

Making a Commitment to our Wonderful West Maui Community



By Joseph D. Pluta
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I know that we all have had a dream of living in a community where we just love it so much that we devote ourselves to preserve and maintain what we believe makes it special. That's how I felt about West Maui when I moved here from Honolulu in April of 1979. In less than a month, I became a member of the Rotary Club of Lāhainā and a Board Member of what was to become the West Maui Taxpayers Association.

I put my faith on the line when two other WMTA board members, Uwe Schulz and Ron Kawahara, and I placed second mortgages on our personal residences to collaterally secure the



construction loan with Bank of Hawaii to privately develop the Nāpili Fire and Ambulance Station. Efforts to build the station led to the creation of the West Maui Improvement Foundation, (WMIF), a nonprofit with a public charity designation that was able to accept tax-deductible donations, including the land donated for the site. Funds were privately raised to build the station, with the county taking over operations upon completion. No other community in Hawai'i had undertaken such a project and people had been skeptical. But the result was improved

"Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings and material assistance which no [person] could have dreamed would have come [their] way. Whatever you do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now."

-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and William Hutchinson Murray



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public safety and drastically lower costs for fire insurance for property owners.

Other achievements the WMTA and WMIF notes include improvements to the Lāhainā Youth Center, the creation of Nāpili Park and the Lāhainā Skate Park, improvements to Honoapiʻilani Highway and pushing for the Lāhainā Bypass, among many others. But the largest undertaking has remained the push for a West Maui hospital. Under the best of circumstances, it takes an hour for someone on the west side to arrive in an ambulance to the Maui Memorial Medical Center Emergency Room after calling 911.

Not long after the fire and ambulance station opened, we worked to determine what it would take to build a hospital. What followed was years' worth of studies, negotiations, land use processes and recovery from the financial meltdown. The biggest hurdle, besides finding the millions of dollars needed to back the project, was obtaining a certificate of need from the State Health Planning Development Association that would deem the project worthy, which was finally granted in 2009. The West Maui Hospital and Medical Center calls for a 24-hour emergency department, 16 medical surgical beds, nine critical-care beds, three operating rooms, a diagnostic radiology department and outpatient services, among other services, according to the hospital's website. (I no longer have any role with the West Maui Hospital. The developer is the only authorized spokesperson.)

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Once the hospital is built, I expect more improvements for the community to fall into place, inclusive of road improvements, high-paying jobs in high-tech fields, and additional housing. Some of the next issues I want to tackle include homelessness, affordable housing and traffic. Some 10,000 people commute to the west side for work each day. More affordable housing needs to be built in the area to accommodate at least a portion of that population. With the hospital as the incentive to create more development, more affordable homes are likely to follow. If fewer workers have to commute, that will ease traffic on the roads. The WMTA is led by volunteers whose dedication and commitment is unparalleled.

I invite all who love West Maui to join me volunteering for our community in membership with the West Maui Taxpayers Association Inc. We have launched a campaign for membership growth and necessary increased financial support to enable us to continue to work on your behalf.

See westmaui.org for more information. ●

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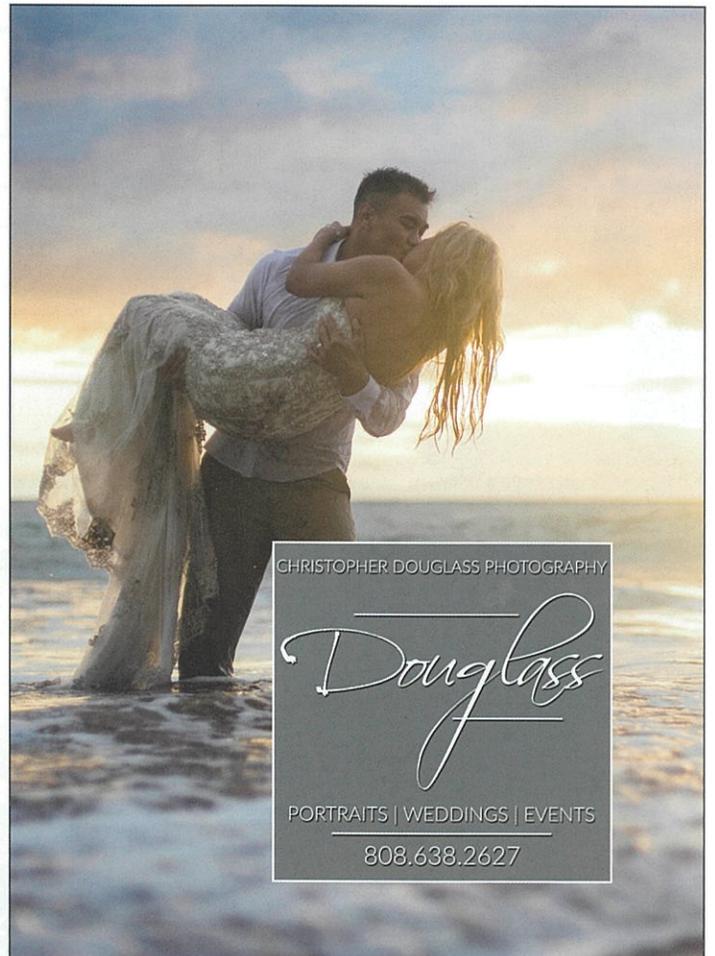
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