



HATS OFF!

Melieni Talakai of East Palo Alto Receives the Volunteer Center's Nonprofit Board Leader Award



On Thursday, April 29th at the **Volunteer Center's Hats Off** event in San Francisco, Melieni Falemaka Talakai of East Palo Alto was honored with the **Nonprofit Board Leader Award**. This annual award recognizes the achievements of outstanding nonprofit board members in the Bay Area.

Melieni has served on the Board of Ravenswood Family Health Center since 1999 when a board was formed to oversee the development of the new community health center. In the fall of 2000 she was asked to assume the role of chair of the Board. She recalls how daunting it was at first. Ten years later she is on her second term as board chair.

During her tenure, Ravenswood Family Health Center has grown dramatically from a staff of 13 in 2001 to a staff of 115 employees, now operating five sites, including the new state-of-the-art dental clinic and the Center for Health Promotion on Bay Road across from the main clinic.

CEO Luisa Buada observes, "Melieni is a natural born leader. She sets the tone for our meetings, characterized by warmth and mutual respect, knitting together our diverse multi-ethnic board.

Melieni is remarkably committed.” Luisa recalls, “When we were planning a silent auction for our 5th Anniversary celebration, Melieni decided to offer to put on a Polynesian Affair as a way of raising money. At her own expense and in the very limited space of her home in East Palo Alto, with one cutting board, she and her 5 children whipped up a huge feast including a dish wrapped in giant banana leaves, fresh fruit, and Ahi tuna. It was a glorious meal for 30 guests and highlighted Polynesian dances performed by her daughters and sons. The affair raised \$3,000 for RFHC.

In addition to her weekly involvement at RFHC, Melieni is a staff nurse on the San Mateo County Mobile Clinic. She is also the co-founder of Taulama for Tongans, a volunteer nonprofit that provides health education to the Pacific Islander community. She hosts a bi-weekly health education program on KEST 14.50 AM.

Melieni’s impact is widely recognized. As one of her colleagues at Taulama said, “In the Pacific Islander community, Melieni is the face of health services.”

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