

# Talking Story with Maui's New Mayor —

*"Charmaine Tavares' granduncle and my father, the late Antone F. Tavares, was elected to the Territorial House of Representatives in 1910, and served in the House and Senate until 1928, a total of 18 years. His son, C. Nils Tavares, Charmaine's cousin, served as Attorney General for the Territory of Hawai'i during World War II, and was appointed Federal Judge by President John F. Kennedy.*

*Charmaine's cousin, and the daughter of Antone Tavares, Edna Tavares Taufaaasau, served as Director of Personnel Services during the mid-1960's in Governor John A. Burns' cabinet. Charmaine's father, Hannibal Tavares, served as a member of the Maui County Board of Supervisors from 1955 -1959. He later served as Mayor of Maui County from 1979-1990.*

*Charmaine served as head of the Department of Parks and Recreation from 1989-1995 and as a Council Member from 1997-2006. Now the Charmaine continues this proud family tradition, which will in the year 2010, mark a century of public service by the Tavares family."*

*---William Tavares, speaking at the public inauguration ceremonies of Mayor Charmaine Tavares on January 2, 2007, held at the Maui Arts and Cultural Center.*

**I**t was only three weeks or so into her administration and Charmaine Tavares was still organizing her office when her assistant Grace invited me in for the interview. This was the third Mayor I had visited in the office and I was curious to see what touches this new Mayor would bring to it. Two things were immediately apparent; the first was a small inviting round glass table with four chairs where Charmaine invited me to sit with her. Previous occupants had preferred to sit and conduct business behind the wide executive-style desk that takes up much of the room.

The second thing that caught my eye was the position of that large desk itself. No longer did the occupant of the

Mayor's office sit and look out across the room, their view ending at a wall decorated with personal honors or artwork. Now, the desk had been turned and the Mayor gazed directly out of the large windows that made up one wall, looking out of her office across Maui's central plain, Kahului Harbor, the slopes of Haleakala and to the airplanes that ceaselessly landed and took off from the airport, bringing tourists, money, jobs, and a series of challenges that would ultimately come to the Mayor of Maui County, no matter who filled the position.

Mayor's, by definition, live on a tight schedule. Charmaine is no different, and after a few more words, we began the interview.

## **What's it like being Mayor?**

Charmaine is the daughter of Hannibal Tavares, who was one of Maui County's most famous Mayors. I wondered what it was like walking into an office where she had once spent time as a young girl.

"Well, I tell you," she replied. "It starts with when I drive into work and I drive into the parking space reserved for the Mayor. Then it kinda hits me. Then I come upstairs here and people that come that knew my Dad all comment on how neat it must feel to be here. And it really is, because I visited him here before I was on the Council and before I worked for him as the Parks Director. And it's quite amazing to me and it's still a thrill to be here."

# — Charmaine Tavares

by Tom Blackburn-Rodriguez



Mayor Charmaine Tavares (left), takes the oath of office from Judge Boyd P. Mossman (Ret.), at her inauguration ceremony held at the Maui Arts and Cultural Center on January 2, 2007, as her mother, Harriet Tavares looks on.

Do you ever hear your father's voice? "Oh yes," she laughed. "I hear his voice a lot. I used to go and chat with him at gravesite and all during the campaign, before the campaign, while I was wrestling with should I run. I always felt that he's been guiding me, hovering over me, watching out for me. I felt I was in good hands, so I was not concerned about the election and the fact that I wasn't going to cry for months and months if I didn't win. I'm sure I would have been sad and disappointed if I had lost, but it was not like the end of the world for me. And that's where my Dad and I were real different"

"He always wanted to be Mayor of Maui County. That was his dream and that was his life goal. And I am so glad

that he got to fulfill his life's goal, but he really wanted to be Mayor and with me it's up to the people. If they're going to vote for me and if I get to be Mayor I'm going to work as hard as I can to help the community."

### **Leadership Style**

Observers of Maui County political campaigns have noted this approach by Tavares during her previous runs for public office. I asked if this reflected her view of public service.

"I think it's a good attitude to have about public service," she responded. "If you think that what you are doing is doing some good for the community, then by all means continue. If you get to

the point where coming to work everyday is a drudgery, you hate it, you wish you were somewhere else, then for crying out loud, 'Why are you doing this?' Then go do something you enjoy, because life is too darn short."

That feeling carries over to the Mayor's hope for what will be seen as her leadership style.

"I would like people to know that I was approachable, that I would listen to all sides and all points of view, and then make any decision based on the best interests of the community. That's what I would like to leave as my style."

"It conflicts with what some people expect," she continued. "There are some people that ask me, 'what specifically are you going to do about X, Y and Z?' And



What's new about being Mayor? "The part that's different is the volume. There's much more that comes up to the Mayor's office. There's a lot more of intergovernmental things and international types of things and coordination between the four mayors."

I tell them I'm not going to specifically do anything until I thoroughly discuss this, or discuss this enough so that I can make some decisions that make sense. Too often politicians decree something and then they can't live up to it, or they can't administer it."

"I might say that I think we should be doing this. This and this, I'm not going to be able to do it by myself. We all do things together. Some people will feel quite insulted if I say this company should do this, and this utility should do this and this legislator should do this. It's not productive. While I can't get into specifics, especially right now, I'm not getting into specifics because I haven't really had the opportunity to get into too much detail about anything."

Recognizing that Tavares' administration was just settling in, I still wanted to get some sense of how Charmaine saw the challenges facing her and some broad themes as to how she would approach areas such as housing, water, energy, the environment and the economy.

"Housing is a very important issue

here," she said. "If not the number one issue, it's close to the top. I think our challenge is going to be finding all the right combinations of people at the table to help us provide those housing units that we need all up and down the spectrum. That's the reason I have a Housing Commissioner, JoAnne Ridao, who I brought from Lokahi Pacific."

### **Energy**

My Energy Commissioner, Victor Reyes, is also going to be helping us formulate some plans and programs and coordination to get renewable energy to the top of the list. One of the things that I was thrilled about listening to the State House, the State Senate and the Governor all talking about the importance of housing and renewable energy, and water... for once the planets are aligned, we're all singing the same song and we're even kind of in key."

To those doubters who think that renewable energy sounds nice, but is impractical, Mayor Tavares responds,

"I'm going to work my darnedest to disprove that because I don't believe that for one minute. We in Hawai'i, or any island nation or community, have got to think about this seriously or they're not going to survive. Their civilization is eventually going to die out. What are they going to do when there is no replacement for fossil fuel? Maybe it's not in my lifetime, or yours, or my nieces and nephews time, but sometime it's going to happen."

### **Housing Initiatives**

Speaking more about housing the Mayor addressed some of the incentives that might be proposed to amend the residential Workforce Housing legislation passed by the previous Council.

"The incentive package I hope will contain things that have to do with credit for other public projects associated with their project, but not closely associated with the project. For example, let's look at Hale Mua's requirement to put a bridge over Iao Stream. Now, that's not

a direct impact of their project necessitating the bridge over Iao Stream. It's more of a regional improvement for traffic circulation. So Hale Mua's project, that's over and above what you would normally expect a developer to do. So, in this case, the developer, under what I think the plan might turn out to be might be, is that they would receive credits up to a certain amount for things like that."

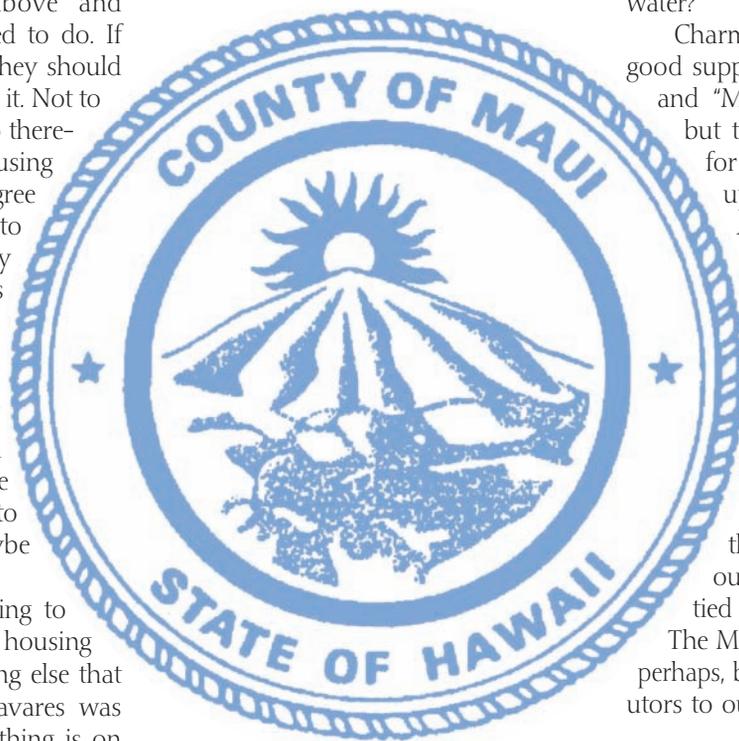
"Or say that a developer builds a school, or they build a special needs housing project, or a homeless resource center. Things that are above and beyond what they're required to do. If they're willing to do it, that they should receive some sort of credit for it. Not to go the whole way and say so therefore the rest of their housing requirement is zero. I don't agree with that, but it could be up to a certain amount that they would be able to get credits for doing above and beyond the requirements of the law. That, density bonuses, tax credits; there's all kinds of other things I think that can be added to the mix to make it more attractive for people to say, 'You know what, maybe this will work.'"

Asked if besides not going to zero in terms of affordable housing required, if there was anything else that was off the table, Mayor Tavares was quick to note, "I think everything is on the table. To me, if they can show the community-benefit that is beyond their subdivision. They're doing a subdivision, but if they're going to do something that's going to benefit this whole community out here, you know, then that's possible. I don't think we should say that we're going to limit ourselves to just certain things, but let's hear what somebody might be real creative about or innovative."

## **Water**

Asked about water issues, the Mayor pointed out that there have been issues about water "since I was a little kid." She remembers having a tobacco bag tied

around the water faucet to catch the dirt and other sediment that came through. She continued, "We do have some challenges and each district has it's own different challenges. Upcountry, where I'm from, and I'm very concerned because that's where the droughts are every year, we need to finish that dual water line for the farmers. We also need to, I think, to build storage up there. I still think we need to build storage. That was the plan many many years ago. They put two reservoirs up there; it's not enough, so I think we should have other reservoirs".



"Storing water is actually less expensive than drilling wells and pumping water. We need to look at what all the options are and try to make the best decisions about water quality and delivery of water, the transmission of water."

The Mayor also supports the idea that water is a public trust and should be controlled by the government, or under the jurisdiction of the government rather than a private company. However, she does not rule out partnerships that would have private developers develop the water and then at a later point in time turn it over to the County. Her concern is that while there is knowledge about the public water, there is not

the same knowledge about the private water. "There are a lot of straws," she said.

## **Support for Agriculture**

As Mayor, Charmaine will continue her traditional strong support for agriculture on Maui. "We need to take a look at all of the ways that county government influences what happens in the agricultural world and try to look at those and say, 'Can we streamline this for them? Can we, perhaps, give them real property tax breaks? Can we provide them cheaper water?'"

Charmaine believes that there is good support for promoting agriculture and "Made on Maui" in marketing, but that the county lacks support for the basics from the ground up. One example: The Kula Agricultural Park has not been expanded since it was created in the 1970's. There has been no addition of land for the Ag Park or Ag activities.

"We came from this agricultural base and I want to see us stay in an agricultural basis," she said. This also is linked into her belief that Maui County could "tie our energy source into a crop, or tied to a crop, a bio fuels crop". The Mayor's view is that, "bio fuels, as perhaps, being one of the great contributors to our being more sustainable."

## **Guiding Growth on Maui**

How does the Mayor see growth on Maui and what is the role of the General Plan Advisory Committee that is now meeting to help shape the plan that will guide growth on Maui through 2030?

"The GPAC and the General Plan, the formulation of the General Plan for Maui County, is what is going to drive what happens with growth here. Where the growth is going to occur and to what "extent, she said."

Her hope for the General Plan is to have the community drive where the growth will be, rather than "solely depending upon the landowner to drive where the development is going to be,



"Affordable housing has risen to the top in every county. The other concern is water on all four islands."

which has been the pattern in the past"

What type of growth appeals to the Mayor who grew on Maui? "I believe in the small town. The small town can be the center of whatever the area is, and if growth is going to come around it, and that's the purpose of those urban growth boundaries that are specified for the General Plan, then we can say O.K., we want to focus our growth...you focus the infrastructure there, you say this is where growth is going to occur so those of you that are landowners in here, now you can come in with your proposal about how you think you can meet our growth demand for the area."

### **Maui's Economy**

When it comes to the future of Maui's economy Mayor Tavares sees strength in the area of renewable energy where she believes, "We will be providing another job center as we proceed not only in developing the technology, but also teaching the technology to other places. That's my dream, that Maui becomes the

center of the Pacific as far as teaching techniques, best management practices, etc. as it relates to bio fuels crops, for example."

"We might encourage them (companies) to come here and make some of the thin-film photo voltaics that are available now. The demand is so great they can't keep up with it. And there are other technologies that we haven't even thought about yet that will probably come out. There's wave technology, ocean technology that we have not fully explored yet, we have so many resources here and we could build an industry, a diversified economy, around our ability to produce energy."

"We want to continue to work in the high tech area with other technologies, to continue the R & T Park, perhaps enlarge the R & T Park so that we can encourage other businesses, the so-called clean businesses, to come over here."

"Tourism will always be a huge part of our economy here, so I think it behooves us for the sake of everyone

that we nurture it to make sure that that part of the economy stays strong until we have something that totally takes it over."

### **You are part of the Community**

As the interview came to a close, I asked the Mayor if there was any one message she wanted readers to take away from the article. She replied, "All of us, all of us together have to care enough to participate in the government. We have been designated in the social sphere to be the leaders, the people to provide the services. But we're not here dictating; that's not our role. We should be very much focused on the community that's here and what their needs are."

"And everyone who's reading this, if you're reading it you're part of this community. Grumbling about it isn't going to help. You gotta get into it, get active, share ideas, somebody calls for a meeting, if you've got the slightest bit of interest go to the meeting, write a letter, do something, just don't sit there and grumble. That's my message." **REMS**