

Left to right: Chuck, Ray, and Christina



Creative Alliances Maximize Center Efforts

by Christina Cox

Exchange asked Christina Cox to interview two respected Hawaiian collaborators for this article.

We found ourselves, once again, meeting to plan the future, enjoying the tropical breezes on another perfect balmy January evening — as the saying goes, “Lucky we live Hawaii.”

I could hear Bonnie’s voice — “You are competitors! How did this collaboration ever happen? How did this kind of thinking begin?” — and was then immediately pulled back to the conversation at hand as two members of the Coalition* — the two most demanding members of the group — began to respond to my first interview question by describing their relationship as a Sumo wrestling match — “The two fiercest of competitors enter the ring, grunt ‘rrr,’ throw salt in the ring, bow . . . and . . .” they dis-

solve into laughter, so it begins. I am laughing to the point of tears and silently groaning at the fact that once again I find myself trying to harness their energy and focus their conversation to bring about an end product, this article. I must admit I have gotten better at it over the past few years. When all six members are together, it’s a real challenge!

For the next two hours, our interview continues as Ray Sanborn, president of Kama’aina Kids, the

state’s fourth largest multi-site provider, reminisces about how he met Chuck Larson, executive director of Seagull Schools, the state’s fifth largest multi-site provider. He is going on about a speech he heard Chuck give at the annual HAEYC conference as worthy wage chair in ‘92 and how impressed he was with Chuck. Then they both laugh heartily again and start firing off ideas for future collaborative projects.

“Hey, I know, I want to motivate the rest of our directors to get accredited. The next NAEYC conference is in New Orleans, I love New Orleans! Let’s write a grant to fund half of the cost of all CBC (Childcare Business Coalition) member directors that run accredited centers.”

“Yeah! That’s a great idea and we are both validators so we’ll be eligible, too!”

When asked to reflect on their unique collaboration, they had similar thoughts:

Chuck comments: “Even though Ray’s business is my most direct competition, I enjoy hanging out

Christina Cox is a vice president of Kama’aina Kids and is the director of the preschool division. She oversees operations for nine centers and serves on a number of state-level committees. The training she received from Bank Street College ECE Leadership Masters Program while working as the full-time center director of a small center in Hawaii strengthened her ability to serve in the diverse roles she fills today.

More Collaborations from Exchange Panel of 200

For 10 years, one of our centers has been on site at the alternative public school for teen parents and adult education. Over the years, the school district has moved and improved the whole program to bigger and better locations twice. They completely remodeled and rebuilt the center each time according to our needs. They pay the building costs, maintenance, and part of the operational costs. United Way, parents, the child care food program, and state and federal child care funding funds the rest. We have nearly all infants and young toddlers, about 60 children enrolled.

— Joanne Cotter, *Early Learning Centers of Lubbock, Lubbock, Texas*

We hook up with the local fitness club as a *value sponsor*. For a yearly fee, we hang banners, set up our promotional booth, advertise in their newsletters, etc. It really helps us promote our preschool, child care, and summer camp to the new young families moving into the area. We also promote through the Welcome Wagon.

— Gale and Doug Wilk, *Breezy Point Day School, Langhorne, Pennsylvania*

Recognizing that there is a direct correlation between quality in early childhood programs and the leadership in those programs, a group of child advocates in Palm Beach County, Florida, have joined together to develop, market, obtain funding, and deliver a voluntary Director Credential Program. Members of the Director Credential Task Force are teachers, directors, and owners of both non-profit and for-profit centers, representatives from child care resource and referrals, Children Services Council (allocates tax dollars to programs that benefit children), the School Board, Head Start, and the local licensing agency. The mission of the Task Force is to develop and provide a comprehensive, inclusive, and voluntary Director Credential Program to effectively prepare leadership in the field of early childhood care and education. They are currently researching other director credential programs nationally, developing components of the credential, collaborating with local universities regarding delivery of the course work, identifying and obtaining scholarship funding, and developing a marketing plan and a plan for evaluating the program. This county-wide collaboration is exciting, productive, and, hopefully, will effectively provide leadership, training, and career advancement opportunities for early childhood educators and caregivers in our county and perhaps our state.

— Leighan Rinker, *Beginnings Child Care Center, Lake Worth, Florida*

Our agency began a collaborative with the city, school district, and two corporations to serve 42 infants of staff and teen parents. Each entity provided money and volunteers. The collaboration is about to add two others — another employer and a funder of early intervention services for infants. The new additions will provide more resources to fund the expansion of the center to more infants and infants with disabilities. Future plans are to include a health care provider and expand to add a new program to serve mildly ill infants.

— Paul Miller, *Tri-Cities Children's Center, Fremont, California*

Mt. Olive Child Care & Learning Center has built a network of collaborators in our community. We work with the Mt. Olive Township Public Schools to provide quality and affordable before- and after-school services, summer camp, holiday care, and inclement weather care; the Mt. Olive Township Health Department (free Mantoux tests for our staff to be in compliance with both licensing regulations and NAEYC standards, consultations by a public health nurse, flu shots for staff and parents, distribution of information on preventive health services for our families at all our programs); the Mt. Olive Township Recreation Department to offer low-cost swimming lessons during summer camp and other services such as pet first aid (and training courses for the school-age children); and the Mt. Olive Township Police Department to offer educational programs for the school-age children. Through a grant just received from the state to expand our school-age programming this past fall, we have been able to expand the collaborative efforts to include access to mentors trained through the local United Way as well as adding a social worker to provide family crisis intervention for school-agers by working with Family Service of Morris County.

— Gail Reuther, *Mt. Olive Child Care & Learning Center, Flanders, New Jersey*

More collaboration stories will appear in the next issue of Child Care Information Exchange.

with him because we have so much in common in both our personal and professional lives. We share an appreciation for Hawaii's diverse culture and extreme beauty."

Ray adds: "Yeah, it's great, we take our families kayaking together."

Chuck sums it up: "I'm impressed with your organization and it pushes me to do more. And I was so flattered when you took one of MY ideas. . . . We operate multi-site, multi-island operations and frequently share our problems, strategies, and successes."

Before the evening was done, I had a list of ideas to follow through on and another event to propose to the rest of the Coalition.

The greatest outcome of this six-member Coalition is the fact that we now have a seat at "the table," whether it's the legislature, Good Beginnings Alliance, Career Development Coalition, HAEYC, approaching local businesses or the Department of Human Services; people now seek our input on a variety of policy and child care business issues. We are truly effecting positive change in the system and opening lines of communication that had not previously existed.

We formed our Coalition three years ago out of need. The state was considering a reduction of the reimbursement rate and we had no organized body to advocate for families receiving tuition subsidies. We decided to organize ourselves, but, as competitors, weren't sure what form it should take.

We finally agreed to share the expense of an all-day retreat with a paid facilitator and from that was born the model that has served us well these past four years, the Childcare Business Coalition.

As my employer, Ray donates my time to the group as needed to organize meetings, coordinate our legislative effort, and keep members abreast of issues we may want to respond to. Without this contribution of labor, such a group could not function.

Successes this past year include obtaining grants that have funded a shared staff training day featuring national presenters Bonnie and Roger Neugebauer, an upcoming all-day training on managing behaviorally challenged children, and a training of trainers in which we have joined forces with the local community college and AEYC.

Friendships have grown and strengthened. We have developed a level of trust that allows us to call on each other in difficult times. We refer business to each other and provide informal consultation to each other on new projects and ultimately have a great time doing it!

The Childcare Business Coalition's members include:

Family Services Center

KCAA Preschools

Kama'aina Kids

Rainbow Schools

Seagull Schools

Waianae Coast

Early Childhood Services

Our goal is to promote licensed, quality center-based early education and care which is accessible to all families with young children. Together, we serve 2,800 children ages 12 months to five years in 28 different centers located island-wide.

"A Reflection"

by Diane Paiva

Collaboration amongst a group of strong individuals who are all used to being in charge is an enlightening experience.

We each arrived at planning meetings with our own agenda — plans of how to organize, delegate, and accomplish the group's goals. Then, as a group, we saw our individual plans disassembled (sometimes with reluctance and resistance). We took bits and pieces from all that was presented, poked and prodded them into place — reassembling them in a way that put the group's needs and focus ahead of any individual's. It was exhilarating, frustrating, and empowering. The thrill of victory when the end results are successful greatly outweighs the aggravations and irritations.

Time spent with people outside your own organization always broadens your view of issues, brings things into focus. Collaborating gives you the strength of numbers. Combining resources enables many small groups to accomplish very big tasks!

Diane Paiva is a Kama'aina Kids center director and co-chair of the Coalition's Joint Staff Training Day.