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By Catherine Cluett

Old News, New Meaning

From 1834 to 1948, over 125,000 pages of Hawaiian language newspaper were printed. However, those pages are crumbling, and the knowledge they contain would otherwise be lost if not for the efforts of Awaiaulu, an organization dedicated to publishing Hawaiian texts whose staff has been working for the past 10 years to preserve and digitize the newspaper pages.

Now, an Awaiaulu initiative called 'Ike Ku'oko'a – or Liberating Knowledge – is gathering volunteers statewide to type word for word thousands of Hawaiian articles into a searchable format.

"Not only is this the historical material from a time when Hawaiians were the nation, it was set up by consensus to be the national repository of knowledge for the future," said Awaiaulu Executive Director Puakea Nogelmeier, via email.

With excitement for the project growing, nearly 1,000 volunteers have already signed up online to become part of the effort, said 'Ike Ku'oko'a Outreach Coordinator Kau'i Sai-Dudoit. The goal is to have 3,000 volunteers working statewide.

The project will launch on Nov. 28 – the day of the Hawaiian holiday La Ku'oko'a , or Independence Day. Organizers hope to complete the transcription of about 60,000 pages within a year.

"It's about reclaiming Hawaiian knowledge," said Sai-Dudoit. "This knowledge helps empower us today."

The first Hawaiian language newspaper was printed in 1834 by Lahainaluna students on Maui as a school project, according to Sai-Dudoit. The idea soon took root in the community, and many Hawaiian newspapers were printed around the state.

"Our kupuna felt it was that important that they spent their lives putting history, mele [and other recordings of culture] into newspapers," said Sai-Dudoit. "One hundred fourteen years Hawaiians were telling their stories in newspapers."

Here on Molokai, Hawaiian language and culture remain alive, especially among students at the Hawaiian language immersion programs. Since the immersion program began in 1992, according to Kumu Manuwai Peters, it "has utilized the vast body of knowledge contained in the Hawaiian language newspapers of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In those pioneer years of immersion, there were no online databases to access the profound knowledge contained within those... Hawaiian language newspaper pages."

By greatly increasing the searchable text of the newspapers, Peters said the 'Ike Ku'oko'a initiative will make the information contained in them more accessible to students of all grade levels.

"At Molokai High School's Hawaiian language immersion program, we are encouraging our students to be a part of the process by volunteering to help with the typescripting of the... newspaper," he said.

Phase two of the project in years to come will include the translation of the documents to English, said Sai-Dudoit. But for now, you don't have to be a native speaker to get involved.

"Ninety-five percent of our people don't speak the language," said Sai-Dudoit. This project, however, allows them to be a part of their heritage and "leave their names on a legacy" even if they don't speak Hawaiian. "This is something that will bring us all together."

The process is simple, according to organizers. The project is contained on the web, at awaiaulu.org. Visit the website and click on 'Ike Ku'oko'a for more information.

"...Log on, get a digital image, get a blank text file, and type what [you] see," explained Nogelmeier. "When [you] log on [you] learn how to match the style of what's been done already. [Do one] page, submit it, and get another."

After they are submitted by volunteers, pages will be reviewed and processed by staff members.