

The Hideaway

The need for affordable boat slips goes back a long way. In 1955, a New Zealander and his American wife first proposed the development of Keehi Lagoon as a "poor man's yacht club."

John Campbell and his wife Annette convinced the state to lease them 5,000 square feet of shoreline in the lagoon. It was tough work and the Campbells only were allowed a month-to-month lease. They built docks and moorings, planted trees and erected a clubhouse.

Campbell died some years ago, but Annette still can be found on the shores of Keehi Lagoon, still pursuing her dream.

Annette, who goes by her second husband's name, Nahinu, is a spry, little woman with disheveled hair and enthusiasm which has not slackened since coming to Keehi more than 30 years ago.

Forced out of her original location when the state canceled the lease, she moved her marina a few hundred yards up the shoreline and kept the dream going. When she moved, she took the club house, trees and docks with her. "I didn't leave one bit of grass," she says.

She then literally chiseled out her new marina, La Mariana, on what was solid 4-foot deep concrete. With backhoes and jack hammers, the concrete was broken up and trees and grass were replanted.

"It's been one tremendous problem after another," she says of her marina, which has about 100 slips. She finally was given a long lease which allowed her to borrow money and create La Mariana in the way it was first envisioned.

Today, La Mariana is a lush hideaway with a bar and restaurant decorated with rattan chairs, wooden tables, nets and glass balls hanging from the walls and ceilings. It looks like it could have been the setting for an old "Hawaiian Eye" episode. While the rest of Hawaii has moved forward, Annette Nahinu has created a bit of old Hawaii.

Nahinu concedes she is a romantic. She remembers when the lagoon was nothing more than the original marina and a landing area for the PanAm flying boats.

"They were like big, black birds," she says. "It was really quite exciting to see."

She remembers the many Hawaiian families who built ramshackle homes on the small islands in the lagoon. "It was picturesque, if you know what I mean ... very charming," she says. "There were lots of islands out there and people were squatting on these islands. It was very basic, very Hawaiian."

Many of the small islands are gone, the squatters forced to move and seaplanes have given way to modern jets. It is a lost era in the history of Keehi Lagoon, not one that Nahinu has allowed to completely slip away.

Visitors to La Mariana can spend Sunday afternoons gathered around an old piano and remember a more quiet time in Hawaii when you could sit on your sailboat and watch the pontoon airplanes gently touch down in the Lagoon.

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