

Showing aloha to the friends of Maui's fallen hero

By JOSEPH W. BEAN

Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan has taken the lives of over 1,700 members of the American armed forces. Naturally, we feel these losses as they are reported. Our hearts go out to the families changed forever. Still, it is understandable that we feel something more when one of our own is lost, as Senior Chief Petty Officer Kraig M. Vickers of Kokomo, Maui, was on August 6.

You must have heard the news: Vickers was one of 38 people, including 22 members of U.S. Navy SEAL Team Six, who died when a CH-47 Chinook helicopter was shot down in Wardak province. He was working with the SEALs, a specialist in explosive ordnance disposal. For him, every operation was a lifesaving mission, lending real weight to the SEAL motto, "The Only Easy Day Was Yesterday."

Long before he was a SEAL stationed in Virginia Beach, Virginia, Vickers was a star athlete – football and wrestling – at Maui High School, graduating in 1992. His parents still live here. So do many of his friends. But,



when it came to planning a memorial service for Vickers, there were a lot of people with no friends or family on Maui who wanted to attend. Finding rooms, homes, condos for more than 100 of those people was going to be a big job.

The big job fell to Hope Chapel. Pastor Craig Englert wondered who to call. Karen Johnson suggested ERA Pacific Properties Realtor Lydia Pedro. She does big jobs for Basketball Maui every year, and she has the heart to hang-in-there with a difficult task.

Pedro didn't know the Vickers family, but she felt the Maui-connection we all

shared, and much more. "I worked for and with the military for 25 years at Pearl Harbor; El Toro, California; and Kaneohe Bay," she said. "I also traveled to all the military bases in Guam, Japan, Okinawa, and the Philippines. I have a very special place in my heart for those who are in the military and for their families. They make so many personal sacrifices for us – to make it possible for us to enjoy our freedom."

There was a lot to do, and not a lot of time. Pedro reached out first to her Hope Chapel 'ohana, then to personal friends beyond the church, and to her colleagues in the real estate community. "So many helped out," she said. "I would hate to leave anybody out of the list, but let me try.... Steve Baker...."

As soon as Baker heard of the need, the Windermere Valley Isle Properties Broker sent out a message encouraging participation. "She will be successful," he wrote. "I have found two houses, and I have personally offered to pay for the cleaning for any owner who donates a vacation rental condo for the four days, so the owner will not have any out



Rosie and Steve Hogan, left and center, invited Lydia Pedro to use their ERA real estate office as the command center for the Kraig Vickers memorial project, and now they'll also proudly hang the beautiful plaque there, too.

of pocket expenses."

Pedro continued. "Jeff Gerard, Kristina Shugars, Louise Wittern, and Debbie Guimond are the real estate names that come to the top of my head. So many helped, but these people were very involved. ERA Pacific Properties owners Rosie and Steve Hogan allowed us to use the

office as command center for the project and for the guys when they arrived. What a blessing! Also, several real estate affiliate businesses were of great help. We had businesses and people donate cars, snorkel trips, cash, restaurants, haircuts, leis, bus transportation to First Friday, music, lei greeters, and hotel

rooms. The visitors who came here for the service were so blessed. They had attended all the services, and this was the last one. They found the people of Maui reaching out to them so touching that they gave us – Hope Chapel – a very special plaque to show their appreciation."

Pedro didn't have to match travelers with accommodations. "No, thank God!" she said. "My dear friend Vickie Hickman did some of that, and the wife of Kraig's pastor in Virginia did it, too. She was close to Kraig's wife, and knew what to do."

The people to be housed and helped were not a stable, counted list of names. "The final count changed," Pedro said, "in the end, the military put some of them up as they were only here overnight. The total also changed because of weather conditions in Virginia."

Pedro led a "brigade" of generous Mauians, each contributing something to the celebration of the life and heroism of one never-to-be-forgotten island boy. If you missed this chance to help, see what can still be done at www.kraigvickers.com.