dubbed Hoʻomalulu O Na Kamaliʻi, or “safe haven for our children,” promises a nonthreatening environment for children in turmoil, a place where kūpuna will reassure them and siblings can stay together.

It will exclusively serve the community that experts say has the greatest need: the Waiʻanae Coast.

The facility is being built with \$1 million donated by a Honolulu man who came from a dysfunctional family background, became a successful businessman, has served as a Big Brother and is on the board of Foster Family Programs of Hawaiʻi. Mike Wood, 67, and his fam-

SEE SHELTER, A2



An artist's rendering of what Hoʻomalulu O Na Kamaliʻi will look like when it's completed.

DEBORAH BOOKER
The Honolulu Advertiser

Shelter

CONTINUED FROM A1

ily have pledged a total of \$9 million to build and finance the operation through its first two decades.

The center would provide a 4,000-square-foot, 10-bedroom, temporary refuge for individual children or siblings while Child Welfare Services conducts a full assessment of each child's physical, developmental, psychological and educational needs. It will care for an estimated 180 to 300 children a year.

The project's emphasis will be:

- To try, if possible, to reunite the children with their parents in a safe environment.
- To otherwise place the children with area relatives or home settings that are culturally familiar to the child.

If neither option is possible, to put them into foster care.

Of special importance would be an effort to keep the siblings together within their Wai'anae Coast community and school districts, said Linda Santos, president and CEO of Foster Family Programs of Hawaii, a social service agency helping 4,000 Hawaii children involved in the child welfare system.

Her agency will manage the new center. Children and parents can remain in touch through supervised visits at the receiving home, Santos said.

KEEPING KEIKI TOGETHER

Also crucial will be the help of local kūpuna, or elders, familiar with the local culture, who would greet, reassure and remain available for the children during the estimated 10 to 30 days they would spend there, she said.

Lillian Koller, director of the state Department of Human Services, said that when she first heard about the receiving home last year, she liked the idea so much she moved quickly to incorporate it into the Villages of Mā'ili homeless transitional shelter project. That \$14 million project is being built on Department of Hawaiian Home Lands property and is set to open in September.

The receiving home "is something the community has wanted for a long time because the kids (who wind up in protective care) just get totally thrown all over the Islands, splitting up siblings, and it makes it very difficult to stabilize the children and reduce the trauma to them," Koller said.

According to recent DHS statistics, some 2,100 kids are in foster care in the state because of confirmed child abuse or neglect, and Koller describes the Wai'anae Coast as the epicenter of the problem. Figures indicate a quarter of all foster children on O'ahu, the state's most populous island, are from Wai'anae. Of those, 67 percent are of Hawaiian ancestry, while 80 percent have a family history of homelessness.

Koller said the receiving home could change those figures for the better and would not have been possible without the generosity of one man who is committed to doing something to help abused and neglected kids.



DEBORAH BOOKER | The Honolulu Advertiser
Mike and Joanne Wood and their son, Greg, review the building plans for Ho'omaluu O Na Kamali'i, for which they have pledged \$9 million to build and operate for 20 years.



RICHARD AMBO | The Honolulu Advertiser
Prep work begins on a site in the Villages of Mā'ili homeless transitional shelter project, where groundbreaking is scheduled this week for the shelter for children in crisis.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR HIM

Wood, one of two principal partners with the MW Group, a Honolulu real estate development company, along with his wife, Joanne, and son, Greg, has already paid more than \$1 million to build and furnish the receiving home. And the family has pledged millions more to keep it going.

Last year, when Wood presented his idea at a local meeting in Mā'ili, he was initially greeted with skepticism. "What's in it for you, Mr. Wood?" was the first question put to him.

"Actually, I'm really glad you asked that question, because if you're asking it there's another 20 of you who are thinking it," Wood recalled last week while talking about that meeting.

Wood, who has lived in Hawaii since 1963, went on to tell those in attendance that although he is a successful businessman today, he had to overcome the adversity of a fractured family and a childhood marked by a distant, philandering, alco-

holic father who couldn't hold a job, and a distraught mother who was given to nervous breakdowns.

He remembers how, growing up in Oakland, Calif, the second of three sons, he and his older brother were given humiliating chores, such as carrying long-overdue rental payments to their apartment landlord.

His older brother was eventually able to escape before things reached their worst. Wood also got out while still in his teens. But Wood was never able to reconcile the fact that he had not been in a position to help his older brother, seven years younger, who was severely affected by the family's dysfunctional relationship.

PROJECT FILLS A NEED

Now that he's able to help kids in a similar situation, he's determined to do so, Wood says. Her prevailed in winning the trust of the Wai'anae Coast community.

Koller called the receiving home a "pilot project" she hopes will inspire similar facilities on

O'ahu and statewide. But that will require the generosity of many other businesses and individuals, she said.

One person who believes that can't happen fast enough is Wendy Peltier, 22, a social service aide with the Department of Human Services. As a former Wai'anae foster child, she believes such a facility might have kept her and her siblings together when she was 12, her sister was 8, and her brother 3.

But the family disintegrated, and the siblings were scattered around O'ahu. It took several years and a marathon effort on Peltier's part to become a foster parent to her own sister and brother and reunite them.

"It was really difficult because we were split up for so long," Peltier said. "If we had had a family or place to take all of us in and keep us together, it would have been way better," she said.

Reach Will Hoover at whoover@honoluluadvertiser.com or 650-8909.