UHPA HONORS PLANT PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION CHAMPION DR. LANI STEMMERMANN THROUGH ENDOWED FELLOWSHIP

“Lani loved field work and jumped at every opportunity to traverse Hawai‘i’s vegetation and landscapes.” —Dr. Dieter Mueller-Dombois

HONOLULU – The University of Hawai‘i Professional Assembly of Honolulu is honoring UH alumna, innovative researcher and UH educator Dr. Lani Stemmermann through a $204,000 pledge to create the Dr. Lani Stemmermann Endowed Fellowship. This endowment will support graduate students pursuing their Ph.D. degree in Botany, in the Department of Botany University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa College of Natural Sciences.

UH Professional Assembly Executive Director Dr. J. N. Musto said, “Over the years UHPA has made contributions to the UH Foundation in support of students and faculty, often in response to matching contributions made by faculty members to scholarships.” Musto continued, “This contribution reflects the wishes of David Duffy who has foregone a part-time paid leave of absence as UHPA President and requested that the funds be used to establish the Lani Stemmermann Endowment. This truly represents an extraordinarily generous act by David, and an expression of collaboration between the Botany Department, the Dean, and the union.”

Dr. Ruth Lani Stemmermann was born in Hilo on September 7, 1952. She spent her childhood years on the Big Island where she graduated from the Hawai‘i School of Girls in 1970. Her undergraduate studies took her to Pitzer College in Claremont, California where in 1974 she earned a B.A. degree in Botany. Upon her acceptance to the University of Hawai‘i for graduate studies in botany, she received a two-year research assistantship with Dr. C. H. Lamoureaux. In 1976 she continued her graduate work as a teaching assistant in the UH Mānoa Botany Department. Lani received her M.S. degree in Botanical Sciences for anatomical and taxonomic
studies of Hawaiian sandalwood, and subsequently published two papers in Pacific Science as a result of her thesis work.

Lani continued her studies in botany by enrolling in the doctoral program at the University of Hawai‘i, during which time she also performed consulting work for the Army Corps of Engineers on Micronesian wetland vegetation.

Upon graduating with her Ph.D. in Botanical Sciences in 1986, Lani was hired first as an instructor and then assistant professor at the University of Hawai‘i and Hawai‘i Community College in Hilo. She taught courses in plant ecology, biology and environmental sciences. During this time Lani led the way with her combination of field-instruction and classroom teaching.

Her passion for field work and love for Hawai‘i’s vegetation and landscape motivated her as a researcher and advocate. She became a champion for plant protection and preservation on the Big Island when she became aware of the military’s destructive effects on Hawaiian plants in the Pohakuloa training area. Lani lobbied for the survival of these rare plants by publicly citing the military for their disregard. The courts initially turned down Lani’s complaint, but through her brave and persistent stance, the military eventual complied with her concerns.

Lani became a co-principal on a new National Science Foundation project in 1990 as Stanford University collaborated with the University of Hawai‘i. The project, “Ecosystem Dynamics in Hawai‘i,” gave her the opportunity to set up a ‘Common Garden’ for the study of native rain forest trees, which was an extension of her dissertation research.

UH Mānoa Professor of Botany Dr. David Duffy said, "Lani believed that Hawai‘i’s species and natural environment merited both research and conservation and she combined the two, setting an example that inspires today. This fellowship celebrates her legacy in academia, just as the endangered palila and silverswords of Big Island endure as legacies of her advocacy on their behalf."

In 1993, Lani’s illness, malignant lymphoma, began to slow her down in her efforts. The continuation of research on the Common Garden, eventually known as the Stemmermann Common Garden, continued with the help of Dr. Mueller-Dombois and UH graduate students.

On March 13, 1995, Dr. Stemmermann succumbed to her illness when both her life and work were tragically cut short. With the Stemmermann Common Garden she left a living legacy in Hawai‘i with her positive impact on the understanding and preservation of *Metrosideros polymorpha*, Hawai‘i’s dominant rain forest tree on all islands and habitats.
UH Mānoa Chancellor Tom Apple concluded “This fellowship ensures Lani’s passion lives on in perpetuity through the lives and work of future botanists.”

To find out how you can support the students and programs in the College of Natural Sciences, please contact Tim Szymanowski at (808) 956-0843 or tim.szymanowski@uhfoundation.org.

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