

Outdoor Circle celebrates its 110th anniversary

Every year, I highlight local companies and organizations that

reach significant milestones. Today I'm happy to congratulate the Outdoor Circle on all it has accomplished in 110 years.

Many in the islands might know that the Outdoor Circle is responsible for eliminating billboards in Hawaii, but most would not know more than that. Diane Harding, president of the Lani-Kailua Branch of the Outdoor Circle, told me about some of its noteworthy achievements.

Kawainui Marsh

This wildlife sanctuary in Kailua came close to being developed into a 740-acre park in the 1960s with a lake and marina occupying about half of it.

Plans also called for football, baseball, soccer, tennis and archery areas, a riding academy, an 88-acre shopping center, roads and 4,000 homes. A small sliver would have remained in conservation zoning.

The Outdoor Circle and the community rose up against the development. Thanks in large part to these efforts, Kawainui Marsh exists today as the largest remaining wetland in the state.

"It's a wildlife refuge for four endangered waterbirds native to Hawaii," Harding said, "and a significant cultural and archaeological site important to understanding the historical roots of pre- and post-contact human presence in Hawaii."

Night blooms

If you have lived on Oahu, you have probably seen the night-blooming cereus hedge adorning the walls around Punahou School.

Charles Brewer (founder of C. Brewer & Co.) brought the cereus from Mexico to Hawaii. Only a single clipping survived the journey, which was given to Sybil Bingham, who planted it on the school wall.

Bingham was the wife of the Rev. Hiram Bingham. The Bingham family founded Kawaiaha'o Church and Punahou School.

By 1907 the cereus covered almost half a mile of the wall, becoming one of the most impressive night-blooming cactus hedges in the country, Harding believes.

The hedge was nearly removed in 1923 when Puna-hou Street was widened. The Outdoor Circle opposed the destruction of the hedge, and as a result of its

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BOB SIGALL

efforts, most of it was saved.

During World War II the Army took over the Puna-hou campus and planned to remove the hedge, but the Outdoor Circle stepped in again. It obtained a truckload of cuttings to plant in many parts of Honolulu. Today, 80 years later, these still flourish on the slopes of Punchbowl, Round Top and elsewhere around the city.

Queen's summer palace

The Queen Emma Summer Palace, or Hanaiakamalama, was built in 1847 by King Kamehameha IV and Queen Emma. Sixty-six years later, in 1913, it was falling apart, and replacing it with a baseball park was planned.

The Daughters of Hawaii and the Outdoor Circle joined forces and persuaded political leaders to visit the site in Nuuanu, where they saw the wisdom in restoring the home and gardens.

A year later, in 1914, the grounds of Iolani Palace, then called the Executive Building, were in great disrepair, and the Outdoor Circle stepped in to refurbish the landscaping.

Outdoor Circle volunteers removed diseased trees and planted new ones. Lawns were reseeded, footpaths were constructed and benches were placed on the grounds.

Billboard ban

At one time, before the Outdoor Circle was founded, Hawaii had many billboards along its streets.

A Heinz pickle billboard blocked a view from Kalakaua Avenue to Manoa Valley. A billboard on Diamond Head touted Bull Durham tobacco. Others could be found near the Pali.

The Outdoor Circle led a boycott against firms that continued such advertising. By 1927 only Wrigley's chewing gum and a few tobacco companies remained. Finally, the last outdoor advertising firm was bought for \$4,000 and shuttered. The Legislature outlawed billboards, and Hawaii is one of only a few states where they are not a blight on the landscape.



STAR-ADVERTISER / 1966



STAR-ADVERTISER / 1964



COURTESY OUTDOOR CIRCLE

The Outdoor Circle and the community rose up against development at Kawainui Marsh, top, in the 1960s. It exists today as the largest remaining wetland in the state. At left, Outdoor Circle members plant trees to observe Arbor Day. Mrs. Harold Erdman, left, tree-planting chair, and Mrs. William Blackfield, Circle president, pose with a palm planted in Waikiki. Eradicating billboards, above, was one of the earliest Outdoor Circle projects.

Ala Moana Beach Park

In 1925, Gov. Charles McCarthy asked for the Outdoor Circle's help in developing plans for the Ala Moana Beach Park area, then used by the city as a dumping ground.

The group was instrumental in creating the current park layout, with tree-filled spaces, open lawns and promenades for all to enjoy. The Outdoor Circle planted dozens of the magnificent trees that grace the park today.

The park was dedicated in 1934 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and dubbed "The People's Park," Harding said. Ala Moana Beach Park is now home to a spectacular collection of trees, including dozens on the State Exceptional Tree Registry.

The large banyan at the tip of Magic Island was designated as an Exceptional Tree due to its history as a third-generation link to Hawaii's past. It was grown from a cutting taken from an enormous banyan that once stood at the corner of King and Keeaumoku streets.

That tree had been planted from a cutting that came from the famous banyan that stood at Ainalau,

Princess Ka'iulani's Waikiki estate.

By 1963 the King-and-Keeaumoku banyan had become so massive that the city proposed cutting it down. An ensuing battle to save the tree was lost, but it led to passage of the State Exceptional Tree Act in 1975, which provides legal protection for our most valuable trees.

Aala Park

In 1899 a marshy area next to Nuuanu Stream was picked for a city park. It was to be called River Park.

The area was once a complex of fishponds and wetlands, Harding said. "The park was built around the turn of the century and became a hub of activity next to the city's main train station at Iwilei.

"By the early 1900s a bandstand and two baseball diamonds were erected, and baseball became the park's defining character.

"In 1912, Honolulu's newly formed Outdoor Circle undertook the planting of 28 monkeypod trees to shade the children's play space."

It was renamed Aala International Park in 1902. Its comfort station, erected in

1916, was the first public restroom in the state.

Tree planting

Aala Park was the Outdoor Circle's first planting project but not its last. The 231 royal palm trees on Palm Circle Drive surrounding the parade grounds at Fort Shafter were another such effort.

Although Palm Circle was strafed during the attack on Pearl Harbor, all the trees survived. During Hurricane Iwa, in 1983, 100 fronds were snapped off but not one tree fell.

The Outdoor Circle has planted thousands of trees on military bases, such as those beautifying Forts DeRussy, Ruger and Armstrong; Schofield Barracks; and Wheeler Airfield.

Over 40 magnificent mahogany trees that grace Kalakaua Avenue leading into Waikiki from South Beretania Street to Ena Road were planted by the Outdoor Circle in 1912.

The Outdoor Circle also planted the banyan trees that today grace the Ala Wai Promenade, next to the Hawaii Convention Center, and Thomas Square.

Thousands of plants and

trees were distributed for highways, school grounds, parks, cemeteries and other public projects.

Inspired by Versailles

The Outdoor Circle was founded by three island women who visited Paris in 1911. The Palace at Versailles inspired Ida Waterhouse, Elnora Sturgeon and Cherilla Lowrey, who felt "Honolulu needs something like these gardens and fountains," and they vowed to do something about it.

Upon returning to Honolulu, they formed the Outdoor Circle, a subgroup of the Kilohana Art League, which had begun in 1894. It had various subgroups called circles, each devoted to various forms of the arts, such as painting, music and drama.

The Kilohana Art League disbanded in 1912, and the Outdoor Circle is the last remnant of it. The Outdoor Circle was founded by women "who were true visionaries at the time," Harding said.

I congratulate them on their 110th anniversary and all they've done to beautify Hawaii.

Bob Sigall is the author of the five "Companies We Keep" books. Send him your questions or suggestions at Sigall@Yahoo.com.