

The Aloha Spirit, Nurtured by Community and Tourism



Genki Ala Wai Project
Restoring the Ala Wai Canal

Hawaii is widely known as a “tropical paradise,” evoking images of abundant nature and healing, and is a premier destination for overseas weddings and family vacations.

The Ala Wai Canal in Honolulu, Oahu, is a 2-mile-long artificial waterway running parallel to the Waikiki Beach coastline, one of the world's leading tourist destinations. Built in the 1920s as a flood control measure for the Waikiki area, which was then wetlands, the original plan was to connect the canal to the ocean at both ends. However, due to environmental concerns regarding Waikiki, the heart of the tourism industry, the eastern end was never connected to the sea. This resulted in a structure where water remains stagnant. While children once swam and fished in the canal, rapid urbanization and population growth led to severe water pollution, and swimming was banned in 1990. Especially, trash and runoff from the mountains flowing into the eastern section had no outlet, causing pollution to worsen over decades.

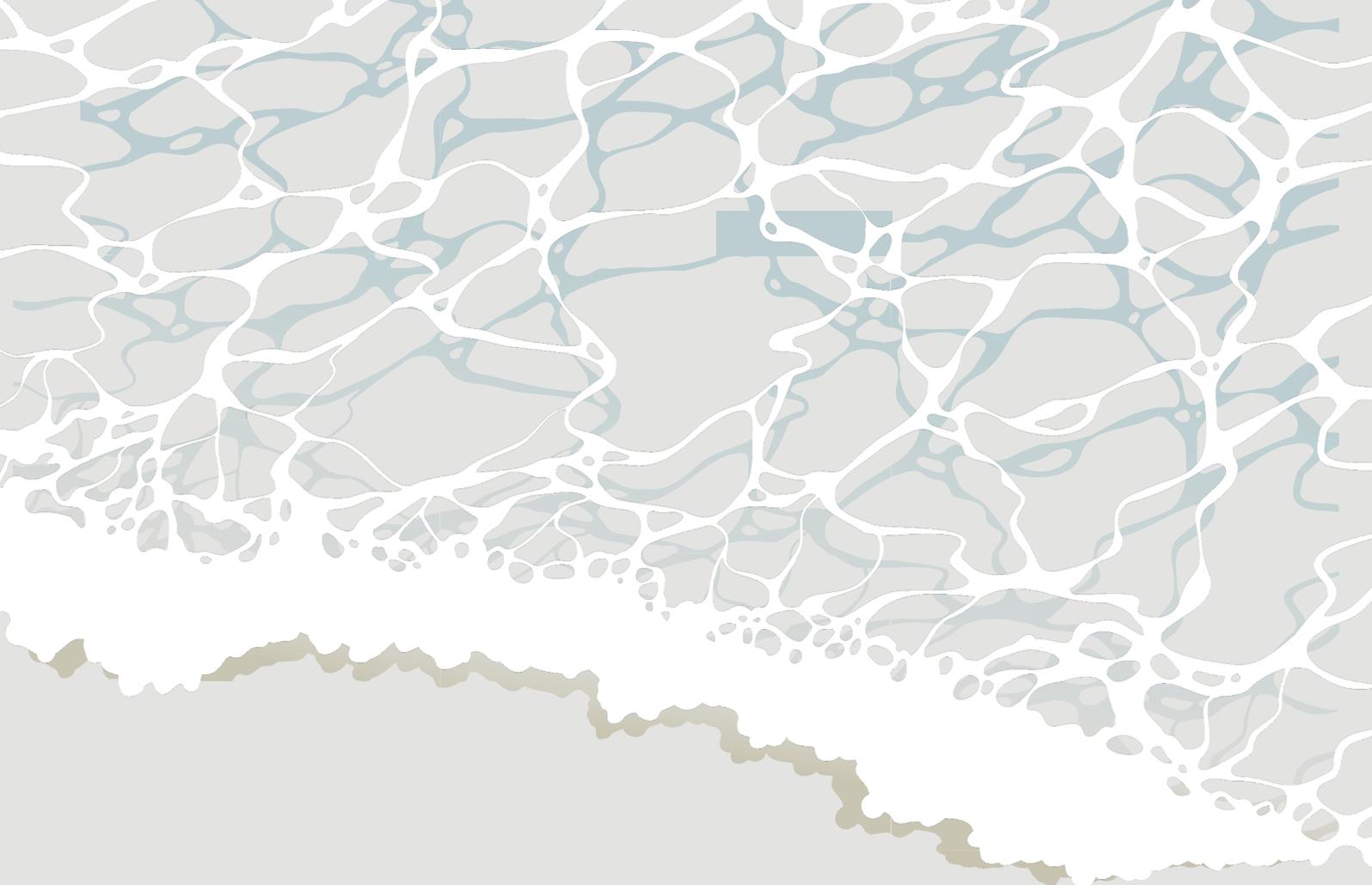
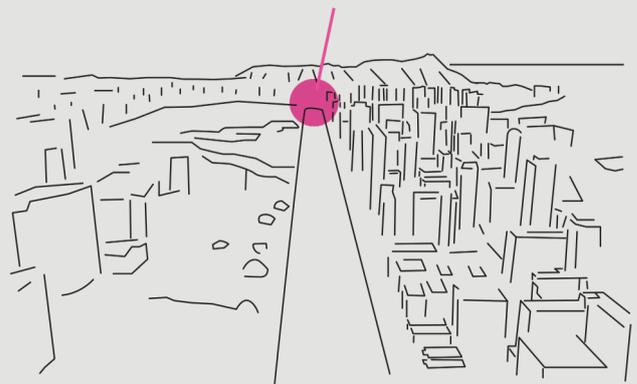


Photo: Terelyuk/Shutterstock.com

A stagnant area with limited water circulation



To solve this problem, the non-profit Hawaii Exemplary State Foundation was established. A movement emerged for residents, businesses, and hotels, everyone connected to the Ala Wai watershed, to work together on ecosystem restoration and flood mitigation.

The Genki Ala Wai Project was formed in 2019 as a group within that foundation, tasked specifically with purifying the canal using EM (Effective Microorganisms). Initially, the parent foundation was supposed to support various group activities, but the Foundation's funding did not materialize due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the Genki Ala Wai Project members decided to start on their own without financial aid. What began with local elementary schools and residents has now grown into a massive movement involving over 200 schools, businesses, hotels, and the Hawaii Tourism Authority. This is the story of how the local community and tourists are working together to restore nature and the "Aloha Spirit" behind it.

Genki Person

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Hiromichi Nago
President, EM Hawaii



Restoring Nature is My Mission

Since we started in 2019, we have tossed approximately 260,000 EM Genki Balls into the canal over five years. As a result, the sludge on the canal bed has been decomposed, odors have decreased, and water clarity has improved. Many creatures have returned, including mullet, Pacific threadfin (moi) – locally known as a fish only reserved for Royalty during the Hawaiian Kingdom – and ducks. In 2023, we even observed manta rays, hammerhead sharks, and Hawaiian monk seals.

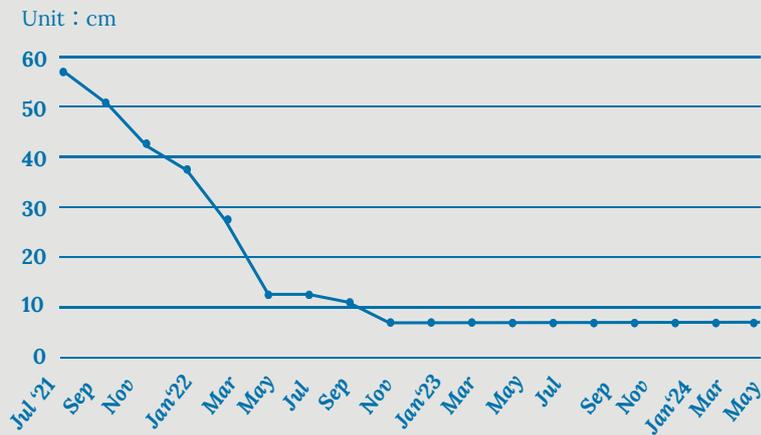
While our members conduct regular water testing, we also commission third-party agencies like the Hawaii State Department of Health, the Honolulu City Water Quality Laboratory, and AECOS, Inc. Seeing the data prove that the water quality is improving gives us a great sense of purpose.

During my 20s, I had the opportunity to work in Okinawa, where my roots lie. During this time, I attended a lecture by EM developer Prof. Teruo Higa and read his book, "An Earth Saving Revolution." When I read the book, I felt that restoring nature was my mission. Just as I was moving back to Hawaii, I heard from EM Research Organization about their plans for a new branch. I started helping out as EMRO Hawaii Branch office technical advisor, and about 20 years ago, I took over the role of representative for EM Hawaii after my predecessor retired.



Hiromichi Nago
President, EM Hawaii

Hiromichi has promoted EM activities in Hawaii for over 20 years and serves as the technical lead for the Genki Ala Wai Project. A third-generation Japanese-American born in Okinawa and raised in Hawaii, he grew up immersed in Okinawan culture. In his late 20s, he worked in Okinawa as an English teacher, allowing him to reconnect with his roots. Influenced by his parents, who used EM in nature farming, and a meeting with EM developer Prof. Teruo Higa, he began his journey toward environmental regeneration in Hawaii.



Sludge reduced to 1/6th in just one year!

From July 2021 to May 2024, the project measured the depth of the sludge in the Ala Wai Canal. After introducing EM Genki Balls, the sludge, which was approximately 60cm deep, dropped to 1/6th of its depth within one year and is now below 10cm.

(Source: Genki Ala Wai Project)

Our first project was the hippo pond at the Honolulu Zoo. The foul odor disappeared, and the results remained excellent for 16 years. Although the project stalled due to a change in City Zoo director management, the zoo is close to Waikiki, and with the Genki Ala Wai Project gaining strong public support, I hope to restart discussions there soon.

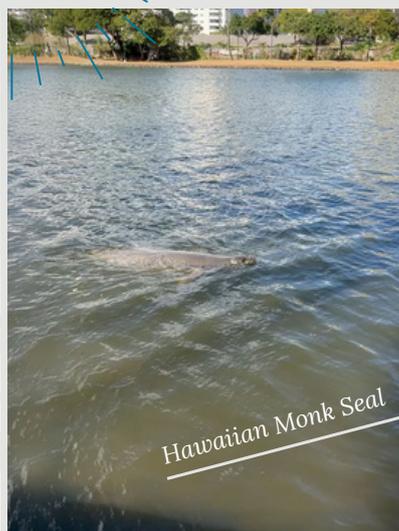
We are also running a pilot program within The Kahala Hotel & Resort in the lagoon where they have a popular dolphin experience, and we plan to train their staff to make EM Genki Balls themselves.



My wife and son have also joined this mission full-time. Just as I trained in Okinawa years ago, my son also spent months in Okinawa learning from our EM colleagues. It is thanks to this support that we have been able to continue for over 20 years.



Mullet



Hawaiian Monk Seal



Sea turtle

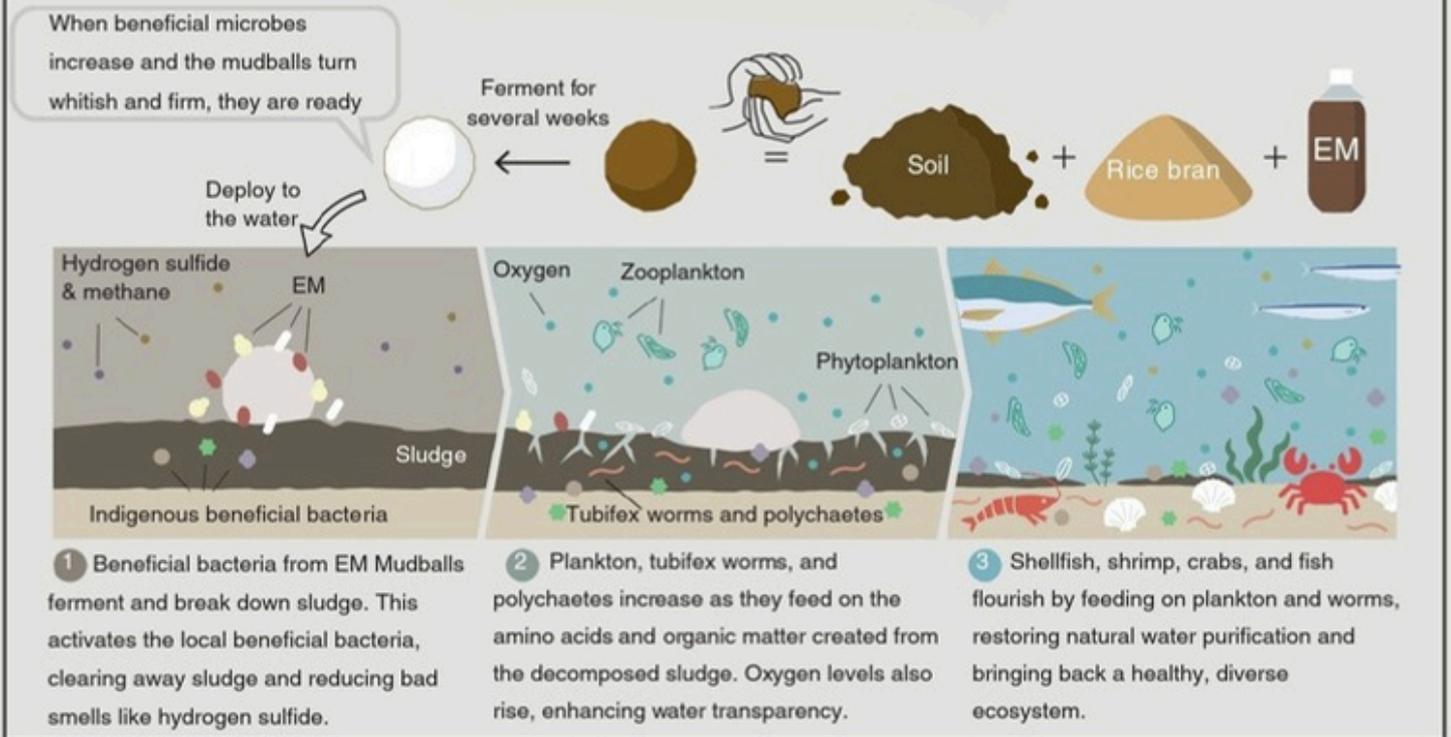


Night Heron



Creatures returning to the canal include sea turtles, native mullet, and water birds. In 2024, residents captured footage of a Hawaiian monk seal swimming in the canal, a sight unseen before the project began.

How EM Mudballs Works



Genki Person

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Jade Haughian

General Manager
Dolphin Quest Oahu

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Ryan Laguercia

Assistant Marine Mammal
Specialist
Dolphin Quest Oahu



One of the most popular experiences at The Kahala Hotel & Resort is Dolphin Quest, where guests can swim with and feed dolphins. As program managers, our highest priority in Dolphin Quest Oahu, is the well-being of our dolphins; we monitor each individual's condition daily and carefully adjust their diet to ensure optimal health.

Our lagoon is uniquely situated adjacent to the ocean, with seawater flowing directly in and out. To protect both the dolphins and the surrounding marine environment, we use no chemicals in the lagoon. In our search for safe, natural solutions, we discovered EM Genki Balls. Following a trial period, we observed a reduction in organic buildup at the bottom of the lagoon with no negative impact on dolphin health. To support our dolphins, our guests, and the ocean, we plan to continue using EM Technology as a long-term solution.

A group of people of various ages are gathered in a park, participating in a community event. They are standing around tables covered with blue tarps, which appear to be set up for making EM Genki Balls. The park is lush with green trees, including several tall palm trees. In the background, the iconic Diamond Head mountain is visible under a clear sky. The overall atmosphere is bright and sunny.

Malama 'Aina

Connecting the Earth,

Opening the Future

About 100 people of all ages gathered at a park with a view of Diamond Head and made EM Genki Balls together.

EM Genki Balls are "Universal Design"

Genki Person

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In Japan, these are known as “EM Dango,” but in Hawaii, we call them EM Genki Balls. When we first began our restoration efforts in Hawaii, we were deeply inspired by the Osaka City Fishermen’s Cooperative Association. During their project to clean up the Dotonbori River, they referred to them as Genki-dama (Balls of “Vitality”). To honor their work and help the movement grow in Hawaii, we adopted the name EM Genki Ball. We continue to share the story of the Osaka fishermen in all of our workshops.

There were also important cultural reasons for the name change. Because of Hawaii’s strong Japanese influence, calling them “Dango” often makes people think of the edible sweet dumpling. In addition, most children in Hawaii grow up without the traditional Japanese sandboxes found in parks or kindergartens, so many have never experienced making mudballs. Even among those with Japanese roots, many who were born and raised in Hawaii do not speak Japanese and would not recognize the term. By using the word “Ball,” everyone immediately understands that it is something meant to be thrown.



Chikako Nago

Born and raised in Okinawa, Chikako brings a diverse background in education, media, and the aviation industry to her work. Following her career in the airline sector, she joined her husband, Hiromichi, to help lead EM Hawaii and the Genki Ala Wai Project. Her extensive experience and dedication help strengthen the cultural and environmental ties between Hawaii and Okinawa.





While our work began quietly in 2019 and 2020 during the pandemic, the project grew in earnest in 2022. That was when I dedicated myself fully to this work. In the years since, the name EM Genki Ball has become widely recognized, frequently featured on local television and in newspapers. Today, we receive requests from a wide range of groups, including elementary schools, churches, temples, senior centers, and local canoe clubs.

I often lead Genki Ball workshops with seniors. We divide the tasks, some sift the soil, some add the rice bran, and others pour in the Activated EM • 1. Once everything is mixed, we chat and laugh while hand-rolling the mixture into tennis-ball-sized spheres. It is a beautiful way to share time together. Those who have difficulty standing can participate while seated; the activity requires no complex technical knowledge and easily transcends language barriers.

"Universal Design" refers to buildings, products, information, and services that are accessible and easy to use for everyone, regardless of age, gender, culture, or ability. In this sense, the EM Genki Ball project is truly an example of "Universal Design" in environmental conservation.

Next generation
stepping up!

Genki Person

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Kouri Nago



Kouri, the son of Hiromichi and Chikako, manages social media for the Genki Ala Wai Project and is currently expanding its reach through new partnerships with companies and organizations. Drawing on his experience at The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Waikiki Beach, he served as a vital bridge in establishing a collaborative partnership between the hotel and the project.

During the interview, one of Kouri's former elementary school teachers was also in attendance. It was a full-circle moment, as they reconnected as partners united by a shared goal: to restore Hawaii's natural environment.

Welcome to Hawaii

Bridging Islands

EM Technology Unites Hawaii and Japan

Genki Person

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Karen Wataru Nakaoka

Sr. Director, Member & Community Engagement
Hawai'i Visitors & Convention Bureau

Genki Person

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Eric Mok

Manager, Membership Communication
Hawai'i Visitors & Convention Bureau

For Hawaii's tourism to be truly sustainable, we must protect the natural environment that makes these islands so beautiful and alluring. However, as visitor numbers grow, environmental degradation can occur, sometimes creating a divide between local residents and guests.

In this context, it is deeply meaningful for visitors to participate in environmental conservation alongside the local community. These activities foster genuine connections between visitors and residents, deepening a love for the land and inspiring a sense of responsibility toward it. Simultaneously, residents benefit from an improved environment.

Organizers of international conventions and major events often tell us, "Since we are coming to Hawaii, we want to do something that truly benefits the islands." In response, we proudly recommend the Genki Ala Wai Project. For example, when the 2024 Pokémon World Championships were held in Hawaii, top players from around the globe took time between matches to participate in this project, contributing directly to environmental regeneration.

Hawaii and Japan share a long-standing friendship. The fact that Japanese-developed EM Technology is now aiding Hawaii's conservation efforts serves as a powerful bridge between our two regions. With hotels around the Ala Wai Canal and Japanese travel agencies increasingly adopting EM Genki Ball activities, the infrastructure is now in place for Japanese visitors to get involved. We want our friends from Japan to visit not just as tourists, but as part of our family who love Hawaii and work alongside us to build its future.

The future of tourism must be "Regenerative", providing mutual benefits to both the destination and its people. The Genki Ala Wai Project is a prime example; it goes beyond restoring the natural environment to build heartfelt connections between the community and its visitors.



During the 2024 Pokémon World Championships, special EM Genki Balls designed to look like "Poké Balls" were tossed into the Ala Wai Canal. It was a unique moment where Japanese anime culture and technology combined to support Hawaii's environmental restoration.



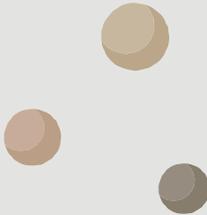
8/8 World EM Mudball Day

World Festival

Connecting the World Through Water
on August 8th

In 2009, an EM water purification event organized by a group in Malaysia inspired EM activists worldwide to designate August 8th as World EM Mudball Day. As water restoration efforts continued to grow globally, EM Hawaii and the Okinawa based community support group Otori-kai led the World EM Mudball Day Festival in 2024. By connecting Japan and Hawaii via a real-time livestream, participants simultaneously tossed EM Genki Balls into their local rivers, oceans, and canals.

In 2025, the movement expanded to include two organizations from Hawaii and approximately 20 groups across Japan, with over 10 additional countries participating through video messages. It was a profound moment in which hearts around the world became one through the medium of water. The resonance between the earth, the sea, and the shared intentions of the people grew into a collective prayer to protect our one and only home Planet Earth.



Members of the Genki Ala Wai Project toss EM Genki Balls into the Ala Wai Canal, feeling a deep connection with Japan.



Participants at the Okinawa venue. Simultaneous events were held across Japan.

Photo credit: Community Support Group Otori-kai

Watch the World EM Mudball Day Festival video here ►





Genki Person

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When People Take Action, Nature Comes Back to Life

Huy Vo

Director of Marketing Communications
The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Waikiki Beach

In Hawaii, we have the saying “Ola I ka Wai” (Water is life, and life is water). Even the name Hawaii itself is said to be derived from Ha (breath), Wai (water), and I (spirit). Ocean water evaporates into clouds, falls as rain on the mountains, flows into rivers, and eventually returns to the sea. The rain that falls on our mountains takes nearly 50 years to become the water that sustains us. As residents of Hawaii, we live our lives with a deep awareness of this cycle and the blessings of water.

The Genki Ala Wai Project is a unique initiative in which human action intentionally revitalizes the natural environment. While conservation efforts such as litter picking and reforestation are common around the world, it is rare to encounter a project that directly engages with and restores the ecosystem itself. This is what makes the Genki Ala Wai Project truly distinctive.

At The Ritz-Carlton, our mission is to provide guests with “warm and memorable experiences.” Since many of our guests are seasoned world travelers, a commonplace experience does not leave a lasting impression. However, when guests make and toss their own EM Genki Balls, they participate with a heartfelt wish: “I hope the Ala Wai Canal is even cleaner when I return.” This becomes a profound and enduring memory.

Furthermore, the Genki Ala Wai Project aligns perfectly with our three core values: Education, Environment, and Community Economy. Schools use the making and tossing of Genki Balls as an educational tool for environmental awareness. Meanwhile, when tourists pay to participate in these experiences, their contributions help sustain the project, while a thriving tourism industry supports and revitalizes the local economy.

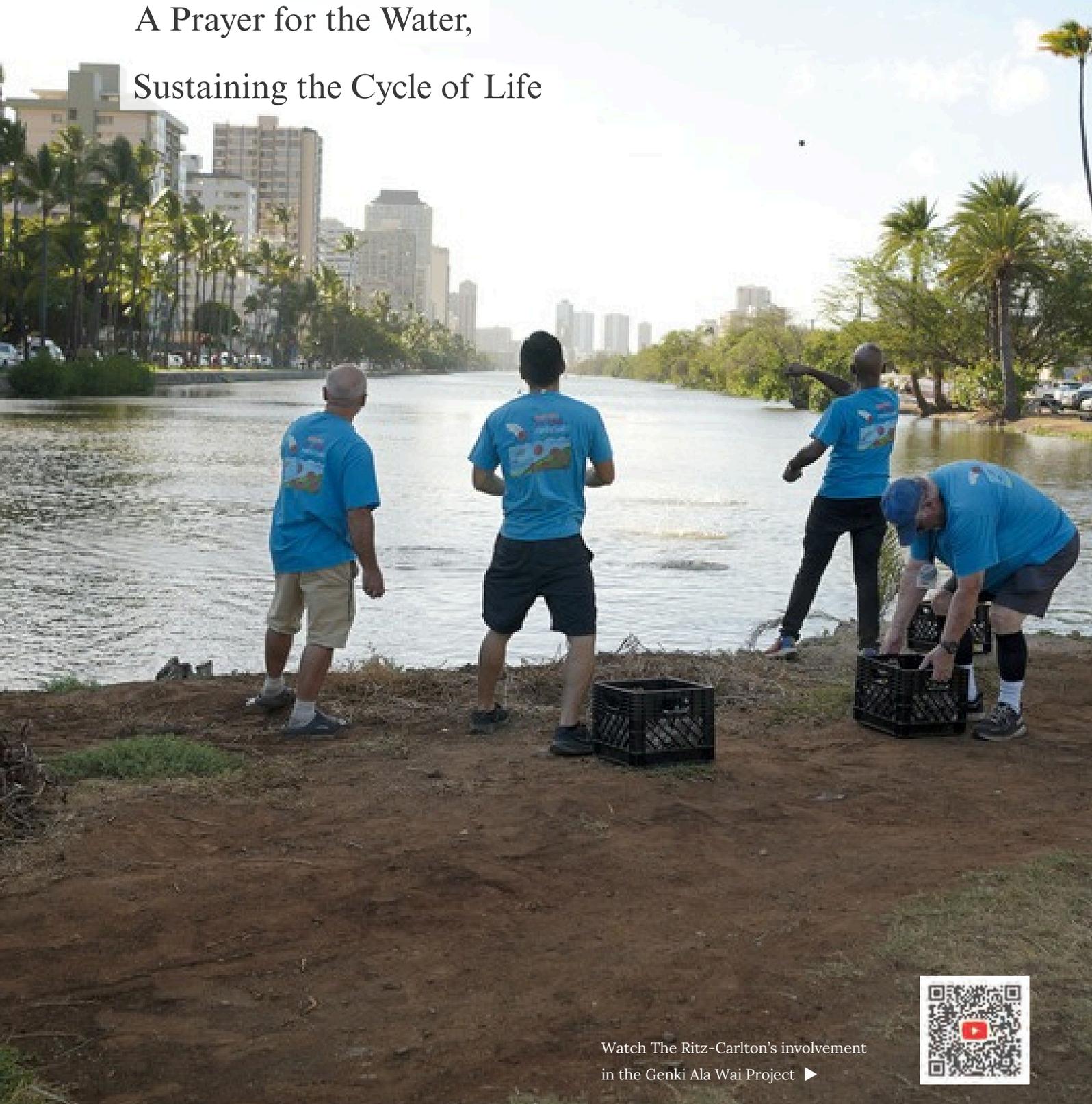
The mother of our former General Manager used to swim and paddle canoes in the Ala Wai Canal when she was a child. Our hotel is located just a two to three minute walk from the canal. To reclaim an Ala Wai where people can once again swim and fish, we look forward to continuing this partnership.



Ola I Ka Wai

A Prayer for the Water,

Sustaining the Cycle of Life



Watch The Ritz-Carlton's involvement
in the Genki Ala Wai Project ▶



Genki Person

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Mary Ann Kobayashi
Educational Coordinator
Genki Ala Wai Project

I previously served as a middle school science teacher, and I now oversee the educational outreach for the Genki Ala Wai Project. Currently, over 40 schools participate in our initiative. My role is to act as a liaison and conduct traveling workshops for students across the islands.

When a school requests a Genki Ball workshop, I start by listening carefully to the teachers' goals and the school's unique context. For a project to be sustainable, it cannot be imposed; my aim is to support teachers in implementing the program in a way that genuinely resonates with them.



Genki Person

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Fumiko Sato-Chun
Community & Media Liaison
Genki Ala Wai Project

Fumiko serves as the Community and Media Liaison for the project. Drawing on her extensive experience in the media industry, she ensures the project's message is communicated effectively, resulting in widespread coverage on television and in newspapers.



Genki Person

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Pualeilani Kamahoahoa
Native Hawaiian Cultural Practitioner

A supporter of the Genki Ala Wai Project since its inception, she shares the important cultural knowledge of the area and the waters that flow into our Ala Wai Canal. Kumu Pua, reminds the participants on the purpose and intention for which they are gathered for the Genki Ball event with traditional Oli / chant to heal and restore the canal for future generations to enjoy. On August 8th, World EM Mudball Day, she led the opening ceremony by offering a sacred prayer to the water.

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Contact them if you
would like to
participate in the Genki
Ala Wai Project!



Genki Ala Wai Project

You can see the activities here

Project Website

@genkialawaiproject





In Hawaii, the word “Aloha” is heard every day. However, it is far more than a simple greeting, it represents a way of life rooted in compassion, openness, and mutual respect.

The word Aloha is derived from Alo (presence / face to face) and Ha (breath of life). In ancient Hawaii, people greeted one another by pressing their foreheads and noses together to share a single breath. This act symbolized the exchange of life force and unity.

Importantly, this "unity" is not limited to humans. In the Aloha spirit, they honor life in all things: birds, insects, mountains, rivers, and the sea.

The Genki Ala Wai Project is more than an environmental initiative; it is an invitation for visitors from Japan to be more than “just tourists.” It welcomes us as partners and as family, united by a shared love for Hawaii.

For over 20 years, EM Technology from Okinawa, Japan, has built a meaningful bridge between our two regions. This is a journey of Aloha, where nature, community, and the hearts truly connect.