

By Jenna-Lee Neff

Environmental Activist Educates on Renewable Energy

Hawaii resident Dr. Lisa Marten devotes her time to working with the community to educate the public about renewable energy and updating infrastructure to accommodate renewable energy. Marten works with two groups, Healthy Climate Communities and Trees for Honolulu's Future, to bring awareness, education and solutions to environmental issues in a changing world.

"After learning about it, we want people to be able to act," says Marten.

Marten was working in health research at the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine when she realized that the biggest apparent threat to long-term health was the changes occurring in the environment in Hawaii as well as around the world. "I wanted to do something, but wasn't sure how I could help," Marten says.

Marten is the executive director and president of Healthy Climate Communities, an organization that got its start in 2014 and became an official nonprofit organization in the fall of 2016. Healthy Climate Communities has worked with 15 schools and engaged with 527 students through workshops to bring awareness to climate change and the needs that the community will face in the future. Working with schools and teachers, Healthy Climate Communities is in the process of developing science curriculum units that will meet the new Department of Education standards, allowing teachers to use them independently.

Marten says these units are place-based, using local data, images and examples allowing students to relate to them.

Students are not the only ones that Healthy Climate Communities hopes to educate on environmental issues and the ways that individuals can become involved. "We offer workshops on a few related topics, all of them interactive and with a focus on personal action," Marten says. "We don't want to make people depressed; we want to make them feel empowered."

Healthy Climate Communities has supported the expansion of renewable energy and the updating of infrastructure at the government level by supporting State and City legislations that will make transitions easier.

Marten's focus on the environment can also be seen in her work with Trees for Honolulu's Future, a foundation in which she is a founding board member. Trees for Honolulu's Future aims to expand the number of trees in Honolulu to move the city from 20 percent canopy cover to 35 percent canopy cover by 2035.



According to Trees for Honolulu's Future's website, canopy coverage is expected to lower the temperature of the city by up to nine degrees and buildings that have trees around them are expected to have their air conditioning needs reduced by up to 30 percent.

Raising awareness to the benefits of trees and canopy cover, Trees for Honolulu's Future provides information to guide the planting of trees, works on developing science curriculum for schools, and identifies neighborhoods with the lowest canopy cover. Once these neighborhoods have been identified efforts are coordinated between local government, private groups and community organizations. These efforts tackle all areas of the project, from the planning stages all the way to the planting of the trees.

"We want people to be able to act, but not everyone has a place they can plant trees," Marten says of the group planting projects.

In collaboration with Healthy Climate Communities, Trees for Honolulu's Future features an annual poster contest open to all school children. Marten says that the poster contest allows students a chance to express why they love trees. Selected posters from the 2018 Keiki Arbor Day Poster Contest will be on display in February at Honolulu Hale and in March at the State Capitol.

Those looking to help out in their community can join Healthy Climate Communities every third Saturday from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. at Hamakua Marsh for their marsh restoration project. This project is a collaboration between Healthy Climate Communities, the Hawaii State Department of Land and Natural Resources, local schools and community groups.