

# 33rd Annual Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival



**Souvenir Program**



**History and Culture  
Demonstrations & Entertainment  
Arts & Crafts**



**Saturday,  
February 7, 2026  
9:00am - 3:00pm**





#WaimeaCBF

Souvenir Booklet Design by Kathy Sprinkle  
Words by Fern Gavelek

Photos Courtesy Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival  
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Aloha Hawai'i County,

What an honor it is to welcome you to the 33rd Annual Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival.

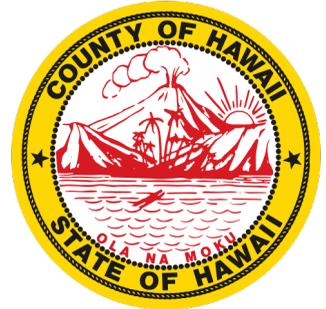
The Festival commemorates the blossoming Sakura (桜, cherry blossoms) of the original 20 Japanese cherry trees planted in 1972 by the Waimea Lions Club at Church Row Park and observes the Japanese tradition of hanami (花見), or "flower viewing."

Symbolizing both beauty and mortality, Sakura only bloom once a year for only a few weeks before falling to the ground, reminding all of us that life is fleeting and that we should strive to live life with thoughtfulness, appreciation and gratitude for the time, experiences and relationships that we have.

Speaking of appreciation and gratitude, I would like to mahalo our County of Hawai'i Parks and Recreation - Culture and Education Division for their dedication to our community and making special events like this possible. I would also like to mahalo all of our county employees, volunteers, organizations and helping hands that put up this event for our community, and YOU – our friends, family and neighbors for coming together to celebrate this special time of the year.

Be safe, be mindful, and always the double shaka,

Dr. C. Kimo Alameda  
Mayor  
County of Hawai'i



### 2026 Festival Planning Committee

Morty Carter, Jr.-- Chairman  
Elyse Stevens  
Lori Lei Katahara  
Bert Mukai  
Madi Bartlett  
Margo Mau Bunnell  
Justin Cabanting  
Colene DeMello

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Michiko Spencer  
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Capt. Roylen Valera  
Kelsey Walker  
Clarence Yee  
Justina Wood  
Karen Wray  
Marvis Yanagisawa  
Luana Zablan

# Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival Celebrates Hanami

In its 33rd year, the 2026 Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival is 9 a.m.-3 p.m. February 7 at multiple venues sprawling from the Parker Ranch Historic Homes to the historic planting of cherry trees at Church Row Park.

Delicate pink blossoms, often backdropped by a crown of snow atop Maunakea, attract thousands each year to the annual festival. Presented annually the first Saturday in February under the direction of the Culture and Education Division of the County of Hawai'i Parks and Recreation Department, the community event is a favorite with both visitors and residents alike.

At the core of the festival is the blooming of cherry trees at Church Row Park and the age-old Japanese tradition of hanami, which literally translates to hana (flower) and mi (look) or "cherry blossom viewing party." Harking from the 7th century, hanami celebrates the fleeting beauty of nature while heralding the arrival of spring.

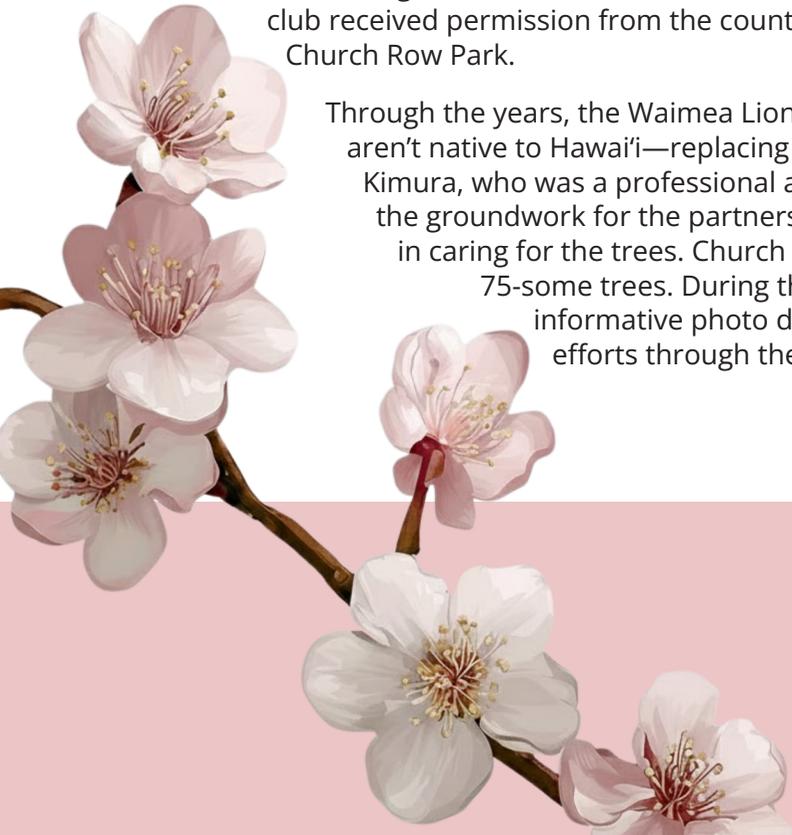
## Cherry Trees Arrive in Waimea in 1953

Cherry trees first came to Waimea in 1953 as a living memorial to Fred Makino, founder of Hawai'i's former Japanese language newspaper, *Hawaii Hochi*. The late Isami Ishihara, a noted Waimea gardener, bonsai master and festival volunteer, propagated more trees. He donated the seedlings to the Waimea Lions Club for community beautification and the club received permission from the county to plant the trees in 1972 at Church Row Park.

Through the years, the Waimea Lions Club nurtured the trees—which aren't native to Hawai'i—replacing those that died. The late Hisao Kimura, who was a professional agronomist, was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the partnership between the county and the club in caring for the trees. Church Row Park is currently home to 75-some trees. During the festival, the Lions Club offers an informative photo display chronicling the club's planting efforts through the years.

### Festival Portal QR includes:

- Digital version of Souvenir Program
- Activity Line-up and Festival Map
- Entertainment Schedule



## Festival Founded in 1994

Under the direction of former county Parks and Recreation Director George Yoshida, the festival originated in 1994 in Church Row Park and has evolved over the years to involve numerous community organizations providing fun activities throughout town.

While activities and locations vary each year, the festival offers plenty of hands-on fun: mochi pounding, bonsai demonstrations, origami making, traditional Japanese tea ceremonies, bon dancing and more. While many venues are within walking distance of each other, Roberts Hawaii graciously provides free shuttle service among select locations.

Attendees are treated to a wide range of local entertainment including taiko drumming, hula and Chinese lion dance, plus sometimes headliners from Japan delight festival goers with authentic Japanese costume, dance, song and instrumentation. Stages outside Parker Ranch Center, Waimea Center, Church Row Park and Pukalani Stables present a wide range of local and ethnic performing arts. Attendees can shop among numerous craft vendors, a farmer's market, tables of Asian-themed collectibles, cherry tree blossoms and cherry-themed art.

All the activities spur the appetite and festival goers enjoy free samplings at staged cooking demonstrations by local chefs. Hungry attendees make their way among numerous broke-da-mouth food booths, Asian baked goods like andagi and refreshing shave ice.

## Official Festival Honorees and Art

Since 2007, the festival has often celebrated persons or organizations within the community—whether they are community volunteers, leaders, businesses or colorful characters involved with the festival—as official honorees. This year's honorees are festival power couple Fred and Nancy Nonaka. In addition, the Waimea Arts Council (WAC) facilitates a contest for the festival's official annual art that appears on this booklet's cover and the event poster that can be purchased for \$10 at Firehouse Gallery. WAC also presents the 33rd annual Cherry Blossom Exhibit, "Big Island Blooms" at Firehouse Gallery, located at Waimea's Historic Corner.



SCAN ME

## Festival Information at Your Fingertips

This Souvenir Booklet shares information on the many community organizations and volunteers who collaborate to present the Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival. For the full lineup of things to do, pick up the free, one-page handout titled "2026 Festival Activity Lineup" at festival venues. It is also available online in the Festival Portal; use the QR code in this booklet to access that link. Mahalo!



Aloha kākou,

On behalf of the Waimea community, it is my honor to welcome you to the 33rd Annual Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival. Each year, this gathering brings our community together in celebration of the traditions, relationships and shared sense of place that make Waimea so special. Today is a reflection of the pilina—the meaningful connections to one another, our history and our ‘āina—that continue to guide us.

For generations, the cherry blossom trees along Church Row have marked the seasons in Waimea, standing as a living reminder of the cultural exchange and enduring friendships that helped shape our community. As these blossoms return once again, so too does a festival that has grown alongside them—one that honors the past while welcoming new stories, new families and new traditions.

This celebration is made possible through the dedication and generosity of volunteers, community organizations and the County of Hawai‘i, Department of Parks & Recreation – Culture & Education Division. Their collective efforts reflect the true spirit of aloha and service, and we extend our sincere mahalo for their continued commitment to Waimea.

As we gather to observe the Japanese tradition of hanami, we are invited to pause, reflect and appreciate the fleeting beauty of the blossoms and the moments we share together. I encourage you to take time today to connect with family, friends and neighbors, and to enjoy the music, culture and experiences that make this festival so meaningful.

Mahalo for joining us and for helping carry this beloved Waimea tradition forward. We wish you a joyful and memorable festival.

Mahalo nui,

James E. Hustace  
Hawai‘i County Council Member  
District 9 - North and South Kohala



## North Hawai'i Bon Dancers

### Accompanied by Kona Hongwanji Taiko Drummers

Bon Odori (Bon Dance) originates from the story of a Buddhist disciple who envisioned his deceased mother in the Realm of Hungry Ghosts where she was indulging in her own selfishness. Greatly disturbed, the disciple went to Buddha and asked how he could release his mother from this realm.

Buddha advised his disciple to perform a charitable act in memory of his mother. The disciple did this and thus saw his mother's release. He also began to see the true nature of her past unselfishness and the many sacrifices she had made for him. The disciple, happy for his mother's release and grateful for his mother's kindness, danced with joy.

This dance of joy is Bon Odori, a time when ancestors and their sacrifices are remembered and appreciated. During the festival, the North Hawai'i Bon Dancers will perform traditional Bon Odori movements in lines fronting the entertainment stage in the back parking lot at Parker Ranch Center. They will be accompanied by the Kona Hongwanji Taiko Group. The public is welcome to join in.



## The Historic Spencer House

The Historic Spencer House has been a Waimea landmark for over 180 years. Still owned by the Spencer family, the original home was built in 1840 and boasts being the first western-style house in the area. A kitchen, bathroom and additional rooms were added later. While most of the family furniture has been dispersed, there are some portraits on the walls, as well as ghost stories that typically accompany all old houses.



Over the years, the Spencer House has been a family home, a hotel, a law office and a restaurant. It has also accommodated various offices and businesses. Some parts of the house are currently under repair, but visitors are welcome to walk through most of the building's ground floor to appreciate its historical significance and vintage craftsmanship. E komo mai!

## Chado Urasenke Tankokai Hilo Association

The Urasenke Hilo Association annually participates in the festival by offering Chanoyu, the Japanese Tea Ceremony. Chado, “The Way of Tea, is based “on the simple act of boiling water, making tea, offering it to others and drinking of it ourselves.” Powdered matcha tea is used, which is whipped into hot water and served “with a respectful heart while received with gratitude.”

The Urasenke Hilo Chapter (Urasenke Hilo Association) was established in 1971. It meets and (hopefully) teaches regularly at the landmark Shoroan (Pine Ocean) Tea House on the beautiful grounds of Lili’uokalani Gardens in Hilo.

Through practice and experience of Chanoyu, each practitioner seeks to attain the four essential virtues. They include “wa,” which is harmony; “kei” is respect, “sei” is purity and “jaku” is tranquility or the peace of mind that comes with the realization of the first three principles of the philosophy of wabi, meaning quiet or sober refinement.

The Urasenke Hilo Association invites festival goers to be a guest at a traditional Chanoyu and enjoy the serenity of a bowl of tea. The members enact several tea ceremonies during the festival from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. at Parker Ranch Historic Homes. Assisting in the tea ceremonies are members of the Japan Clubs at both Hilo and Waiakea High Schools.



## Kamuela Hardwoods

Debating at the 2025 festival, Kamuela Hardwoods recently opened a Waimea showroom in the former Parker Ranch Slaughterhouse behind Mana Christian ‘Ohana (old Kahilu Town Hall). Founded in 2009, Kamuela Hardwoods received the prestigious County of Hawai‘i Mayor’s Sustainability Achievement Award in 2021 for advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Led by Waimea co-owners Alex Woodbury and International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) certified arborist Joshua Greenspan, the company “takes pride in reclaiming, recovering and salvaging wood that would otherwise be burned, chipped or thrown in our landfills.” Local silk oak, Japanese (Sugi) pine, monkey pod, Norfolk Island pine, mango, koa, jacaranda, ‘ohi’a and more are milled at a facility south of town and sold at the showroom as lumber, distinctive live-edge slabs, bowl turning blanks and more. Also at the showroom is hand-crafted finished furniture, fine art and gift items.



During the festival, take a guided tour in the showroom to learn about the attributes of different local wood species. From 9 a.m.-2 p.m., participate in a make-your-own charcuterie board workshop (\$45 fee). Browse the Saturday Artisan’s Hui offering local paintings, wood carvings and alpaca yarn. Free festival parking is available on their front lawn.

Info: 808-731-9924, <https://kamuelahardwoods.com>.

## **‘Driving with Aloha’ is the motto of Roberts Hawaii**

Roberts Hawaii has partnered with the County of Hawai‘i’s Culture and Education division over the years to provide complimentary shuttle service to venues of the Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival. Roberts takes pride in its Big Island operations and management team, which has a sense of “kuleana” (responsibility) to the community they live in to help events like the festival.

“We are happy to have seen the success of this festival and its growth over the years,” says Margo Bunnell, GM of Roberts Hawai‘i Island. “Our commitment to these types of events is to always be good partners to help preserve the mixed cultures found in the Hawaiian Islands.”

Bunnell remembers in 1994 when the festival started as just the pure enjoyment of “hanami”— the viewing of the beautiful (mi) flowers (hana) on the cherry blossom trees.

“We are so fortunate the Waimea community wanted to expand this event throughout the town,” she continues.

“We will always be here for the community and be part of this major event that has brought a small town like Waimea to be the host of this Asian tradition. Whether you are in China, Japan, Korea or Washington DC—where else in the world can you see the magnificent Mauna Kea as the backdrop for these wonderful ‘hot pink’ cherry blossoms in February?”



## **Waimea KTA Super Stores**

KTA Super Stores started in 1916, as a modest, 500 square-foot grocery and dry goods store, by Koichi and Taniyo Taniguchi. Since then, KTA has grown to a nine-store chain, serving the residents of Hawai‘i island. For over 100 years, KTA Super Stores has been committed to our founder’s philosophy, which is a commitment to humbly serve the people of our community.



KTA Waimea opened in 1989 to serve the community of Kamuela, later expanding and renovating in 2002. KTA is proud to be a regular venue participant in the festival, often doing food demonstrations and other activities.



## Kamuela Farmers Market

The Kamuela Farmers Market was founded December 2015 by a group of vendors who had been working together in Waimea for many years. The goal was to establish a place for the community to gather and support small and local family owned businesses. The market is held at the idyllic historic Pukalani Stables, which was part of the original Pukalani Village in the 19th century and located at 67-139 Pukalani Road in Waimea.



Over the past 10 years, the Kamuela Farmers Market has grown to more than 50 vendors offering some of the island's best locally grown produce, "grindz" and goods. Known as "The Heartbeat and Gathering Place of Waimea," the Kamuela Farmers Market has hosted many outstanding musicians and performances at special events and is honored to be an official participant of the 33rd annual Waimea Cherry Blossom Festival.

The Market is offering a lineup of entertainment and partnering with the Holo Holo Ku at Parker Ranch Homeowners Association to provide festival activities, including the Cherry Choo Choo by Kohala Mountain Express. The keiki train rides are \$5 and run 9 a.m.-3 p.m. next door at Holo Holo Ku at Parker Ranch.

For info on the Kamuela Farmers Market, visit [kamuelafarmersmarket.com](http://kamuelafarmersmarket.com).

## Holo Holo Ku: A Community Rooted in Service



Holo Holo Ku is more than a neighborhood — it's a community built on aloha, service and connection. Residents and leadership actively support local non-profits and charitable organizations, giving back through education, cultural preservation, food drives, environmental efforts and youth programs.

The neighborhood believes true community extends beyond property lines. Whether it's volunteering at local events, partnering with nonprofits, or celebrating traditions like the Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival, Holo Holo Ku strives to embody the values of generosity, stewardship and aloha spirit. Together, Holo Holo Ku honors its heritage, supports its neighbors and proudly contributes to the Big Island's future with generosity, stewardship and aloha spirit.

## Kohala Mountain Express

The Kohala Mountain Express chugs into Waimea to again offer its trackless keiki train rides at Holo Holo Ku at Parker Ranch next to Pukalani Stables. Train Engineer Clarence Yee of Hawi drives the 10-barrel train that is powered by an authentic looking locomotive (some say it resembles Thomas the Train!). Scenic rides aboard the Cherry Choo Choo are a delight for young children and offer great photo opps! Passengers are charged a nominal fee and the Kohala Mountain Express operates 9 a.m.-3 p.m. All Aboard!





## Kahilu Theatre

Located in a stand-alone building at Parker Ranch Center, Kahilu Theatre is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1980 by the late Parker Ranch heir and Broadway actor Richard Smart. Kahilu raised its curtain in 1981 and has been a cornerstone presence in Waimea and North Hawai'i for over four decades.



The theatre's mission is to make a place where community, creativity and inspiration thrive. Their vision is to provide educational programs that engage keiki, adults and kupuna in the artistic process; cultivate appreciation of the performing, musical and visual arts; and make the arts an integral part of school and community life. Kahilu supports professional and emerging artists, offers world-class entertainment, in-house original productions and a wide range of art exhibits featuring painting, photography, ceramics, digital arts, weaving and sculpture in the Simperman and Suli T. Go galleries.

Stop by Kahilu Theatre during the festival to view the Annual Juried Contemporary Art Exhibition. Also on tap will be a live Asian music and dance presentation featuring 20 dancers and musicians entitled "Sakura Beauty and Spirit." Time is 2 p.m.



## Parker Ranch Historic Homes

In the scenic, pastoral countryside of Waimea, Parker Ranch's two historic homes, Puuopelu and Mana Hale, still reside among the green hills and windswept pastures. These beautiful homes tell the Parker family's story through historic heirlooms and works of art. The homes are open for free to the public for self-guided tours during the Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival.

Mana Hale, the two-story, "saltbox" koa-wood house that John Palmer Parker built—almost ship-like with its small rooms, narrow staircase, and low ceilings—was moved from its original location to sit side-by-side with the more elaborate Puuopelu.

Purchased by John Parker II in 1879, the "Hawaiian Victorian" manor house served as the family home through sixth generation heir Richard Smart, who surrounded it with flower gardens and filled it with his extensive art collection, family portraits, antiques and treasures from world travels.

Take a tour of the historic homes of Parker Ranch, a family dynasty that began nearly 200 years ago, with deep roots in the land and intricate ties to the history and monarchy of Hawai'i. Upon arrival, you will receive a self-guided tour pamphlet to guide you through the historic homes, gardens, and grounds.

During the festival, attendees can also browse a selection of Parker Ranch merchandise. Also in Puuopelu, there will be a feather lei display.

The beautiful furnishings of the Historic Homes will be the backdrop of traditional Japanese tea ceremonies presented by the Chado Urasenke Tankokai Hilo Association. Time is 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

With the exception of festival day on February 7, tour reservations and availability are booked online, visit <https://parkerranch.com/waimea/explore-self-guided-tours/>.



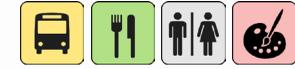
# Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival

9:00am - 3:00pm | Saturday, February 7, 2026

 FREE Shuttle Bus Stop
  Recommended Event Parking Area
  Food Available
  Public Restrooms
  Art & Craft Activity



## Historic Church Row Park



Cherry Blossom Trees & Entertainment  
Waimea Lions Club

- Festival History, T-shirt Sales, Lost & Found
- Kamuela Hongwanji Open House**
  - Chef Demos & Tasting
  - Food Booths
  - Pop-Up Retailers
- Waimea Bon-yu Kai Bonsai Club**
  - Display, Demonstrations, Sales

## Kamuela Liquor Store

- Sake Tasting, Book Signing noon-3 p.m.

## Waimea Center



- KTA Super Stores Waimea**
  - Food sampling until 1p.m.
- Waimea Center's Center Court**
  - Koto, Taiko, Lion Dance, Jazz 10 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
- Historic Spencer House**
  - Vintage Kimono, Obi
  - Kokeshi Doll Displays

## Parker Ranch Historic Homes



- Open House
- Tea Ceremony
- Merchandise Sales

## Waimea's Historic Center



- Firehouse Gallery**
  - Cherry Blossom Art Show
- Waimea Preservation Association**
  - Open House
  - Chess Fair on giant 20 ft. chess board!

## Thelma Parker Library



- All Ages Cherry Blossom Craft

## Kahilu Theatre

- Asian Music & Dance
- Art Exhibit

## Mana Christian 'Ohana Hall & Kamuela Hardwoods

- Hall: Kravin' Munchies Craft Fair & Quilt Display
- Kamuela Hardwoods: Artisan's Hui & Workshop
- IK Vehicle Display on Grass

## Parker Ranch Center



- Festival Entertainment Stage:** In the Center's back parking lot. 9 a.m. blessing opens festival
  - Bon Dance
  - Mochi Pounding with Kona Hongwanji
  - Taiko Drumming
  - Local Entertainment
  - Craft Fair in back lot and throughout Center

## Pukalani Stables



- Paniolo Heritage Center**
  - Self-guided tour, gift shop

## Holo Holo Ku at Parker Ranch

- Kohala Mountain Express



## Kamuela Farmers Market

- 70 food and product vendors
- Cherry branches, tree sales
- Entertainment
- Face Painting



# Japanese Cultural Center

Located on O'ahu, the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i aims to be a vibrant resource, strengthening our diverse community by educating present and future generations in the evolving Japanese American experience in Hawai'i.

The organization does this through relevant programming, meaningful community service and innovative partnerships that enhance the understanding and celebration of our heritage, culture and love of the land. To guide them in this work, they draw from the values found in our Japanese American traditions and the spirit of aloha.

A newer edition to the festival, this year the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i offers interactive uchiwa (fan) and hachimaki (headband) stamping, plus organization info at the Kamuela Hongwanji.



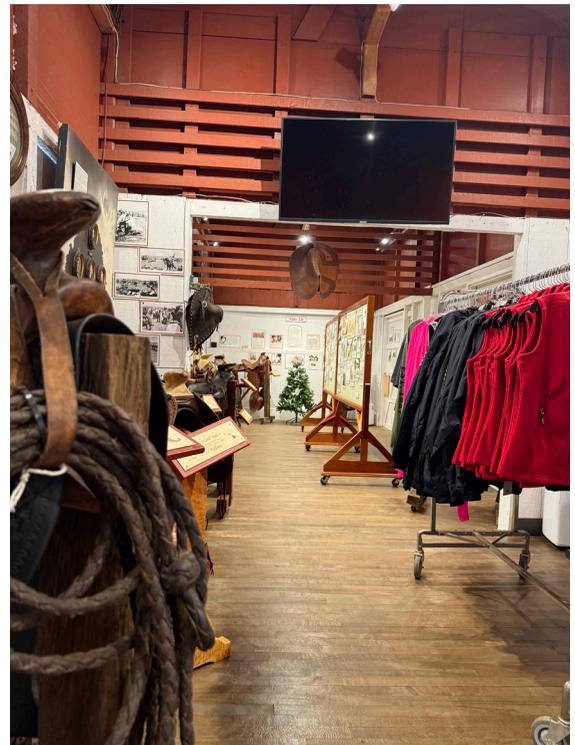
## Paniolo Preservation Society

Known as paniolo, Hawai'i's cowboys have a compelling history starting with a gift of cattle from a British seafaring captain in 1793. It involves Hawaiian royalty, Spanish vaqueros, a winning ride at the 1908 World Roping Championship in Wyoming on a borrowed mount...and so much more.



The Paniolo Heritage Center brings the unique story of Hawai'i's paniolo to life, illustrated through artifacts, images and original Hawaiian saddles. Paniolo have been comprised of a rich tapestry of ethnicities—Japanese, Filipino, Portuguese, etc.—but they continue to use the Hawaiian language when referring to life out on the range.

Located at picturesque Pukalani Stables in Waimea, the Heritage Center is located in the facility's right corner as seen from the courtyard. Also on display is an exhibit chronicling the Paniolo Hall of Fame, which has recognized the state's top working paniolo since 1999. Find ranch-themed treasures in the center's gift shop. For info, <https://paniolopreservation.org>.



## Kamuela Hongwanji Mission

Kamuela Hongwanji Mission is located at 65-1110 Mamalahoa Highway fronting Waimea's Historic Church Row Park. Established in 1954, the temple was originally called Waimea Hongwanji. The name was changed to Kamuela Hongwanji Mission in 1969, so as not to confuse it with Waimea Hongwanji on Kaua'i.



The temple is a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Temple and is one of 33 temples in Hawai'i associated with Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i in Honolulu. It also maintains close ties with the Nishi Hongwanji head temple in Kyoto, Japan. Rev. Daido Baba is the resident minister of Kamuela Hongwanji and also serves as the minister for Honoka'a, Kohala and Pa'auilo Hongwanji.

For this year's festival, Kamuela Hongwanji will host its temple open house with Rev. Daido Baba. He will explain Shin Buddhism rituals and chanting to visitors. Guests are invited to sign the guest book. Kamuela Hongwanji will offer a concession stand serving delicious foods such as bento, chichi mochi, Okinawan andagi and more. The temple's social hall will be hosting cooking demonstrations by guest chefs from island restaurants and more activities.

## Kona Hongwanji Buddhist Temple

The Kona Hongwanji Temple annually provides a "hands-on" demonstration of mochi tsuki (mochi pounding) during the festival and offers attendees complimentary mochi treats made from the freshly pounded mochi. The treats are flavored with either red bean paste (anko), peanut butter or a soybean powder with sugar (kinako).

Mochi making is a multi-day process. Rice must be washed and rinsed, all wooden equipment soaked, the rice cooked and then pounded. Mochi is believed to symbolize unity and strength because of its sticky consistency. Since mochi rice is pounded, it lasts much longer than ordinary cooked rice and is therefore associated with longevity.



The Kona Hongwanji Buddhist Temple is located in Kealahou and celebrated 125 years in 2022. The Temple aspires to be the leading Buddhist center for West Hawai'i by providing:

- spiritual guidance and support for living in the 21st century
- propagation programs and activities appealing to people of all ages and ethnicities
- a resource center for Pure Land/Jodo Shin Buddhism



## Thelma Parker Memorial Public and School Library

Thelma Parker Memorial Library first opened its doors in Waimea in 1951 on land donated to the County of Hawai'i by the world-famous Parker Ranch and its owner, Richard Palmer Kaleioku Smart. Smart named the library after his mother, Annie Thelma Kahiluonapua'api'ilani Parker. In 1978, the State of Hawai'i opened a new and larger Thelma Parker Memorial Public and School Library (TPMPSL) near its original location and is located at 67-1209 Mamalahoa Highway.

The popular library continues to serve patrons—residents and visitors alike—from a wide geographic area. TPMPSL has the longest name of all 51 libraries in the Hawai'i State Public Library System and is the sole state library without a location name. The facility boasts being the only library in the state selected (in 2017) to be part of the NASA@My Library initiative to promote STEM learning in the community. E komo mai!



# Kamuela Liquor Store

Operated through the years by several generations of the Wakayama family, this long-time liquor store is a Waimea landmark at 64-1010 Mamalahoa Hwy. 19.

Around 1938, Jitsuji Wakayama erected the Kamuela Theatre next door to the then I. Oda Store to expand entertainment offerings once held at I. Oda. The theatre supposedly presented dramatic Japanese touring companies, movies and community events. During WWII, the military screened movies for American soldiers who were in Waimea on R&R after Pacific Theater duty. Post war, the operation was devoted to selling beverages.

The store, then overseen by Jitsuji's son, Tetsuro, became known as the Kamuela Liquor Store and the business was established in 1946. Today, Tetsuro's son Alvin continues to operate the store. It offers a wide range of spirits, fine wines, beers and gourmet food products.

Festival goers can enjoy sake tasting from noon to 3 p.m., including a handcrafted selection by Islander Sake Brewery at the Hapuna Golf Course in Mauna Kea Resort. Concurrently, author-cultural historian Cheryl Soon signs her book, "Remembering History and Honoring Culture." It shares photos and stories about monuments, statues, temples and memorials across the state that celebrate ali'i, cultural practitioners, revered leaders, immigrants, veterans and paniolo of every ethnic persuasion, including those of Japanese ancestry.



## Waimea Bon-yu Kai Bonsai Club

In 2026, the Waimea Bon-yu Kai Bonsai Club will be entering its 70th year as an active bonsai club. Waimea Bon-yu Kai continues to be an active group in the community and has participated in every Cherry Blossom Festival held in Waimea. The late Isami Ishihara of Waimea was a founding club member as well as the planter of the original cherry trees in Church Row Park.

"In bonsai, the main thing is the Three Point Rule," Mr. Ishihara once shared. He described it as the bonsai having a triangular shape with the top apex, or point, actually at the top. "You also see this in Japanese flower arranging," he added. The triangle's points are called "heaven, man and earth," he continued. "The bottom is earth, the foundation; it is strong."

During the festival, visit the Bonsai Club booths in Church Row Park and talk story with the members. There will be bonsai plants on display, bonsai for sale, and an ongoing clinic and demonstrations to discuss and work on any bonsai you may have.

To learn more, the club invites the public to attend one of its monthly meetings offered 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. every fourth Sunday of the month, except December, at the Waimea Community Center. For more information, email [WaimeaBonsai@gmail.com](mailto:WaimeaBonsai@gmail.com).



## Fred and Nancy Nonaka are 2026 Festival Honorees

The 2026 festival honors Hawai'i Island natives and long-time Waimea residents Fred and Nancy Nonaka. The festival power couple have worked behind the scenes with each of them playing a dominant role— Fred with the planting and care of the many Church Row Park cherry trees while Nancy served as the spark plug behind the many cultural demonstrations and hands-on activities offered at the Kamuela Hongwanji Mission adjacent to Church Row Park.

A native of Umauma on the Hamakua Coast, Fred earned an agriculture degree from UH-Manoa and is a retired landscape contractor, owning Fred's Nursery in Waimea for over 50 years. In addition to caring for the 75-some cherry trees all these years—the 89-year-old Living Treasure of Hawai'i is still involved with pruning duties—Fred recalls that he was one of the local businessmen who first advocated for the planting of the trees in 1972. He says the idea was to attract people to Waimea when there was talk about a bypass road skirting the town.

“We figured we needed something and came up with the idea to plant the cherry trees,” details Fred, who worked with the Waimea Lions Club in the effort. “The trees and the festival are important as they draw people here and are what Waimea is known for now. I'm glad the festival is still going.”

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Nancy, who grew up in 'Ola'a in the Puna District, attended business college on O'ahu. She and Fred both settled on Hawai'i Island in the mid-1960s where Nancy was employed as a secretary for the State of Hawai'i. Devout Buddhists, Nancy served as president of the Waimea Buddhist Women's Association while Fred was a 10-year state president for the Honpa Hongwanji in Hawai'i.

Serving for many years as the liaison between the festival and the Kamuela Hongwanji, Nancy has since retired. During her tenure, she oversaw the mission's varied offerings in the on-site social hall that have evolved through the years: origami, calligraphy, sumi-e (black ink painting), mukimono (decorative vegetable carving) and the selling of handmade crafts such as soda can lanterns, blooming cherry blossom branches, plus plants and Oriental antiques.





## Parker Ranch Center

Parker Ranch Center is thrilled to once again be a major participant with the annual Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival for 2026. Visitors to this year's festival can enjoy shopping, dining and entertainment while experiencing the stunning aromas, views and colors of the 33rd Cherry Blossom Festival. Located in the heart of Waimea, the center offers plenty of parking.

Before or after the festivities, shop an array of friendly, distinctive stores including Aloha Grown, The Uiha Hat Bar, Mary Jane's, Mahina and HIC. Also enjoy an array of food/dining options in Parker Ranch Center's food court, including Big Island Tokyo Table, Kuya, Don's Chinese Kitchen and Starbucks.

Parker Ranch Center is part of the 250,000-acre Parker Ranch, one of the nation's oldest and largest cattle ranches. The center was built to serve the needs of the ranchers and their families who made their livelihood on the ranch.

Originally opened in 1968, Parker Ranch Center was reconfigured and designed to an award-winning architectural standard in 2002. It is anchored by local island grocer Foodland and local health food store Healthway's. Signature tenants include Starbucks, Patisserie Nanako, Mahina, Village Burger and Waimea's only food court.

Located in the heart of Hawai'i's paniolo country, Parker Ranch Center invites festival goers to visit the nine-ton "Ikua Purdy Rides Again" statue, courtesy of the Paniolo Preservation Society and located near the Center's Mamalahoa Highway 19 entrance. Purdy was the 1908 World Champion Roper who was inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. Inside the center's Fireside Food Court, 32 paniolo murals, painted by local artist Marcia Ray, colorfully adorn the walls. The history of Parker Ranch and Waimea is rich and captivating. It's a story of the land, of the melding of cultures, of cowboys and of community spirit.

## Asian Dance and Music

The performing arts of Japan returns to the Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival during a presentation of 20 Asian dancers and musicians entitled "Sakura Beauty and Spirit" at Kahilu Theatre. The sakura, or cherry blossom, is the national flower of Japan and represents a springtime sense of renewal and optimism.

Dances and choreography are by the Shizuno Nasu Dance Institute of Japan while Annu Shoko Shionoya, who teaches and performs piano on the Big Island, coordinates participating local musicians and artists. On lyre (a harp-link instrument), is Miyuki Ikesue, who has appeared in concert in Japan, Europe and the US. She will play solo and and leads a group of other lyrists. Also on stage will be local performers flutist Yumi Kikuchi and pianist Shionoya. Decorating the stage will be a painting by Susumu Sakaguchi.



*Miyuki Ikesue on the lyre, photo provided by Annu Shionoya.*



# Waimea Lions Club



Guided by their motto, "We Serve," the men and women of the Waimea Lions Club have dedicated themselves to community service for 70 years. This non-profit organization played a significant role in the beautification of Church Row Park by planting its first cherry blossom trees in 1972.

During the annual Waimea Cherry Blossom Festival, the Waimea Lions Club provides

a glimpse into this legacy with a large photo display showcasing the original tree plantings. They also operate the festival's official Lost and Found station. In 2026, the club debuts Cherry Blossom Festival t-shirts and tote bags for sale, offering a new green palaka design (pictured). Shirts are available in adult unisex sizes S through 3XL, while supplies last. Profits made during the sale go back into the Waimea community. Beyond the festival, the Waimea Lions Club supports the community through meaningful service initiatives such as the Waimea Lions Club Penhallow Scholarship, photos with Santa and annual school supply and slipper drives. Central to the club's mission is a strong commitment to vision care, including conducting school vision screenings and collecting used eyeglasses for redistribution to those in need.



The Waimea Lions Club warmly welcomes new members passionate about community service. Contact [bigiwaimealions@gmail.com](mailto:bigiwaimealions@gmail.com), visit <https://eclubhouse.org/sites/waimea> and follow WaimeaLionsClubDistrict50 on Facebook.



## So-shin Kai Koto

Based in Hilo, So-shin Kai is a group of koto students under the instruction of Darin Miyashiro that performs at the Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival. Last year, the group wowed attendees with a performance in the atrium at Waimea Center. Check the QR code for the 2026 Festival Activity Lineup in this booklet for this year's times and locations.

The koto is an ancient Japanese zither-type instrument with 13 strings and moveable bridges. It measures up to six feet long and a foot wide and is played with picks, called tsume. Said to "represent a dragon," the koto is related to the Chinese guzheng and Korean gayageum. The koto has been played for over 1,000 years there. Since the Meiji Era (1868-1912), many new koto pieces have been composed. Koto music often expresses meaningful Japanese customs or seasons, including the sakura or cherry blossom season.



## Kravin' Munchies Craft Fair & Quilt Display

Kravin' Munchies of Hilo brings its line of tasty goodies to Waimea at Mana Christian 'Ohana (Old Kahilu Town Hall) for a craft fair and quilt display. Owned by Cassi Kaneda and Tia Revilla, Kravin' creates freshly packaged gourmet flavored popcorns, furikake munchies, cotton candy, li hing mui lollipops and ube crinkle cookies that can be found at Lani's Island Snack Shack in downtown Hilo.

The Kravin' Munchies Craft Fair & Quilt Display also offers local designer clothing and artisan gift items. Find apparel, handbags, fine jewelry, art work, engraved chopping boards, drinking cups and unique

island finds in a lively emporium atmosphere.

Attendees are invited on stage to view an exhibit of local patchwork and Hawaiian quilts. See the



*Photo Credit:  
Courtesy Tina Martinson*

Sakura Quilt, designed and stitched by late members of the former Ka Hui Kapa Apana Waimea quilt club.

Follow Kravin' Munchies on Facebook and Instagram, @kravinmunchies.



## 'The Future is Bright' Photo Selected as 2026 Festival Art



Barbara Schaefer's whimsical photo, "The Future is Bright," is the official art for the 2026 Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival. It was selected from a field of nine entries by the festival's community planning committee.

The winning image appears on both the cover of this year's festival souvenir booklet and the 2026 festival poster. Purchase the poster for \$10 at Waimea's Firehouse Gallery where Schaefer will sign posters during the February 7 festival. Also on display and for sale will be Schaefer's original 14X11-inch photo on metal.

When the call went out for 2026 festival art, the Waimea resident says she literally looked into her crystal ball to see what might be ahead and muses "the past, as often is the case, predicted the future."

The photographer used an image she had previously constructed, a composite of snow-capped Mauna Kea with a foreground cherry blossom branch, and viewed it through her crystal ball. "I focused my camera on the ball, allowing the background image to soften into a fond memory while foreseeing a bright, hopeful future for our community."

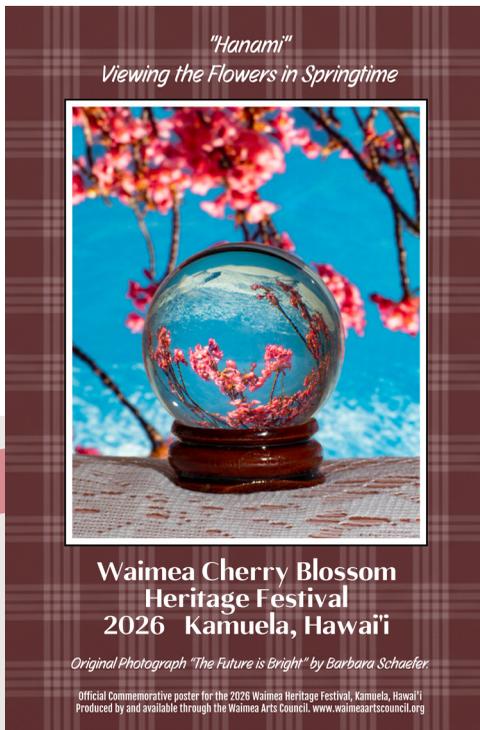
Schaefer sees photography as a method to capture moments, preserving a particular view of history at a specific time. She also enjoys capturing timeless representations of form and color, seeing and recording images that others might not notice. Her joy in photography comes from sharing the images with others so they might also enjoy the beauty of majestic scenes and everyday small views. Schaefer's picturesque photo of cherry blossoms framing 'Imiola Church was chosen as the 2016 festival art.

Since retiring from an astronomy career, Schaefer enjoys focusing on photography, canoe paddling and volunteering. She is a member of the Gallery Committee at the Waimea Arts Council Firehouse Gallery, on the board of directors of E Mau Nā Ala Hele, a trails advocacy group, and a Board of Visitors member of the University of Wisconsin Astronomy Department. Find her art at Fireside Gallery.

**Limited Edition**  
only \$10

**Official Collector's Poster**

The 17x11" poster is only available at the Firehouse Gallery. Find them on Facebook: Firehouse Gallery & Waimea Arts Council  
808-877-1052 [www.WaimeaArtsCouncil.org](http://www.WaimeaArtsCouncil.org)



# Mahalo!

The Waimea Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival is produced by the Hawai'i County Parks and Recreation's Culture and Education Division. At the helm is event coordinator Morty Carter Jr.

Presented at numerous venues throughout Waimea, the free festival is a community-wide effort staged by a dedicated team of organizations, individuals and businesses. Mahalo to those who pitched in to produce the 2026 festival!

- Hawai'i County Mayor Kimo Alameda & Mayor's Office
- Hawai'i County Councilman James Hustace
- Annu Shionoya—Classic Japanese Music & Dance
- Chado Urasenke Tankokai Hilo Association—Tea Ceremony
- CJ's Promotions
- Fern Gavelek Communications
- Hawai'i County Fire & Police Departments
- Hawai'i County Parks & Recreation Department
- Hawai'i County Public Works Department
- Historic Spencer House
- Holo Holo Ku at Parker Ranch Homeowners Association
- Islandwide Canopy Tents
- Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i
- Kahilu Theatre
- Kamuela Farmers Market
- Kamuela Hardwoods
- Kamuela Hongwanji Mission
- Kamuela Liquor Store
- Kathy Sprinkle
- Kohala Mountain Express—Train Rides
- Kona Hongwanji Buddhist Temple—Mochi Pounding
- Kravin' Munchies
- KTA Super Stores/Waimea Center
- North Hawaii Bon Dancers
- Paniolo Preservation Society
- Parker Ranch Center (M&J Wilkow Properties, LLC)
- Parker Ranch Historic Homes
- Roberts Hawaii-Free Shuttles
- So-shin Kai Koto
- Thelma Parker Memorial Library
- Waimea Arts Council—Firehouse Gallery
- Waimea Bon-yu Kai Bonsai Club
- Waimea Lions Club
- Waimea Preservation Association



*"Taiko Amid Sakura" by Wilfred Y. Fujimoto  
11x14 Oil Painting*

***Runner-up winner of the 2026 Waimea Arts Council's annual Cherry Blossom Invitational Contest.***

*This painting in oil captures the role that the taiko plays during ceremonial events such as the annual Cherry Blossom Festival in Waimea.*

*This painting and others are available for purchase at the Firehouse Gallery.*