

Star Advertiser

By [Pat Gee](#), Sept. 29, 2020

Affordable meal program developed for kupuna and caregivers who are too tired to cook

A program developed out of concern for kupuna is inviting people of all ages to take advantage of its affordable meals.

Touch a Heart, a nonprofit that helps the disadvantaged acquire culinary training and find jobs, launched the Kupuna & Family Meal Program when the pandemic hit in March. Robin Kumabe, Touch of Heart's executive director, was especially concerned about kupuna stuck at home alone, who had to rely on others to shop for them.

The program offers a sampling of various cuisines in a three-meal set.

Though most of their customers still are kupuna, Kumabe said, the meals are also ideal for caregivers and those who come home from work too tired to cook.

Another upside to the meal program is that it has enabled the nonprofit to keep paying its staff of nine, plus hire three culinary graduates who had been laid off from their restaurant jobs, Kumabe said.

Touch a Heart was founded in 2004 by Robin and her husband, Colin Kumabe, director of operations and training, to help the homeless obtain employment and become self-supporting. The organization works in partnership with Salvation Army rehabilitation programs and other social service agencies.

Each week, 390 refrigerated meals, prepared by chef-caterers Jensen Hirota and

Mark “Meleko” Lagmay, are sold in sets of three for \$25.50; they’re individually wrapped and can be reheated as needed.

The set varies each week and cycles through a variety of cuisines, giving many kupuna a chance to taste foods they don’t usually get to eat, Kumabe said.

Each meal comes with a small fresh salad and starch. This week’s menu: pork nishime with rice; Japanese hamburger steak with grated daikon, yuzu ponzu and rice; and ochazuke baked fish with matcha broth.

Kumabe said customers especially like the fish, meatloaf and mapo tofu when they’re available.

Desserts can be added for \$5 each. In these stressful times, she said, “there are just as many orders of desserts as there are meal sets — people feel the need for a little treat.”

A different scone is available each week, as well as other desserts, like banana bread, chai masala bread pudding and lemon meringue pie, available this week.

Kumabe said the meal program is barely breaking even after covering the cost of the meals. Some meals are provided free, and donations are welcome to cover a waiting list of customers in need. Touch a Heart also provides free meals in partnerships with other agencies, she added.

The program also needs more drivers to join the ranks of folks such as Bob and Nancy Okuda, and Lei Hilton, members of Kalihi Union Church, who have volunteered since March to deliver meals across Oahu.

Overall, the program has done well and expanded in the six months since its birth, Kumabe said. “Experiencing lives being changed has been wonderful!”

Order online at touchahearthawaii.org or call 779-7083. Baked goods from the affiliated Baker’s Heart program are also available. Pickup is Wednesdays, 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Kalihi Union Church, 2214 N. King St.; and 3 to 4:30 p.m. at Pearl City Community Church, 933 Lehua St. To volunteer or make a donation, go to the same website.
