

Partnerships in Action

by Erica Tobe, MSW

Archimedes wanted only a lever and a place to stand and he promised to move the world. Today, more than 2,000 years later, credit unions and the Cooperative Extension are standing side by side and leveraging their complementary resources to change the world for youth. Collaborations in two states show how this partnership can move young people to financial independence through education.

Hawaii Credit Union League/University of Hawaii Cooperative Extension

Witnessing an alarming increase in bankruptcies in 1997, the Hawaii Credit Union League turned to Dr. Ronald Wall of the University of Hawaii Cooperative Extension Office for assistance. The result of that alliance led to a financial counseling training program for credit union staff that immediately started helping members improve their financial wellness.

Bob "B.J." Jonick, Hawaii Credit Union League's member relations officer, describes Wall as one of those individuals whose heart and soul is devoted to sharing his knowledge to better the financial lives of others. The league now offers a certificate program each year. The Pacific Financial Counseling Institute uses Wall's *Financial Counseling In Practice: A Practical Guide for Leading Others to Financial Wellness* as its text.

Current joint efforts include the development of a guide to assist credit unions in finding free or low-cost financial education materials and other resources for use with different age groups. Other efforts consist of train-the-trainer programs and community workshops centered on financial education topics, including *Surviving Financially in Paradise*, *Financial Strategies for the Unemployed*, *Surviving College*

Without *Going Broke* and the NEFE® High School Financial Planning Program®.

Popular league/Extension joint presentations have covered long-term health care, identity theft, and reverse mortgages. Additionally, many new subjects aimed at attracting the attention of youthful members are in the works. An attendee at this year's National Youth Involvement Board's conference in Madison, Wis., Jonick returned from the conference energized about reaching out to youth.

Jonick and Wall are now working to find new ways to help younger members learn money management basics. After all, today's young member is tomorrow's target market.

Ohio Credit Union System/Ohio State University Extension

Each of Ohio's 88 counties has an Extension agent and each has at least one credit union. These counties have teamed up to help individuals and families find a way to make good financial decisions based on their incomes to build wealth. Numerous projects are currently under way to fulfill this mission, including Reality Days, which focuses on youth.

Reality Days, which helps teenagers understand their many financial choices, is currently active in four Ohio counties. This program helps high-school students prepare and manage a budget based on income for their chosen careers, and

their housing, transportation, and entertainment preferences.

Jointly, credit unions and Extension offices work with financial institutions and other community partners to set

up one-day Reality Days at various locations. The local Extension office finds the schools interested in scheduling the programs. The schools determine if grade point average and attendance records will be used to establish the student's base occupation and salary. Credit unions provide staffing for the events. In addition, both credit unions and the Extension provide educational resources to teach budgeting and money management. In 2006 the Reality Days team expects to have all 88 counties involved in junior or/and senior high financial education outreach programs.

Basic budgeting classes, retirement programming, and understanding credit reports and credit scores complete the list of partnership opportunities that credit unions and Extension offices have delivered cooperatively. The Hawaii and Ohio experiences are just two examples of successful credit union/Extension partnerships in action. To learn more about working with the Cooperative Extension in your community, contact Erica Tobe or Philip Heckman (pheckman@cuna.coop). ■

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(Clockwise from top) Bob Jonick of the Hawaii Credit Union League and Cammie Furoyama, Ken Anama, and Thalia Yanazaki of HawaiiUSA FCU, Honolulu, are working with the Cooperative Extension to help Hawaiians build wealth through programs such as *Surviving Financially in Paradise*.

Credit unions and the Cooperative Extension have joined forces throughout the county to help people help themselves with improved money skills.