



Spring 2026 Greenleaf

February 2026

A Message from our Executive Director



Welcome to this issue of The Greenleaf, where we share updates on our statewide and branch activities from 2025.

It was a wonderful year of tree giveaways and projects across the state.

At the heart of our organization is our incredible volunteer leadership at the branch and state level. These dedicated and hard-working stalwarts of the organization continue to show the kind of leadership that helps make our islands a better place to live, as has been done for 114 years. For all who have served or currently serve in these roles, we owe our sincere and unending thanks for the work you do to ensure that our branches and statewide organization remain vibrant!

Likewise, you, as a member or donor, are the lifeblood of our organization. The Outdoor Circle thrives because of you. You understand our importance to Hawaii and our communities, past, present and future. We sincerely thank you for your enduring support and commitment to our mission.

Winston Welch
Executive Director

A Message from the President



Aloha Outdoor Circle Members and Supporters,

This past year in 2025, the Outdoor Circle was proud to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the historic passage of the State Exceptional Tree Act. To honor this milestone, the TOC took part in celebratory events and outreach activities, which are detailed in this issue of The Greenleaf.

As part of our continuing commitment to environmental stewardship, TOC sponsored two tree giveaways on Maui to honor the anniversary of the devastating Lahaina fire along with a tree planting at Jarrett Middle School in Honolulu. We also held a mid-summer Shower Tree Festival event to highlight these trees. Special thanks to our dedicated office staff, including Executive Director Winston Welch, Programs Director Myles Ritchie, and Operations Director Jackie Wah for organizing these events.

We have also made significant strides towards building an infrastructure to promote our long-term sustainability and mission stewardship goals, as well as build on and preserve our enduring legacy.

Highlights of TOC's advocacy, legislative, and public affairs efforts over the past year appear in this issue of The Greenleaf. In particular, TOC was actively involved in opposition to two proposed legislative actions that would have devastating effects on our scenic view planes and weaken Hawaii's exemplary signage and anti-billboard laws. In addition, TOC put forward two bills of its own at the state legislature, one regarding enhancing the Exceptional Tree Act provisions and one regarding instituting nationally recognized 'Best Management Practices' for contractors and arborists hired to work on trees on state property. Special thanks to Myles and Winston for their work on these bills.

Our branches statewide have continued tree planting and beautification efforts in their communities, as well as tree protection and preservation activities, in particular working to save Hawaii's foundational coconut trees from the devastating effects of Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle infestation. Our branches also held November tree giveaways at Arbor Day events on Kaua'i and O'ahu. Highlights of our branch activities statewide are included here.

As we move forward, The Outdoor Circle thanks you for your steadfast support and commitment over the years - which has allowed us to further our enduring mission of **keeping Hawaii clean, green, and beautiful!** Mahalo from all of us at The Outdoor Circle!

Diane Harding
President

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ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP HIGHLIGHTS ~ 2025

TOC Tree Giveaways

Maui Tree Giveaway

June 2025 saw the first TOC event conducted on Maui in over a decade. The event was sponsored by FedEx and the Arbor Day Foundation and saw 400 fruit/food trees consisting of 16 different species/cultivars/varieties given away to the Maui community to help replant their canopy following the 2023 fires.

TOC collaborated with Maui Green and Beautiful (previously the Maui Outdoor Circle Branch) and Maui Nui Botanical Gardens to conduct the event. The event was held at the aforementioned gardens and was also notable as it was the first tree giveaway in recent memory on Maui that was comprised of solely fruit/food tree species.



Maui Tree Giveaway

Lahaina Tree Restoration Project

A second event on Maui was a large-scale tree up-potting/distribution event that took place at the Royal Lahaina Resort in August 2025 to commemorate the second anniversary of the tragic fires.

A survey of over 150 Lahaina residents/families had been conducted by nonprofit Treecorecovery to ensure that only the most desired species were purchased for this project. The result was that over 600 trees comprising 24 different species/cultivars/varieties were tagged for these recipients.



Lahaina Tree Restoration Project

Funding for the trees came from United Airlines and the Arbor Day Foundation, whose representatives, along with TOC and Treecorecovery volunteers, up-potted 1-7 gallon plants into larger 5-25 gallon pots which tree recipients could take home that day or leave at Treecorecovery's tree-hub to be cared for until the residents' properties are ready to receive them.

TOC Tree Planting, Preservation, and Outreach Events

Jarrett Middle School Tree Planting Project

In June 2025, The Outdoor Circle conducted a tree planting event at Jarrett Middle School in Palolo Valley, Honolulu, where 29 trees ranging from 10-25 gallons in size were planted throughout the campus and were comprised of kukui, kamani, breadfruit/ulu, jacaranda, milo, and plumeria.

The project was funded by SeaGrant for the purpose of mitigating storm water impacts in the Ala Wai Watershed. The area where these trees were planted is comprised of hardpan/dense clay soil which reduces water infiltration during large precipitation events. Three stormwater mitigation techniques will be implemented as a result of the tree planting:

First, as the canopy of each tree grows, an increased amount of rainwater will be intercepted and slowed down during precipitation events. Second, because a large sized area was excavated/loosened around each tree prior to planting, this will help rainwater percolate into the aerated soil ground instead of quickly running off into the adjacent Palolo Stream. Third, the trees themselves will absorb and utilize water via transpiration, helping to prevent over saturation of the soil which can result in increased stormwater runoff.

An added benefit of this project is the substantial amount of shade that will be provided throughout the school campus once the trees mature. A big mahalo is due to Steve Mechler for designing the tree concept plan for this project. TOC will be conducting weekly maintenance of the trees for the next year as part of the SeaGrant funding.



Jarret Middle School Tree Planting

Saving Exceptional Hutu Tree at UH Manoa

TOC Programs Director Myles Ritchie was invited by UH Manoa officials to consult on the disposition of a Hutu Tree (*Barringtonia asiatica*) on campus (one of seven Exceptional Trees there).

The tree was planted by Joseph Rock, Austrian-born botanist, explorer, and photographer known as the "father of Hawaiian botany", and the first curator of the UH Manoa herbarium (1911–1920).

Recent proposed construction plans to realign a pedestrian walkway on McCarthy Mall would have negatively impacted the roots of the 107+ year-old tree. Myles was able to recommend an alternative design, focusing on a gradual raised bridge over the roots, which was accepted, thus preventing possible damage or loss of this exceptional specimen.



Hutu Tree on McCarthy Mall

Shower Tree Festival

In the mid to late 1990s, The Outdoor Circle would host a yearly "Shower Tree Festival" to celebrate these beautiful trees that are in full bloom in mid-summer. In June 2025, in commemoration of those events, and in partnership with The Friends of Honolulu's Botanical Gardens, TOC co-hosted a guided tour of the hundreds of shower trees on the UH Manoa campus, which run the lengths of the central medians of both East West Drive and Maile Way, as well as elsewhere on campus.



**Queen's White Shower Trees
East West Drive**

Roxanne Adams, from the Division of Urban Forestry, and Myles Ritchie, TOC Programs Director, led the tours, giving fascinating insights into these trees, which were in spectacular bloom and lovely to see.

It should be noted that over a century ago TOC planted numerous shower trees in Honolulu that still grace our streets today.

Evaluating The Public's Perceptions Towards Trees

TOC has been working on a research project, in collaboration with UH Manoa and the University of Copenhagen, designed to evaluate the public's perceptions towards urban trees. The initial phase of the project will be on Oahu but could be replicated statewide based on interest. The goal of the project is to obtain data to show why people like or dislike trees and, with that derived data, better inform urban forestry programs, policies, and legislation to promote better retention of existing trees and lead to planting of new trees as well as implementation of urban forestry best management practices. This project was proposed at the American Association of Geographers conference in March 2025.

EXCEPTIONAL TREE HIGHLIGHTS ~ 2025

Exceptional Tree 50th Anniversary Celebrations

This past year marked the 50th Anniversary of the passage of the Hawaii Exceptional Tree Act, which was largely spearheaded by The Outdoor Circle. To honor that milestone, a celebration took place at Foster Botanical Gardens in May. TOC's Programs Director Myles Ritchie gave a presentation on the Exceptional Tree Program and the nomination process, as well as a guided tour of the gardens, home to twenty Exceptional Trees. To view a short video by Myles about the ET program, visit:

<https://www.outdoorcircle.org/exceptional-trees.html>

Myles also wrote an article appearing in the May 18, 2025 edition of Civil Beat highlighting the history of Hawaii's Exceptional Tree Program and providing examples of these trees, and where to find them via TOC's Exceptional Tree Map. The article referred readers to a step-by-step process on how to nominate a tree for exceptional status. The article can be found at:

<https://www.civilbeat.org/2025/05/hawai%CA%BBis-exceptional-tree-program-now-50-years-strong/>

For more information about TOC's public-access Exceptional Tree Map, visit:

<https://www.outdoorcircle.org/exceptional-tree-map3.html>

In October, in honor of this 50th year, City & County of Honolulu Councilmember Tyler Dos Santos-Tam recognized The Outdoor Circle at a full council meeting held at Kapolei Hale, where TOC was presented with a "Council Honorary Certificate" for the work it has continued to provide in protecting our trees. TOC Executive Director Winston Welch and TOC President Diane Harding accepted the award on behalf of TOC.

Exceptional Tree Legislation

In 2025, TOC Staff drafted state legislation designed to improve Hawaii's Exceptional Tree Program for the first time since 2004 when the tax deduction for ET maintenance was introduced.

Recommended changes focused on increasing the number of selection criteria used when considering exceptional status, providing definitions and thresholds for each criteria used, and forming a statewide Arborist Advisory Committee (AAC) to assist each county's AAC which are responsible for reviewing exceptional tree nominations and providing recommendations to ensure the overall wellbeing of these trees. The legislation will be reintroduced for the 2026 session.

Expanding the Exceptional Tree Registry

As Chair of the AAC for the City and County of Honolulu, TOC's Programs Director Myles Ritchie was able to help review exceptional tree nominations, which, in addition to trees nominated and approved by City Council in early in 2025, has led to the recommendation of nineteen new nominees on Oahu.

LEGACY BUILDING HIGHLIGHTS ~ 2025

Archiving TOC's Rich History

Over the past year, TOC has made great strides in its efforts to digitally archive our rich history. The goal is to ensure that our historical records are archived and available for public viewing online.

We have been working with the Hawaii State Archives, where a large collection of TOC historical records has been stored over the years. The collection has now been significantly organized so that it can start to be digitized for entry into their public-access archival database.

TOC has also developed its own in-house public-access archival database, called OMEKA, for our branches to upload their historical records as well as for the public to have access to TOC's extensive set of historical documents. To date, the Kauai Branch has digitized and uploaded its files, and TOC documents have been uploaded as well. TOC intern Flor Williams created two easy to follow online tutorials on how to access OMEKA, for both data upload and public viewing.

If you or someone you know may be interested in helping with the archival process (digitizing and uploading), whether at the State Archives or for OMEKA, contact TOC at: mail@outdoorcircle.org

TOC's Legacy Society

During this past year, as an enhancement to the planned giving options available to our supporters, TOC established a "Legacy Society" to honor those providing a future legacy gift in their estate plans or those making a significant gift to the Outdoor Circle. Many of you generously support us with annual donations, but if you are interested in also including us in your planned giving, we would be honored to hear from you.

For more information on the program, its benefits, and how you can become an Outdoor Circle Legacy Society member, visit: <https://www.outdoorcircle.org/planned-giving-opportunities.html>

TOC's "Keep Hawaii Beautiful" Pledge Drive

In 2024, TOC began what will be its annual "Keep Hawaii Beautiful" pledge drive to raise funds to support our abiding mission of keeping Hawaii clean, green, and beautiful. As you know, the work we continue to do benefits all of Hawaii, so a pledge solicitation describing who we are, what we do, and why our work is so important was sent out to targeted sections of the public-at-large (foundations, businesses, individuals) asking them to invest in Hawaii's future through a donation to TOC.

If you or someone you know may be interested in learning more about the campaign, visit: <https://www.outdoorcircle.org/keep-hawaii-beautiful.html>

ADVOCACY & PUBLIC AFFAIRS HIGHLIGHTS ~ 2025

LEGISLATIVE (Statewide)

Bill SB583: Passage of this bill would have had devastating effects on our scenic view planes and weakened Hawai'i's exemplary signage and anti-billboard laws under the guise of "naming rights" for any state facility statewide. Thanks in large part to our Executive Director Winston Welch's intervention, and your testimony, calls and emails, this bill, although passed by the legislature, was vetoed by the Governor.

The Outdoor Circle put forward two bills at the state legislature which unfortunately did not pass committee, but are planned to be reintroduced at the next legislative session:

Bill SB1550: Improving Hawai'i's Exceptional Tree Act provisions on its 50th anniversary to add new categories and modernize and strengthen protections.

Bill HB1380: "Best Practices in Arboriculture" to require all State departments and their contractors to follow ANSI A300 best practices for work on trees on state property.

LEGISLATIVE (City & County of Honolulu)

Bill 4: This bill allowing sponsorship 'advertising' on city assets, did pass, but not before being amended to reflect TOC concerns regarding outdoor signage related to the bill.

ADVOCACY ACTIONS

Ala Wai Bridge: TOC continued to oppose a 180-foot-high bridge over the Ala Wai which would mar legally protected view planes of Diamond Head, working with a variety of groups on alternatives acceptable to the community.

Aloha Stadium Entertainment District Redevelopment: The Outdoor Circle is working to ensure trees impacted by construction are moved to local parks and schools whenever possible.

HART: TOC continued meeting regularly with leadership at HART to ensure proper tree care is top of mind, and when trees are removed, that compensatory measures are taken. After the final construction segments begin, focus will turn to getting canopy tree coverage surrounding approaches to the stations, as well as beautification efforts.

Historic Banyan Drive, Hilo: The Outdoor Circle continued efforts to break through jurisdictional issues to ensure the iconic trees of Banyan Drive are treated and maintained, and when necessary, replanted with gall wasp resistant species.

National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific: After many years of discussion, TOC signed an MOA with the American Battlefield Memorial Commission to protect exterior scenic view planes and the integrity of Punchbowl as new features are added to the cemetery.

BRANCH ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS ~ 2025

Manoa Branch

The Manoa branch continues to stay abreast of issues that affect the community, including two major housing projects - Manoa Banyan Court on Chinese Cemetery property and Avalon on the former St. Francis school site, which are going through Honolulu C&C review process.

They are also staying abreast of the "CampusTown" development at UH, a 15-acre site mauka of University Ave and Dole St. It is proposed that UH will move the School of Education and Day Care center currently on the site to locations within the UH campus area by 2027, leaving the Charter Lab School on the site.

The branch also held a very successful Arbor Day tree giveaway in November 2025, where over 2,000 trees and shrubs of 70 varieties were given away to over 1,100 people. All of the plants and trees were tested for Little Fire Ants in consultation and coordination with the Oahu Invasive Species Committee (OISC). Experts were on hand to answer questions, Girl Scout Troops 861 and 337 volunteered for the event, and, in recognition of the "Year of the Community Forest," DLNR provided floral and tree stickers to the delight of many attendees.



**Arbor Day Tree Giveaway
Volunteers**

For more information about the **Manoa Branch**, visit: <https://www.outdoorcircle.org/manoa.html>

Lani-Kailua Branch

In early 2025, in collaboration with Smart Trees Pacific, LKOC held a Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle (CRB) Call to Action public workshop to alert Kailua residents about their devastating effects. Shortly thereafter, they established a "Niu Sanctuary" at the Women's Community Correctional Center (WCCC) as part of LKOC's Learning to Grow program at the facility. The goal of the sanctuary is to help mitigate the loss of trees due to CRB by planting and preserving a variety of coconut species, creating a gene pool that can be reintroduced into the community once CRB has been eradicated. The public is invited to donate specimens for the sanctuary, which will be screened before acceptance. If you are interested in donating a specimen, email lani-kailua@outdoorcircle.org or visit the LKOC website: <https://www.lkoc.org/crb-call-to-action.html> for more information.

In May 2025, LKOC, in collaboration with C&C Division of Urban Forestry, completed a major tree planting project on Keolu Drive in Enchanted Lake, Kailua, where ten new milo and silver trumpet trees will now provide a welcome shade canopy along the busy thoroughfare. The city will water the trees for two years to ensure they thrive. Funding for the trees came from proceeds from LKOC's annual "I Love Kailua" Town Party, held each April.

LKOC in collaboration with Smart Trees Pacific, held its annual Arbor Day tree giveaway in November, where over 300 plants (25 varieties or fruit, flowering, shade and ornamentals) were adopted by residents from across Oahu. The event included arborists' demonstrations of professional tree climbing techniques that attendees could participate in. Master Gardeners and arborists helped attendees with plant selection, along with LKOC's "Learning to Grow" students, who had nurtured the plants at WCCC prior to the event.



Keolu Drive Tree Planting

For more information about the **LKOC Branch**, visit: <https://www.LKOC.org>

North Shore Branch

The North Shore Branch continues to volunteer every month in in the Ginger Garden at Waimea Valley on Oahu and has also begun working at the Kokua Learning Farm to help out there once a month. The branch is working with the design firm of Bowers and Kubota to re-design the Ke Ala Pupukea Bike Path, a 10-mile stretch which the branch spearheaded and landscaped back in 1994 and continues to maintain regularly.

The branch has raised funds to treat dozens of coconut trees at Haleiwa Beach Park that have CRB infestation. The results have been positive so far, with some exhibiting new growth.

Governor Green recently endorsed release of Grants in Aid (GIA) funds to the branch for installation of new irrigation at Weed Circle in Haleiwa. This multi-acre tree-filled site has been planted and maintained by the branch since 2003.



Weed Circle, Haleiwa

For more information about the **NSOC Branch**, visit: <https://www.outdoorcircle.org/north-shore.html>

Kauai Branch

The Kauai Branch participated in the annual Arbor Day Tree giveaway in Lihue in November, where over 1200 trees were distributed to 600 participants. The Kauai Outdoor Circle shared a booth with a newly formed CRB Action Kauai organization, that is dedicated to spreading the word about CRB and being a resource of viable and valuable information. Kauai Branch President Maureen Murphy is on their advisory board.

The branch has also been working with Kauai County officials to save about 50 trees from removal to make way for new sidewalks in the Koloa/Poipu area and was successful in saving 45 of them. Unfortunately, despite a petition with almost 1,000 signatures, they were unable to save two large banyan trees that were removed to make room for a roundabout at the entrance to Poipu Shopping Village.



Banyans at Poipu Shopping Village

For more information about the **Kauai Branch**, visit: <https://www.kauaioutdoorcircle.org/>

East Hawaii Island Branch (Hilo)

The branch continues its ongoing landscaping maintenance at Wailoa State Park, which began in 2021 when they planted golden trumpet trees, brunfelsia, and mock orange bushes to replace two large monkey pod trees that had been removed.

The branch also continues its steadfast involvement in preserving and protecting the iconic banyans on Hilo's Banyan Drive which suffer from gall wasp infestation and it has recently received GIA funds to treat them.



Hilo's Banyan Drive

For more information about the **East Hawaii Island Branch**, visit: <https://www.easthawaiioutdoorcircle.org/>

Waikoloa Village Branch

Waikoloa Village Branch's "Community Garden", established in 2019, continues its productive activities despite experiencing hot, windy and dry conditions.

The garden has over 70 plots available for individual gardeners who grow a variety of vegetables, fruits, and other plants. It is open to the public and visitors are welcome to stroll about.

For more information about the **Waikoloa Village Branch**, visit: <https://www.outdoorcircle.org/waikoloa.html>



Waimea Branch

The Waimea Branch on Hawaii Island continues to find creative ways to secure funding and recruit new volunteers for their ongoing maintenance of Ulu La'au Nature Park, which was established by the branch in 1999. The Nature Park is home to one of the largest collections of colorful Ohia in the world.

It is free and open to the public daily from 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. for walking, gatherings and picnics, nature enjoyment, native plant identification, and responsible dog walking.

Maps and digital tours of the park are available at: <https://www.waimeaoutdoorcircle.org/park.html>

For more information about the **Waimea Branch**, visit: <https://www.waimeaoutdoorcircle.org/>



Erik Hazelhoff Memorial Tree 'Ohia Blossom

Kona Branch

In recent months, there has been positive interest in reestablishing the Kona Branch, which has been inactive in recent years.

It is one of our oldest branches, established in 1948, and was responsible for installing landscaping at numerous public sites, including Kona Hale, Halawai Cultural Center, Pali'i Park, the Painted Church, the Kona airport entrance, and Honokaa Junction.

Over the decades, it created many green spaces that are enjoyed today by visitors and residents alike, such as Old Kona Airport Park, White Sands Beach Park, Kahakai School and Pahoehoe Beach Park.



Founding Kona Outdoor Circle Members

In 1985, the branch was deeded a major property in Kona, on which they founded the Sadie Seymour Botanical Gardens, named after the Kona Branch's first President. The botanical gardens and adjacent Kealakowa'a Heiau are now maintained under the auspices of the Kona Educational Center, as a separate entity apart from the Kona Outdoor Circle Branch.

If you are interested in learning more about how you can get involved with the **Kona Branch**, visit: <https://www.outdoorcircle.org/kona.html>

Kaneohe Branch

The Kaneohe Branch has been inactive in recent years.

It is one of our oldest branches, established in 1948. It began by distributing thousands of trees and shrubs to residents to beautify the community, and planted rainbow showers on the Kamehameha Highway median and sandalwood trees in parks. Its major achievements in the 1970s include its successful efforts to designate He'eia Fishpond as a State and National Historic site, place the entire Kualoa Ahupua'a on the State Historic Register, and designate Kualoa Point as a State Park, thus preserving these historic landmarks for future generations.

If you are interested in getting involved with revitalizing the **Kaneohe Branch**, contact TOC at: mail@outdoorcircle.org

East Honolulu Branch

The East Honolulu Branch has been inactive in recent years.

It was established in 1997 under the leadership of its President Susan Spangler and has spearheaded numerous planting projects and outreach events over the years including planting projects in Diamond Head Crater, Kuhio Elementary School, and Waialae Iki Neighborhood Park.

If you are interested in getting involved with the **East Honolulu Branch**, contact TOC at: mail@outdoorcircle.org

Greater Waikiki Branch

The Greater Waikiki Branch has been inactive in recent years.

It was established in 2016 under leadership of Branch President Brian Bagnall who created a wonderful website including four self-guided walking tours that highlight Waikiki's trees and historic sites. The website also includes a section called "The Waikiki Whisperer" containing interesting and entertaining articles about Waikiki. You can visit the website at: <https://www.waikikioutdoorcircle.org/>

If you are interested in getting involved with the **Greater Waikiki Branch**, contact TOC at: mail@outdoorcircle.org

Kapolei Branch

In recent months, there has been positive interest in reestablishing the Kapolei Branch, which has been inactive in recent years.

The branch was established in 2005 under the leadership of Branch President Jackie Rayla, Certified Arborist and Horticulturist. With volunteers from Schofield, they planted Kou trees at Nanakuli High School in 2007, and the following year they hosted an Arbor Day event at Nanakuli Elementary School where a monkeypod tree was planted. The branch was active in the community through 2012.

If you are interested in getting involved with the **Kapolei Branch**, contact TOC at: mail@outdoorcircle.org