

Science, culture connect

ASTRONOMY GROUP USES HAWAII'S SCIENTIFIC HISTORY TO INSPIRE YOUTH

BY CHELSEA JENSEN
WEST HAWAII TODAY
cjensen@westhawaii.com

Getting Hawaii Island's students engaged in science, which can provide stepping stones to a better future, is easier when you bring Hawaii's culture and scientific history into the picture, cultural practitioners said Saturday in Kailua-Kona.

"Culture is something that is very important, and if it's not touched on, students here on the Big Island really don't feel that they have a part in science. We need to blend and bridge the gap between Hawaiian culture and science," said Koa Rice, a cultural consultant, community outreach educa-

tor and cultural practitioner affiliated with the Waimea-based International Lunar Observatory Association. "We want our youth to understand that science is fun and science is good, and it's about carrying on the Hawaiian tradition. ... We are trying to bridge the gap by promoting careers, mentorship and internships."

Rice, along with Kimo Pihana, a Hawaiian sacred site caretaker, cultural practitioner and retired Mauna Kea park ranger, spent the morning immersing about a handful of people, including a few teachers, in the significant role science played in ancient Hawaii during a workshop held at the Ellison S. Onizuka Space Center located within Kona International Airport.

The Hawaii Culture and 21st Century Galaxy Education workshop strives to incorporate astronomy education into academic curricula for students from

► SEE FORUM PAGE 5A

1B Travel 6C Volcano Watch 2C

WEST HAWAII TODAY | SUNDAY, JANUARY 30, 2011

FROM PAGE ONE

► FORUM: 'Students need to have a better understanding of where they are in the universe'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

preschool to college. The workshops are taped and provided free-of-charge to teachers who were unable to attend Saturday's event, said Steve Durst, association president.

Teaching students how Hawaiians understood the birth of the universe, as contained in the creation chant "kumulipo," and the significance a comet had on the Hawaiian people during Kamehameha I's birth will help students realize Hawaii and its people have a long scientific history, she said. Little bits of information like how Iolani Palace had

both telephones and electricity prior to the White House also can snag a student's interest, Rice added.

Pihana and Rice both also noted how involved King David Kalakaua was in the sciences when he hosted in 1874 an English astronomical expedition to Hawaii to view the Transit of Venus, which occurs when Venus passes directly between the Sun and Earth. The transit, which occurs in pairs that are separated by over a century, was seen in 2004 and is slated to again occur in June 2012, she said.

"Hawaiians were the smartest of anyone and our students don't realize

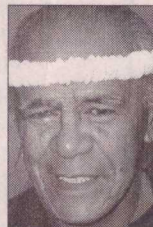
this," Rice said. "We need them to realize they can be anything they want to be in the footsteps of their ancestors."

Una Burns, a teacher at West Hawaii Explorations Academy who has attended all three of the association's annual workshops, said the effort made by the association and others to promote galaxy education is a great thing for the Big Island.

"It's inspiring for teachers who are supposed to contin-



Koa Rice



Kimo Pihana

ue learning. It helps me to learn new things and pass that on to the students," Burns said. "Students need to have

a better understanding of where they are in the universe and realize that we are this tiny little area in the galaxy, yet we've been able to understand so much in just the last 100 years. It inspires not only the students, but other people to go up there (Mauna Kea) and seek jobs (to better their lives)."