



Kenneth and Diane Matsuura Foundation

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Scholarship fund helps future nurses

After consistently hearing about the need for nurses during the pandemic, Kenneth and Diane Matsuura decided to do something about it. Rather than park their money in investments, the couple was driven to establish a foundation that would support future healthcare workers, knowing the essential role nurses play in and outside of hospital settings.

"During the pandemic, we saw the perseverance of nurses," says Diane Matsuura, a retired music teacher. "I could never do what they do; they work tirelessly to help their patients heal. And we're fortunate enough to be able to start this foundation to help future nurses attain their degrees."

The COVID-19 pandemic was not in sight when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared 2020 as the Year of the Nurse and Midwife, with a goal to raise awareness of the need for "nine million more nurses and midwives to achieve universal health coverage by 2030."

In Hawaii, there are currently 1,000 vacant nursing positions across the state, according to the State Department of Labor and Industrial Relations. State data further shows the demand for more nurses will grow by more than 100 positions each year.

Tiannah Ohta and Genie Reutirez heard that calling and decided to answer it by applying to Chaminade's nursing program. As part of the cohort of students in the accelerated track to earn a bachelor of science in nursing, Ohta, Reutirez and their fellow nursing students will complete their degrees in five back-to-back terms (20 months, as opposed to the traditional four years) through a rigorous academic schedule.

"When I read the email that I received a scholarship from the Kenneth And Diane Matsuura Foundation, I started to bawl," Reutirez told Diane Matsuura and son Keven Matsuura over lunch. "It was such a huge surprise and a major financial help."

Ohta was in disbelief when she learned about her scholarship, thinking at first, that the email was a prank. "I wasn't expecting it all; I had to read the email a few times because I thought I was reading it incorrectly," said the 24-year-old Waipahu native and two-time nominee for a U.S. Presidential Scholars Medallion. "This helps me a great deal financially because we can't work and go to school at the same time. It's just not possible."

With an increasing emphasis on preparing nurses at the baccalaureate and higher degree level, one innovative approach to nursing education is to offer an accelerated degree program for non-nursing graduates. These programs build on previous learning experiences and provide a way for individuals with undergraduate degrees in other disciplines to transition into nursing.

Having already completed her undergraduate degree in public health, Reutirez decided to pursue her nursing degree, a goal of hers even when she was completing her first bachelor's. "It's just a little later than I expected," said the Ewa Beach resident. "I guess though it's better late than never."

Geared to individuals who have already proven their ability to succeed at college or university, accelerated baccalaureate programs accomplish programmatic objectives in a short time by building on previous learning experiences. Instruction is intense with courses offered full-time with no breaks between sessions. Students receive the same number of clinical hours as their counterparts in traditional entry-level nursing programs.

"Even when I was completing my bachelor's degree in biology at the University of Las Vegas, I knew I wanted to be in the medical field," Ohta says. "This program will help me get there."

And so will her Kenneth and Diane Matsuura scholarship.

"It's rewarding to meet these young women who have so much passion to become nurses," Diane Matsuura says. "My husband is currently hospitalized so I see what these nurses have to go through day in and day out. They work long shifts and the job is physically demanding. So, I commend anyone who goes into nursing."