

Learning all about airlines

By **Caryn Kunz**

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Want to be a pilot when you grow up?

You may find that you'd rather be an air traffic controller during the Island Air Explorer Program, a 10-week career education program for students interested in airline-related jobs.

"We want students to know not only what jobs are in the industry, but also those that are affiliated," said program adviser Cory Kohler.

Interested local youth ages 14 to 20 must submit applications for the program during an orientation meeting at 6:30 p.m. Jan. 20 at Bishop Museum's Atherton Hālau. Fifteen applicants will be invited to participate after a rigorous application screening and formal group interview process.

Each Wednesday evening from February to April, student explorers will learn all aspects of the industry through hands-on site visits. Topics range from aircraft maintenance and air traffic control to flight operations, airport security and customer service.

The program culminates in a flight to Maui, where students experience the flight process from beginning to end.

"The idea is to give students a hands-on experience with what it's like to work in aviation, to not only limit themselves to what they see when they travel, such as flight attendants, pilots and ticket agents," said Kohler, who has set up a talk with Federal Aviation Administration representatives, a Transportation Security Administration security demonstration and a visit to codeshare partners Hawaiian and Continental airlines.



Robson Ah Puck, left, and his brother Sonny participated in the Island Air Explorer Program last year. Robson won the program's Jaime Wagatsuma Award.

Photos courtesy of Island Air Explorers

ON THE WEB

Applications for the Island Air Explorer Program are available at
www.islandair.com/explorers



Island Air Explorers learn about every part of the aviation industry during the 10-week program.

The program, run entirely by Island Air employee volunteers, is part of Learning for Life, an affiliate of the Boys Scouts of America.

Island Air assumed the Aviation Explorer Post formerly held by Aloha Airlines after the longtime Aloha Explorer Program folded along with the company.

"A lot of the employees here (at Island Air) have actually gone through the Aloha program," Kohler said.

Participants are honored at a graduation ceremony with friends and family, where one outstanding explorer is awarded the Jaime Wagatsuma Award in honor of the late pilot at Island Air and Aloha. Wagatsuma, who was very involved in the Explorer program, died of cancer in 2007.

Robson Ah Puck earned the award during Island Air's first graduation last year. "I really wanted to be in the program because I love aviation," he said. "Ever since I was in elementary, I always wanted to be a pilot."

Ah Puck, who now attends Flight School Hawaii, credits the Explorer program with teaching him that aviation support personnel are just as important as pilots or flight attendants.

"Before I went into the program, I had a little knowledge, but I didn't really know what goes on behind the scenes at an airline," he said. "It gets you thinking about what really makes an airplane fly."

Kohler hopes that the program will help students pinpoint the career they want to pursue without having to backtrack.

"Nowhere else in Hawai'i can you attend a multiweek training course for the airlines unless you actually get a job in the industry," Kohler said. "I think for the age range (14 to 20), it's perfect because this is when they have to decide what they're going to do with their lives, and this is a hands-on way to see what it's all about."