

Award boost for 'steersman' trying to ride out storm

by MELISSA TANJI - STAFF WRITER (MTANJI@MAUINEWS.COM) • AUG. 30, 2011

Before accepting a \$10,000 leadership award Monday, the chief executive officer of Hale Makua Health Services described himself as the organization's "steersman" in "rough seas" generated by cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, the financial lifeblood of his nonprofit agency that provides nursing home care and other services on Maui.

"I would say this is the darkest and most challenging time I have ever seen in terms of funding and resources to care for an exploding frail and elderly population," said Tony Krieg, who has been at Hale Makua for three decades.

Because of the cuts, competition and other factors, Hale Makua has 60 empty beds at its nursing homes in Kahului and Wailuku. He said it's going to take hard work, extra direction and steering in the next three to five years to ride out this storm.

On Monday, Krieg received a boost as he tries to steer Hale Makua into better times. He was presented with a 2011 Ho'okele Award at a ceremony on Oahu. The award was established in 2002 by the Hawai'i Community Foundation and the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation and aims to recognize and strengthen the leadership in the state's nonprofit sector.

Receiving awards with Krieg were Lea Hong, Hawaiian Islands program director for The Trust for Public Land; Robert G. Peters, head of school of Hanahau'oli School; and Leslie Wilcox, president and CEO of PBS Hawai'i.

Award recipients each receive \$10,000 to be used for their professional development and personal renewal. Over the past 10 years, \$420,000 has been presented to 42 recipients.

"We recognized that Hawaii was in danger of losing incredible executive talent in the nonprofit sector in part because many executives had little opportunity to renew themselves and marshal the stamina to continue their demanding work," said Kelvin Taketa, president and CEO of the Hawai'i Community Foundation. "The Ho'okele Award (which means navigator or steersman in Hawaiian) allows us to recognize, thank and reward our community's truly selfless leaders."

"I really appreciate and will take advantage of this award," Krieg said. "I'm not sure what exactly I'm going to do. Maybe take a trip with a friend and taking photographs in a couple of national parks for a couple of weeks to give me some space to reflect on the challenges ahead."

"I wish I could extend the same thing for our staff," he continued. "We work 24 hours, seven days a

week for people, (that) otherwise their family can't take care of."

Krieg joined Hale Makua Health Services in 1981 and was named CEO in 1986. He oversees more than 500 employees in four programs that provide nursing home care, social work, foster care management and rehabilitation services on Maui.

His work also extends to the state's long-term plan to research, create and execute goals for Hawaii's growing frail and disabled population as part of the Hawai'i Long Term Care Commission.

At Hale Makua, Krieg said that 85 percent of its clientele are covered by Medicare or Medicaid and that cuts to those programs really hurt his agency. Since August, there has been a 3 percent cut in Medicaid payments, and in October, there will be an 11 percent reduction in Medicare payments, he said.

He added that the state's decision to privatize the Medicaid program for the aged, blind and disabled also has hurt his agency. Managed care insurance companies look for other ways to keep people out of nursing homes like Hale Makua, which can cost more compared to other alternatives, he said.

This loss of revenue led to five layoffs at Hale Makua this past year. If more cuts come, there may be more who may lose their jobs - which Krieg does not want to happen.

Through these difficult times and all these years, Krieg has stayed with Hale Makua and been driven by a desire to help those for whom their families can no longer care. He recalled an elderly woman many years ago, his girlfriend's grandmother, whom he enjoyed seeing. The grandmother ended up in a nursing home, and "it was a real sad thing," he said.

As the director of a large nursing home, he remembers that grandmother and tries to do right by her.

Krieg said that although the award is "for the guy that is steering the ship," it's his staff, board, committee members and the community who have made Hale Makua successful.

"It's been a community effort, and with the community's help, we'll get through this," he said.

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