

Enhancing workforce opportunities

FERN WHITE USES CLIMBHI BRIDGE TO CONNECT BUSINESS, NONPROFIT LEADERS WITH STUDENTS

SPECIAL TO WEST HAWAII TODAY

Editor's note: Each Wednesday, West Hawaii Today is publishing a story about individuals, groups or organizations that have helped make life better for others in our community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

More than 200 Hawaii businesses and nonprofit organizations have come together in a groundbreaking community initiative to help more than 3,000 high school students statewide, and counting.

ClimbHI Bridge, which was formally launched in December by Hawaii workforce development nonprofit ClimbHI, is growing with unprecedented participation from businesses and hundreds of public and private schools. The ClimbHI Bridge online career portal takes a fresh approach to connecting business leaders with students and teachers to enhance workforce opportunities and exposure across a variety of industries. More than 500 educators are enrolled.

"This strong network of businesses is supporting students and teachers on all islands across Hawaii," said ClimbHI President Julie Morikawa. "The COVID-19 pandemic is

forcing everyone to think differently about how we ensure that Hawaii's urban and rural students are prepared and skilled to fill jobs that pay living wages. By connecting businesses to schools, educators have the opportunity to expose students to careers and learn from professionals."

HIDOE West Hawaii Career and Technical Education District Resource Teacher Fern White used ClimbHI Bridge to enhance a virtual career event in December for schools across West Hawaii. She was initially expecting a small handful of speakers and classes.

But, with ClimbHI Bridge, participation soared to 23 presenters, 47 teachers and 522 students over two half-day live sessions. Participating businesses included Hawaiian Electric, Big Island Candies and The Queen's Health Systems.

"I have been in the classroom for decades and am always looking for ways to connect kids with fields of study, and to give them a peek at the various opportunities that are available to them," said White, who is already planning another virtual career event.



White



Students learn about the hospitality industry during a ClimbHI event in 2019 at the Westin Hapuna Beach Resort. ClimbHI Bridge, which was formally launched in December by Hawaii workforce development nonprofit ClimbHI, is growing with unprecedented participation from businesses and hundreds of public and private schools. COURTESY PHOTO/SPECIAL TO WEST HAWAII TODAY

"ClimbHI Bridge is a vital resource for us to connect schools across a large geographic district, igniting student inspiration and conversations."

Participating businesses, associations and nonprofit organizations can log on to the free ClimbHI Bridge portal and post opportunities for students and teachers, including internships, project-based learning,

events and careers. Teachers can easily search for guest speakers and send requests for class involvement, career fair participation, site visits and job-readiness activities.

Training is ongoing for all Hawaii public high schools. The portal's expansion also includes serving middle and elementary schools by the end of 2021. Support

is provided by the nonprofit Hawaii Executive Collaborative, which has committed to funding the program for five years. ClimbHI Bridge was conceived at the 2018 Hawaii Executive Conference.

Businesses, associations and nonprofit organizations in Hawaii are encouraged to visit www.climbhi.org/portals or e-mail

info@climbhi.org to participate.

Know a Hometown Hero who should be highlighted next Wednesday? It can be anybody, from a youngster doing good for the community, to a professional helping with the COVID-19 pandemic, or even a kupuna! Please send your nominations to cjensen@westhawaii.com with the subject: Hometown Heroes Nomination. Please include the hero's name, contact information and what makes them a hero.

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