

Respecting history

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(Left to right) NSDAR awardees Momi Naughton; Janet Garcia, representing Paniolo Preservation Society and Paniolo Heritage Center; Kathy Painton; Billy Bergin; Steve Bess, trustee for the Anna Lindsey Perry-Fiske Charitable Trust and Anna Ranch Heritage Center; and Julene Ignacio Chapter Regent of Hawaii Loa Chapter were honored at the July 16 event. (PHOTO COURTESY OF GINGER HALL/HAWAII LOA NSDAR CHAPTER)

By Mary Mowdy Special to West Hawaii Today

WAIMEA — Launching easily into casual conversation about Hawaiian paniolo, Dr. Billy Bergin demonstrated his lifestyle of commitment to preserving local history at a reception hosted last Saturday by the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) at Mana Christian Ohana in Waimea.

“We Anglos say our cowboys began with us but we’re about 250 years after the fact,” he said. “The difference is in Hawaii. Mexicans came here and made a very direct, singular, definitive, public, cultural impact, which, for our purposes, we recognize the Hispanic connection in great detail.”

At the event, Parker Ranch’s quarter-century veterinarian and author of four books on the ranch, paniolo and cattle, was awarded the NSDAR Historic Preservation Medal given by NSDAR’s Hawaii Loa Chapter. This was the first time the chapter was approved by the national committee to make a medal award.

Julene Ignacio, local chapter regent, read from the approval announcement from the chair of NSDAR’s National Historic Committee.

“The Historic Preservation Medal is the most prestigious preservation award the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution presents to individuals who have done extraordinary work in historic preservation over a long period of time. Only around 30 of these awards are presented each year throughout the United States,” she said. “The National Society is deeply indebted to the people who receive this award because one of our major goals is to preserve our nation’s history. Dr. Bergin’s devotion to preserving the history of the Parker Ranch and the ranching tradition of Hawaii has been extraordinary.”

A surprise bonus for Bergin and his family at the presentation was a commendation from Gov. Ige, congratulating him for the prestigious award. State Rep. Cindy Evans also presented joint certificates from the House and Senate to the recipients at the event.

In addition to the Historic Preservation Medal, the Hawaii Loa Chapter bestowed the Historic Preservation Recognition Award on two notable residents and two organizations. Recipients included Momi Naughton, Ph.D., of the Heritage Center at the North Hawaii Education and Research Center (NHERC) in Honokaa; Kathy Painton of the Camp Tarawa Foundation; The Paniolo Preservation Society and the Paniolo Heritage Center at Pukalani Stables; and The Anna Lindsey Perry-Fisk Charitable Trust and the Anna Ranch Heritage Center.

Naughton was honored for her significant assistance in creating several heritage centers along the Hamakua corridor and in North Hawaii. The award also celebrates her decades of commitment to historic preservation as curator for Anna Ranch Heritage Center in Waimea, board member and advisor to the Paniolo Preservation Society and professor of museology classes at the University of Hawaii at Hilo.

Kathy Painton, who was recognized for her work preserving the history of Camp Tarawa through a collection of oral histories, photos and other artifacts, said she grew up not knowing her dad who trained at Camp Tarawa but died in 1945 at Iwo Jima.

“Being led here to Hawaii and having the experience of getting connected with the camp gave me a connection with him that I never had as a child,” she said.

The first of two organizations that received the Recognition Award was Paniolo Preservation Society. Their educational program emphasizes the importance of self-efficiency in agriculture and ranching by teaching the historical background of those industries. It also brings forth values essential to successful ranching today: dedication, good work habits, loyalty to the ranch, self-confidence and community participation.

The Anna Lindsey Perry-Fisk Charitable Trust and Anna Ranch Heritage Center also received the award. Known as the “First Lady of Ranching” in Hawaii, Anna Lindsey Perry-Fisk set aside her ranch land and house in a trust that has been a gift to her community on Big Island since 1995 so that its rich history would not be lost. The Anna Ranch Heritage Center was later placed on both the Hawaii State and National Register of Historic Places because of its historical and cultural importance.

NSDAR was founded in 1890 to “promote patriotism, preserve American history and support better education for our nation’s children.” Its members are descended from the patriots who won American independence during the Revolutionary War. With 165,000 members in approximately 3,000 chapters worldwide, it is one of the world’s largest and most active service organizations.