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Local Kauaʻi News by Wilma Lee Kapp
2023 - Quarter 2 – June**

Local Kauaʻi News – Thursday June 1, 2023

The Kauaʻi County Council approved Wednesday a resolution urging the state Board of Land and Natural Resources to prioritize public access for the land surrounding the derelict Coco Palms Resort. The land has recently become a point of contention, as board Chair Dawn Chang told the council earlier this month that she had received several allegations of land use violations by the Utah-based leasee, including failure to maintain the premises, failure to submit annual reports, failure to pay property taxes and cutting down palm trees without consent. The state Department of Land and Natural Resources is conducting an investigation into these claims, after which they will have the discretion to revoke the leases. If the DLNR chooses to revoke the leases, the property's valuation would likely be significantly reduced.

Union workers with Hawaii Gas Company are on strike. Officials with Teamsters Local 996 say the strike encompassing more than 200 of its members went into effect just after midnight today. A union spokesperson says the strike was called after Hawaii Gas Company officials refused to negotiate over the past five weeks on wage and benefit issues. Hawaii Gas officials, however, say they sent an undated offer on Tuesday, adding that the company is working to ensure customers won't be impacted by the strike.

The Navy has an updated plan for the defueling of Red Hill. Now it includes a drill planned for mid-July. In a report released on Wednesday, the Navy says they're preparing for the worst case scenario, which is a pipe bursting and spilling more than four-million gallons of fuel in a 30 hour period. To combat the effects of that, the Navy said it will install pumps this summer before they start draining the 104-million gallons of fuel in October. The military still has 33 repairs to finish before then and also plans to remove three major pipelines.

Authorities at the Honolulu Airport are dealing with an infestation of bed bugs. State Transportation Director Ed Sniffen says the agency got word of the outbreak inside one of the E Gates in Terminal 2 on Monday. HDOT staffers reportedly were dispatched to deep clean the facility and remove affected or potentially affected items. The following day, personnel were deployed to continue cleaning efforts, pull carpet and treat affected areas. The gates were closed yesterday. Additional cleaning efforts are ongoing. Officials say flight operations have not been affected.

A man from Hawaii is pleading guilty after he picked up a bison calf in Yellowstone, leading it to be euthanized. Clifford Walters was visiting Yellowstone National Park earlier this month when he approached a bison calf he believed to be struggling and moved it to the road. The interference led to the calf's herd rejecting it. Park rangers repeatedly tried to reunite the animal with its family but it began displaying dangerous behavior towards humans and was put down. On Wednesday Walters pled guilty to a charge of intentionally disturbing wildlife and will be forced to pay a one-thousand-dollar fine.

State Department of Land and Natural Resources officials are mulling their next steps after cinder blocks used during last weekend's Hawaii Island canoe regatta damaged one hundred live coral colonies in Kailua Bay. Race officials say the regatta had to be paused Saturday after DLNR

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authorities got the news. Dive teams reportedly were deployed to find and relocate the blocks. As of yesterday, officials say, all but three of the blocks had been moved. An investigation into the incident is ongoing.

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Local Kauaʻi News – Friday June 2, 2023

Compared to most of the rest of the U.S., the economic future looks relatively bright in the in our state. According to the State Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, Hawaii appears poised to enjoy economic growth for the next two years. That growth rate reportedly is well above current projections for the mainland, based largely on both a recovering tourism industry and a stronger construction market. Meanwhile, state officials say an increase in state excise-tax receipts also suggests robust growth that should continue to outpace the current national average.

A horrible situation went from bad to worse for a couple visiting Hawaii. Police say a man and woman were in the state for their honeymoon and went snorkeling at Kapolei's Electric Beach Thursday morning. The 49-year-old husband became unresponsive in the water and had to be dragged ashore where bystanders began CPR. He was rushed to a hospital but died Friday morning. To make matters worse, while the couple was in the water someone stole their bags off the beach and took their rental car. One resident says the current at Electric Beach can get quite strong, and she hopes the city adds a lifeguard to prevent anymore drownings.

Officials at Honolulu's Daniel K. Inouye International Airport are touting the TSA's new pre-screening procedures. Authorities say the TSA has deployed explosive-detection canines to sniff out potential threats earlier in the screening process. The new process reportedly means travelers won't have to remove their shoes or hand over electronic devices for inspection during the screening process.

State officials are gearing up for next week's planned handover of the long-delayed Honolulu rail system to the city's Department of Transportation Services. Workers reportedly have completed repairs to cracks in the "hammerhead" track supports that keep the system properly aligned. In addition to these and other fixes, city, state, and federal transportation experts reportedly completed safety checks on 24 thousand rail-system elements in advance of the planned handover in order to meet the June 30th launch deadline.

The Hawaiian honeycreeper is close to extinction. This according to Hawaii conservationists who say the bird is struggling due to exposure to disease-carrying mosquitoes and rats. Efforts to keep the now-rare bird in the wild reportedly include the collection of unhatched eggs that can be safely cared for at a bird-conservation facility, as well as the distribution of rats trap in areas where the endangered birds live and feed. Authorities say the rare and unique birds could be extinct in the wild within the next year or so if these and other efforts are unsuccessful.

A mother from the Big Island has been charged after allegedly stabbing her nine-year-old daughter multiple times. The 34-year-old woman from Pahoia was charged with five crimes on Tuesday, including assault and unlawful imprisonment. One week ago, she allegedly violated a child custody order by pulling her daughter out of school. Court documents say she then drove her daughter to a home and stabbed her several times in the hand and chest. She is also accused of lunging at a police officer with a knife, leading to another charge of attempted assault of an officer. The child has since been released from the hospital.

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Local Kaua*ʻ*i News – Monday June 5, 2023

A second person has died following an apparent mass overdose event in Waikiki on Sunday, Honolulu police have confirmed. HPD also revealed that fentanyl was detected at the scene. HPD said a 44-year-old man was pronounced dead at the scene on Sunday morning. A 53-year-old was pronounced dead at the hospital on Sunday afternoon. Meanwhile, three others remain hospitalized in serious to critical condition. All of the patients transported were in their 40s and 50s. Heather Lusk with the Hawaii Health and Harm Reduction Center says "we don't know the full story" but the overdose victims likely didn't know "what was in what they were taking."

Six of the nine Honolulu city councilmembers are staying silent about their upcoming pay raises. In less than a month, councilmembers will receive 64-percent pay increases, while Mayor Rick Blangiardi and other top city executives will see a 12-point-six-percent salary boost. Councilmembers will go from making nearly 69-thousand-dollars annually to making more than 113-thousand-dollars annually. The council chair will see their pay go to more than 123-thousand-dollars annually.

Two suspects are on the run after a failed armed robbery outside of the Ala Moana Center. A couple told police they were on their way home from a birthday party when the suspects approached them on bikes and demanded their gifts early Sunday morning. One of the suspects held them at gunpoint. However, they rode their bikes away empty handed. Anyone with information on the gunman and his accomplice is urged to come forward.

Honolulu County officials are moving ahead with plans to limit the number of surf contests held during the summer on Oahu's south shore. Authorities say the proposal would be similar to existing guidelines limiting surfing events on the North Shore enacted in the 2000s. Under the south shore proposal, a limited number of permits would be available for events other than Duke's Oceanfest. The permits would limit when and where surf contests could be held, and stipulate appropriate holding periods.

Governor Josh Green is signing two new gun measures. On Friday, Green signed Senate Bill 1230, which restricts firearms in sensitive locations like schools, government buildings, public transportation, and more. He's also signing a bill that will require the Department of Education to create an active shooter training program for state schools.

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Local Kauaʻi News – Tuesday June 6, 2023

Green waste is closed until further notice at the Līhuʻe refuse transfer station due to the discovery of two coconut rhinoceros beetles, an invasive species in Hawaiʻi. Green waste at Līhuʻe is estimated to be closed through next week, as State officials and invasive species crews are on site and responding. The closure may be extended if necessary. Residents are advised to utilize green waste facilities in Kapaʻa. Commercial loads may be dropped at Kauaʻi Nursery and Landscaping. Please call 808-245-7747 for more information. According to the State of Hawaiʻi Department of Agriculture, a survey crew from the Kauaʻi Invasive Species Committee found a live beetle in one of the traps near the green waste site at the Līhuʻe refuse transfer station on May 31. On June 2, survey crews found a dead CRB in another trap near the green waste area. Although green waste service is closed until further notice, other services are available at the Līhuʻe refuse transfer station.

Some of Hawaii's beaches aren't as clean as people think. The Surfrider Foundation's Blue Water Task Force just released its latest clean water report and three Hawaii waterways are being identified as priority beaches with high bacteria rates. One of those beaches includes Kahaluu, where 88-percent of the tests within the last 12 months came back with levels of bacteria above the health departments clean water standards. Hanamaulu Beach and Nawilwili Stream are also on the high priority list. The SurfRider Foundation says cesspools and agriculture development are the two biggest contributors to high bacteria levels, but this isn't a new problem. The non-profit says funding needs to be set aside to help homeowners convert their cesspools, which will cost an average of around 20-thousand dollars.

NOAA is offering a five thousand reward for information that leads to the prosecution of the people responsible for intentionally killing a Hawaiian monk seal on Oahu in March. The agency says the seal was found dead on March 12th at Ohikolo beach. They say the cause was from blunt force trauma. Hawaiian monk seals are some of the world's most endangered species with just 15-hundred known individuals in the main Hawaiian islands. They're protected by the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Tomorrow, the Honolulu City Council will discuss a proposal that would ban council members from having outside employment. The bill's first reading will take place during tomorrow's council meeting. It comes with council members already getting a more than 60-percent pay increase starting July 1st. Council members wouldn't be allowed to hold a second job once they reach 61 days after being elected or appointed. If the bill passes, it would take effect at the start of next year.

The Honolulu Police Department is trying to manage a major officer shortage. Right now, the HPD needs to fill 390 vacancies, which is about 20-percent of the entire police force. A department spokesperson tells KHNL-TV the vacancies aren't impacting their ability to respond to crime. But, retired HPD deputy chief John McCarthy says the numbers are getting concerning. He believes criminals notice when there are less officers patrolling certain areas too. The Honolulu Police Department can have up to two-thousand-177 sworn officers.

More treatment is needed after bed bugs were found at Honolulu Airport. The state says the airport is

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now clear of the bugs, but work cleaning the airport isn't done yet. The bed bugs were found on May 29th in E Gates five, six and seven, and in Terminal Two. Those areas were fumigated last week, and the entire E concourse was fumigated Monday night. Airport officials still aren't sure where the pests came from.

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Local Kauaʻi News – Wednesday June 7, 2023

Kilauea volcano began erupting on Wednesday after a three-month pause. U.S. Geological Survey officials said that a glow was detected in webcam images from Kilauea’s summit early this morning, indicating that an eruption was occurring within the Halema’uma’u crater in the summit caldera. Before issuing the eruption notice, the observatory said increased earthquake activity and changes in the patterns of ground deformation at the summit started Tuesday night. All activity is within a closed area of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, on Hawaii’s Big Island. Hawaii County Civil Defense officials said there is no volcanic threat to any community. However Hawaii Island residents are being urged to prepare for the potential for heavy gas emissions and even “very light” ashfall as the eruption at Kilauea’s summit crater continues.

A woman is in critical condition after falling an unknown height from a condominium building on Tuesday. The incident occurred before noon at the Keahou Place Condos in Honolulu. The victim was identified as a woman in her 30s and she was rushed to the hospital in critical condition. Police say the circumstances leading up to the fall are still under investigation. The incident has been classified as an attempted suicide. At the same time of this incident and at the same building, bystanders on the ground recorded a harrowing rescue after a young boy was seen clinging onto the railing on the outside of a balcony more than 100 feet in the air. Moments later, a woman is seen pushing the child back to safety on a neighboring balcony. Authorities have not confirmed if the two incidences are connected.

Hawaii will begin taxing vaping products the same as cigarettes at the start of 2024. That's after Governor Josh Green signed a bill into law on Tuesday. E-smoking devices and E-liquids will be taxed at a rate of 70-percent, just like tobacco products. Green says one in three of Hawaii's high schoolers and one in 20 of its middle schoolers have used E-cigarettes or vaping products.

Hawaii's Hokulea license plate is considered the best around. The Automobile License Plate Collectors Association ranks it number one after it was nominated by 17 states and two countries. The special plate was designed by Molokai native and Polynesian Voyaging Society crewmember Todd Yamashita. The background image shows Hokulea anchored at Kualoa and honors the voyaging canoe's maiden voyage in 1976.

Huge new fuel storage tanks are being built in Kapolei as the military gets ready to drain the fuel tanks at Red Hill. The construction of the above-ground tanks is funded by the military and is expected to be completed in August. The process of defueling Red Hill will start in October. The new tanks are at Island Energy, which received a five-year contract from the military worth more than 170-million-dollars. The five new tanks are 64-feet tall and 125-feet in diameter, and six existing tanks at the facility are being repurposed as well. Island Energy hasn't said if the tanks will be holding the fuel that's eventually removed from the underground tanks at Red Hill.

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Local Kauaï News – Thursday June 8, 2023

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration today issued an El Nino advisory. El Nino has already formed which is month or two earlier than most El Ninos do, which “gives it room to grow,” and there’s a 56% chance it will be considered strong and a 25% chance it reaches supersized levels. The warmer waters of El Nino increase the chance of hurricanes in the Pacific.

Meanwhile

Experts believe a Category Four hurricane or above could leave Honolulu's airport under at least nine feet of water. NOAA's storm surge maps show Downtown Honolulu and Waikiki would be under three to six feet of water, while parts of the Honolulu Airport would be under nine feet of water. . Iniki was a Category Four hurricane with 145-mile-per-hour winds when it made a direct hit on Kauai in 1992. It destroyed or damaged more than six-thousand homes.

The Federal Aviation Administration is putting a new plan in place that would reduce the number of aerial tours. The objective of the air tour management plan is to reduce the impact air tours have on the park's natural and cultural landscapes. The plan will designate no-fly days on Sundays, establish specific tour times and define three tour routes. The FAA did admit that this could impact business but it's more important to eliminate the noise pollution the tours cause.

Honolulu's bars and nightclubs are a step closer to being required to carry Naloxone, also known as Narcan. When the nasal spray is administered in time, it can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. On Wednesday, the Honolulu City Council advanced a bill that would require so-called high-risk businesses to carry Naloxone. The Honolulu Emergency Services Department says one or more people on Oahu are now overdosing on opioids like fentanyl every day.

The Honolulu City Council is officially getting a 64-percent pay raise. The big pay boost was included in the more than three-point-four-billion-dollar city budget that passed on Wednesday. The council can technically withdraw the salary boost from the budget up until June 25th. If not, it will take effect on July 1st, when the new fiscal year starts. The pay increase was initially recommended by the Honolulu Salary Commission.

Hawaii has the highest debt-to-income ratio of any state in the U.S. That's according to a new report from USAFacts that relied on Census Bureau and Federal Reserve data. For every one dollar of income, Hawaii's households average two-dollars and 26-cents in debt. Idaho came in second with a debt-to-income ratio of two-dollars-seven-cents of debt to every dollar of income.

Kilauea is erupting again after calming down for about three months. A new eruption started Wednesday morning with lava fountains as high as 200 feet. By the afternoon, peak fountain heights were down to 30 feet. And, 32 new feet of lava have been added to the floor of the Halemaumau Crater. The Hawaiian Volcano Observatory says the lava is contained to the crater and does not pose a threat to the public at this time.

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Local Kaua*ʻ*i News – Friday June 9, 2023

There's a new law that officials hope will allow more community-based non-profits to control the number of visitors at state parks in Hawaii. The law signed Thursday by Gov. Josh Green would allow community partnerships to manage state parks — like Haena State Park, DLNR Division of State Parks (DSP) Assistant Administrator Alan Carpenter, other state officials, and community members worked for several years on the Hā'ena State Park Master Plan Implementation Case Study Committee. It produced the 63-page playbook, which is intended to guide other communities being pressured by over-visitation at state park hotspots nearby. The Master Plan has resulted in controls on the numbers of visitors each day, the transportation of most park visitors by shuttle from Hanalei leading to fewer traffic and parking issues and opened-up access for Hawai'i residents. The desired and achieved end result has made Hā'ena and the adjoining Nāpali Coast State Wilderness Park cleaner, better-managed, safer, and much more enjoyable to visit.

Governor Josh Green put his emergency room doctor skills to good use again. On Thursday, Green came to the aid of a 25-year-old man who was ejected from the bed of a pickup truck on Kauai. He hit his head on the pavement in Kapa'a and suffered an apparent concussion after getting knocked out. Green helped carry the man off the road, assessed him, and calmed him down until paramedics arrived. The pickup truck was traveling in front of the governor's vehicle at the time. This was the third time Doctor Green has assisted in a medical emergency since he became governor.

Our County of Kauai wants residents to examine their compost and green waste piles for signs of invasive pests. That's after two coconut rhinoceros beetles were found at a green waste transfer station last week. It was the first time the beetles have ever been found on Kauai, or any island other than Oahu. Agriculture officials are urging residents to report any signs of the coconut rhinoceros beetle or its larvae. The invasive beetle is known to kill palm and coconut trees.

On Oahu A woman is in serious condition after an elevator fell two floors at Honolulu Community College. Two people were inside the elevator on Thursday afternoon. The 58-year-old woman is hospitalized with lower back injuries. The other person inside, a 50-year-old man, declined treatment from paramedics. Both of them are employees of the school.

Honolulu is the best place in the US to treat yourself to a staycation. Wallethub ranked the best U.S. cities to enjoy a vacation while at home and found Honolulu took the top spot. The city was highly ranked for rest and relaxation opportunities, as well as food and entertainment options. Other great places for staycations were Orlando and Las Vegas.

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Local Kauaʻi News – Monday June 12, 2023

Kauaʻi Police report a male visitor died while swimming in waters off Tunnels Beach in Haena Friday night. He has been identified as Lucas Ivor, age 37, of California. A fellow beachgoer saw the man waving for help in the water and swam out to him. The swimmer was unresponsive by the time he arrived. Bystanders pulled the man to the shore and performed CPR until responding firefighters and medics took over lifesaving efforts. Medics transported Ivor to Samuel Mahelona Memorial Hospital. Attempts to resuscitate the man were unsuccessful.

Firefighters extinguished a structure fire that broke out in a Kalāheo residence on Friday night and left three people displaced. No injuries were reported. At approximately 8 p.m., firefighters were dispatched to Puʻuwai Road in Kalāheo, after receiving reports of a house on fire. Firefighters arrived on scene and found a single-story residence fully engulfed in flames. Fire inspectors estimate the damage to the structure and its contents to be roughly \$500,000. The cause of the fire remains under investigation.

On Oahu A Campbell High School student has been indicted on suspicion of taking a photo of a fellow student with severe disabilities using a urinal, then posting the photo on social media. The student has been indicted on two counts of privacy violations in connection with the photo that was posted in April. He is facing up to five years in prison and ten-thousand-dollars in fines if convicted as charged.

One of the most popular hiking trails in Hawaii is back open after a water outage forced park officials to close Sunday morning. The state Department of Land and Natural Resources says park officials had to turn away hundreds of people at Diamond Head because water stopped flowing to the park's restrooms, sinks, and water fountains. They believe vandalism is to blame. This comes a week after crews removed a hose that was being used to siphon water into a nearby homeless encampment.

Hundreds of Hawaii Gas employees have now been on strike for 12 days. The strike has caused several restaurants and other businesses on neighbor islands to temporarily shut down until they get propane delivered. A bargaining session held last week didn't produce a contract agreement. Workers now want a 22-percent wage increase and a small increase in their medical premiums.

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Local Kauaʻi News – Tuesday June 13, 2023

More families affected by the Red Hill water crisis are joining a lawsuit against the US government. According to court documents, approximately 187 new people have been added and about one-thousand additional claims will be filed by victims in the next few days. The families, who fell ill when jet fuel contaminated their drinking water in 2021, say the Navy failed to exercise reasonable care in its operation of the World War Two-era Red Hill fuel storage facility.

The Navy claims it's having major success in cleaning out its contaminated water well at Red Hill. The Red Hill Shaft was contaminated with jet fuel in 2021, leading to hundreds of residents near Pearl Harbor getting sick. The state Department of Health ordered the pumping of the Red Hill Shaft more than 18 months ago. Since then, more than two-point-three-billion-gallons of fresh, filtered water have been washed down the Halawa Stream and into the ocean. The Navy says, as the well gets cleaner, it's cutting down on the amount of water it dumps down the stream. The DOH has granted the Navy permission to reduce pumping from five million to one-point-eight-million-gallons of water per day.

The Hawaii Gas workers' strike is now in its 13th day. On Monday, picketers blocked Hawaii Gas delivery trucks at the Kaneohe Base Yard. The latest development comes after reports that the company has temporarily hired non-union workers to make propane deliveries. Hawaii Gas calls the move unethical and says the picketers are delaying deliveries to hospitals. Several restaurants and retail propane suppliers on the islands have closed for the time being after running out of gas. Hawaii Gas is also claiming union members have asked other unions to stop barges with gas shipments from docking. Union leaders say that's not true.

Hawaii is less likely to see repeat visitors from North America in the near future. That's according to a state-commissioned Visitor Satisfaction and Activity Survey. Compared to last year, fewer visitors said they're "very likely" to return to Hawaii within the next five years. Many of the people from the mainland U.S. and Canada cited Hawaii being too expensive, or said they want to visit someplace new instead. Others also mentioned Hawaii being too overcrowded or too commercialized. The survey was conducted between January and April.

Honolulu officials are reviewing a bid for the permanent removal of the Haiku Stairs. A construction company is offering to dismantle the Stairway to Heaven for more than two-point-two-million-dollars. It would use helicopters to remove the steel steps from a ridgeline above Kaneohe. Mayor Blangiardi and the Honolulu City Council have been working toward having the World War Two-era stairs dismantled since 2021. Demolition of the nearly four-thousand steps was supposed to start late last year.

The ACLU is challenging Hawaii County's homeless encampment sweeps in Kailua-Kona. Last week, county officials conducted an enforcement sweep outside the Kona Aquatic Center. An encampment at Hale Halawai Park was also cleared two weeks ago. The ACLU of Hawaii has sent a demand letter to Hawaii County Mayor Mitch Roth. It calls on Hawaii County to stop its enforcement efforts and calls the homeless encampment sweeps unconstitutional.

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Local Kaua'i News – Wednesday June 14, 2023

The Kaua'i Police Department in conjunction with the U.S. Marshals Service, successfully executed two joint operations last week. KPD and The U.S. Marshals Service Fugitive Task Force located and arrested four most-wanted fugitives on the island on two separate days, for charges stemming from outstanding arrest warrants. During the second operation, a total of 104 sex offender compliance checks were made in three days with help from the U.S. Marshals. 16 of those subjects checked were found to be in non-compliance, including two who are incarcerated and one who has moved off-island. Non-compliant cases will be referred to the Office of the Prosecuting Attorney for further action.

The FDA is announcing a voluntary recall of strawberry products sold in Hawaii. The Willamette Valley Fruit Company of Salem, Oregon is recalling packages of frozen strawberries and a frozen fruit blend that contains strawberries because of a risk of Hepatitis A contamination. The affected strawberries were grown in Mexico. The recalled strawberries were sold at several major retailers like Walmart and Costco. The FDA has yet to report any illnesses in connection with the strawberries.

Former Honolulu City Council Chair Ikaika Anderson has pleaded not guilty to abuse charges. Tuesday was Anderson's first court appearance since his arrest on May 15th. He is accused of physically assaulting a 34-year-old woman, who was his girlfriend at the time. KITV reports the two had been dating for about a year. Anderson asked for a jury trial on Tuesday. He is due back in court on June 27th.

Another Hawaiian monk seal has been found dead on Oahu. NOAA reports Ho'o-mau Lehua was found dead on the north shore on Monday. The female seal was less than four months old, having been born on February 23rd. No cause of death has been determined. Last week, NOAA announced a monk seal found dead on Oahu in March was intentionally killed. It died of blunt force trauma.

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Local Kaua*ʻ*i News – Thursday June 15, 2023

The state Department of Transportation is urging travelers to get to Lihue Airport early. The TSA has been having issues with its bag screening equipment, which is delaying the check-in process. The equipment isn't working at full capacity. The HDOT says passengers should arrive at the airport at least two or three hours before their flight.

The Hawaii Gas strike is coming to an end after two weeks. Union employees voted to ratify a new three-year labor deal with the company on Wednesday night. Terms of the contract have not yet been announced. Hundreds of Hawaii Gas employees demanded better pay, plus improved medical costs and retirement benefits. The strike forced dozens of businesses to temporarily close because they didn't have enough propane.

A Honolulu teenager is behind bars after he cyberbullied a disabled student. On Wednesday, State Sheriffs arrested 19-year-old Cagen Huddy Esperanza on two counts of privacy violation; class C felonies punishable by up to five years in prison and ten-thousand dollars in fines. The high school senior is accused of taking a photo of a student with severe disabilities using the bathroom and posting it to social media. He was released from jail after posting a 25-thousand-dollar bail and will be arraigned on Monday.

About a billion dollars in emergency cuts are being made to Hawaii's budget during the next two years. It comes just a few days after the 2023-2024 budget was approved by the state legislature. On Wednesday, Governor Josh Green announced many high-profile projects are being reduced or eliminated entirely. And, some major adjustments are being made to surpluses and emergency funds set aside for disasters. Green says he has to prioritize some projects over others after a sudden 300-million-dollar drop in estimated state tax revenue.

Hawaii is dealing with a shortage of hotel employees. Nationwide, 82-percent of hoteliers are reporting staffing shortages, and 26-percent say the shortages are impacting their ability to run their hotels. Many Hawaii hotel employers are now offering incentives to entice people into applying. Offers of relocation assistance, bonuses, travel perks, and discounts on stock purchases are common. Pleasant Holidays is offering a one-thousand-dollar retention bonus and two promotional travel tickets for concierge positions, while Marriott Vacations Worldwide is offering a variety of sign-on bonuses ranging from five-hundred to a-thousand-dollars.

Governor Josh Green signed 15 bills into law at the state capitol on Wednesday. Eight are related to domestic violence and sexual assault, while the other seven relate to wellness and child welfare. Green says the laws promote a pathway for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence to feel safe and protected in Hawaii. Three of the eight domestic violence and sexual assault-related bills were part of this year's Women's Legislative Caucus package. They create a new human trafficking prevention program and new training requirements for child custody evaluators.

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Local Kaua*ʻ*i News by Wilma Lee Kapp
2023 - Quarter 2 – June**

Local Kaua*ʻ*i News – Friday June 16, 2023

Hawaii's unemployment rate is now at its lowest since the start of the pandemic. It fell to three-point-one-percent in May, down from three-point-three-percent in April. It hasn't been that low in more than two years. The last time the jobless rate was lower was in March of 2020, when it stood at two-point-two-percent. But, that's the month the pandemic started. Hawaii's unemployment rate skyrocketed to 22-point-six-percent the following month.

The NTSB is announcing the cause of a cargo plane crash off the coast of Oahu. A final report, released Thursday, says the Transair cargo plane went down off Kalaeloa in July of 2021 due to the misidentification of a damaged engine. Investigators say the pilots misidentified which engine was failing, then used the damaged engine for thrust during the flight. The plane broke apart after hitting the water. The two pilots were injured but survived. The NTSB also says the pilots' ineffective crew resource management, high workload and stress contributed to the accident.

Honolulu is releasing more details about the grand opening of its long-anticipated rail line, which is now just two weeks away. All rides will be free from 2:00 to 6 p.m. on June 30th. A HOLO card will not be needed because the gates to all nine stations will stay open. Rides will stay free between July 1st and 4th, but passengers will have to buy a two-dollar HOLO card and load it with at least three dollars more to get into each station. The cards will be needed to open all station gates after June 30th.

Hawaii is less likely to see repeat visitors from North America in the near future. That's according to a state-commissioned Visitor Satisfaction and Activity Survey. Compared to last year, fewer visitors said they're "very likely" to return to Hawaii within the next five years. Many of the people from the mainland U.S. and Canada cited Hawaii being too expensive, or said they want to visit someplace new instead. Others also mentioned Hawaii being too overcrowded or too commercialized. The survey was conducted between January and April.

The Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) has issued a warning about certain raw oysters in the state that could be contaminated with norovirus. So far, five people have gotten sick since eating raw oyster shooters last month. Officials said the Korean food company has voluntarily recalled its Individual Quick Freezing raw oysters that were harvested in February and April last year and distributed to restaurants and retailers in Hawaii, Georgia and Minnesota. Norovirus is a very contagious virus that causes vomiting and diarrhea. Consumers who recently ate raw oysters and suspect they have food poisoning should seek medical care immediately, especially those who are pregnant, elderly, or have weakened immune systems.

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2023 - Quarter 2 – June**

Local Kaua*ʻ*i News – Monday June 26, 2023

The Hawai*ʻ*i Department of Transportation (HDOT) will begin nightly emergency bridge repair work this week. Emergency deck repairs will affect Kūhiō Highway between the southern point of the Mayor Bryan J. Baptiste Memorial Bridge and Kuamo*ʻ*o Road nightly from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. from Monday, June 26 through Friday, June 30. This nightly single lane closure will alternate between the northbound mauka and makai lanes of the Mayor Bryan J. Baptiste Memorial Bridge. Traffic will contraflow through the open northbound lane, depending on the area of work. The emergency closure is needed to replace damaged deck panels following findings from an emergency bridge inspection on Tuesday, June 20.

The Hawai*ʻ*i Department of Transportation (HDOT) announces nightly full closures of Kūhiō Highway (Route 560) between Hanalei Plantation Road and Ohiki Road for the Hanalei Bridge Repair Project starting Tuesday, June 27, 2023. The closure will take place from 11 p.m. Sunday night through 5:30 a.m. Friday. There will be no closures scheduled on Friday and Saturday nights. First responders will be allowed through the work zone.

Six people are recovering from injuries after large waves hit a catamaran off Waikiki Beach. The boat was carrying 30 people when it was battered around on Saturday afternoon. The catamaran was smacked by at least four big waves. Paramedics treated four passengers for multiple injuries then took them to hospitals. One was in serious condition. Two other people had minor injuries and were not hospitalized.

Honolulu police are on the lookout for a 150-thousand-dollar food truck that was stolen in Waikiki. The brand new food truck was stolen Friday, just about a week before the owner planned to open it for business. The trailer was parked in a lot near Waikiki Beach, when someone in a rental van drove off with it in tow. The theft was caught on camera but no suspects have been identified.

The NBC series "Magnum P.I." won't return for a sixth season. Industry sources reported yesterday that the updated reboot of the popular '80s drama about an Oahu-based private detective will not be renewed. The then-new "Magnum, P.I." ran for four seasons on CBS before NBC picked up the franchise last year. Industry officials say the show's demise might be linked to the ongoing writer's strike in Hollywood.

Tonight, Maui County is giving its residents a chance to weigh in on a possible tax hike. The Maui County Council is considering raising its general excise tax from four to four-and-a-half-percent. It would use the extra revenue to help pay for housing infrastructure. Officials estimate the county government could bring in another 400-million-dollars in tax revenue in five years. Maui County Mayor Richard Bissen is among those in support. Tonight's Maui County Council meeting starts at six p.m. and will be open to public comment. It will be held both in-person and virtually.

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2023 - Quarter 2 – June**

Local Kaua*ʻ*i News – Tuesday June 27, 2023

Hawaii is getting another 149-million-dollars in federal funding to expand broadband internet service. The program is giving 42-billion-dollars to all 50 states, the District of Columbia and five U.S. territories. The U.S. Department of Treasury already gave Hawaii 115-million-dollars to expand broadband internet access or upgrade existing infrastructure. And, earlier this month, Hawaiian Telecom was awarded a 37-million-dollar federal grant. The utility will use that money to lay more undersea and land-based fiber.

A couple from Honolulu is behind bars in connection with a deadly mass drug overdose at a hotel in Waikiki. Honolulu police confirm the man and woman were arrested last Friday. They're accused of distributing the fentanyl that killed two people and hospitalized three others earlier this month. Detectives say they were part of a much larger fentanyl distribution ring. Officers searched their apartment and found 500 grams of fentanyl, meth and 100-thousand-dollars in cash in a safe, then found drugs in their car. Investigators then searched postal records and the couple's laptop computer, revealing they ordered the drugs from Southern California using encrypted communications on the dark web.

A man accused of stabbing two people with a sickle in Hilo has been charged with two counts of first-degree felony assault. The stabbing happened in front of a Ross store one week ago. Investigators say it started with a fight between a group of homeless people at the Waieka Shopping Plaza. On Monday, the suspect's attorney told a judge his client was acting in self-defense and suffers from mental health issues. The suspect is facing at least ten years in prison, if convicted.

A woman who was run over by a city bus is now suing Honolulu and Oahu Transit Services. The 62-year-old claims the company ignored the driver's troubled personal driving record. The woman was hit while out for a morning walk in September of 2021, and says she was wearing light-colored, reflective clothing to make her visible. Court records show the bus driver was charged with driving 93-miles-per-hour in a 55-mile-per hour zone in his personal vehicle in 2018. Oahu Transit Services says he has not driven for them since the accident.

according to a new report out by Forbes Advisor that compared the nation's 100 busiest airports based on two factors, on-time arrival performance and airfare price during the summer months. The report ranked Hawaii's Lihue Airport in first place, followed by four other airports in our State.

Hawaii residents will soon be able to visit Hanauma Bay without a reservation. The change begins on July 1st. Residents will need to show a valid photo I-D upon entry. Now that staffing numbers have increased at the Bay, they're hoping the no-reservation idea can remain permanent. Hanauma Bay is open Wednesday through Sunday between 6:45 a.m and 1:30 p.m.

Honolulu's red-light cameras continue to issue dozens of citations each day. The Department of Transportation says, since last November, the ten cameras have collectively issued more than 63-hundred citations. The intersection of McCully and Algaroba Streets had more than 550 red-light

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runners cited in the past six weeks alone. The fine for a citation is 200 dollars. So far, two people have contested their citations in court, and lost.

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2023 - Quarter 2 – June**

Local Kaua*ʻ*i News – Wednesday June 28, 2023

Some Honolulu police officers could be facing discipline in connection with a shooting that left a suspect dead in Pearl City. Investigators say the man grabbed an unattended police rifle last Friday. The man was initially wanted on suspicion of burglarizing his ex-girlfriend's home while armed with knives. The HPD says the man found the rifle after running to a home next door and making his way to a balcony where officers had previously been posted. The 32-year-old man was holding the police rifle when he was shot to death by three officers.

A couple arrested in connection with a deadly mass fentanyl overdose at a hotel in Waikiki is now facing charges. The man and woman made their first federal court appearance on Tuesday and were charged with conspiracy to distribute and possession with the intent to distribute. Two people died and three others were hospitalized after overdosing on June 4th. The suspects are accused of providing fentanyl to one of the men who died. Investigators searched the couple's apartment and found 500 grams of fentanyl and 100-thousand-dollars in cash.

Honolulu is getting 20-million-dollars to buy new electric buses. The money comes from the Federal Transit Administration, through a grant program. The Honolulu Department of Transportation Services will use the money to buy up to seven 40-foot battery electric buses. It will also buy up to 18 battery electric bus chargers for the Pearl City Bus Depot. Honolulu is aiming to have a fully electric bus fleet by 2040.

A man has his 150-thousand-dollar food truck back, and it appears he'll still be able to use it. The trailer, which was stolen from a lot in Waikiki last Friday, was found Tuesday morning. Someone abandoned it in the Turtle Bay area. It has only minor damage. No arrests have been made.

Honolulu officials are bracing for complaints with the grand opening of Skyline two days away. Transportation officials say they're aware several rail stations don't have bathrooms and other key amenities. That's because of several cost cuts made during the construction process. The Honolulu Authority For Rapid Transportation also decided to leave some stations with small parking lots. And, most stations have just one escalator serving each of their two platforms. That's because escalators are expensive to build and maintain.

The Honolulu Liquor Commission is facing criticism after a new report revealed some policy flaws. The report says the commission's enforcement system doesn't have clear policies and procedures, lacked training and reliable data, and failed to investigate complaints in a timely and reasonable matter. Rick Blangiardi says the findings are "disturbing and unacceptable" adding that trust must be restored and is promising "comprehensive reform." On top of that, the owner of Scarlett Honolulu agrees and is now suing the commission for discrimination and retaliation by its investigators.

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2023 - Quarter 2 – June**

Local Kaua*ʻ*i News – Thursday June 29, 2023

Kauai has its first shipment of locally produced biodiesel. It was delivered to the Kauai Island Utility Cooperative on Wednesday. It was produced by Pacific Biodiesel Technologies, which owns the biodiesel refinery on the Big Island and has a new contract with the Utility Cooperative. The company is the only commercial producer of liquid biofuels in Hawaii so far. The primary fuel source is cooking oil that the company recycles from Hawaii's restaurants. The company also use sunflowers and other crops, and animal feed, as raw materials for production.

The long-awaited defueling of Red Hill is a step closer to happening. On Wednesday, the military joint task force in charge of removing fuel announced all of the needed modifications and repairs to the World War Two-era storage facility have been completed. The state Department of Health required the work to be done before crews could safely start draining the underground tanks. Next up is removing 104-million-gallons of jet fuel. Defueling operations are expected to start in September, with most of the work on track to be done by the end of January.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Hawaii is demanding change after a recent police shooting left a man dead in Pearl City. Investigators say the man grabbed an unattended police rifle last Friday and was still holding it when he was shot by three officers. Scott Greenwood with ACLU Hawaii says the shooting raises concerns about "weapons security practices, policies on body-worn cameras, and the escalating incidence of police use of force across the state." The Honolulu Police Commission are preparing for an incident briefing at its meeting in July.

There are new details about the couple arrested in connection with a deadly mass fentanyl overdose in Waikiki. A raid of the couple's home last week allegedly turned up 500 grams of fentanyl. Police say that's enough for 250-thousand lethal doses. The couple is accused of providing the fentanyl that led to five overdoses in a hotel room on June 4th. Two of the people died.

Over a dozen boats are starting the first wave of the biennial Transpac Yacht Race. The yachts left Los Angeles on Tuesday afternoon and are racing towards Diamond Head lookout. It's estimated the teams will take five to ten days to complete the race, covering a distance of 22-hundred-25 miles. In total, 58 teams will compete in this year's race, the most in more than a decade.

A piece of Hawaii's maritime history could be in jeopardy. The iconic Falls of Clyde Ship moored at Honolulu Harbor is losing its historic designation. On Wednesday, the state Department of Transportation announced it will delist the ship from the Hawaii Register of Historic Places. It's part of a plan to speed up ship's removal and the renovation of its home, Pier Seven. Falls of Clyde has been inactive for the past 15 years.

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Local Kaua*ʻ*i News – Friday June 30, 2023

Crews with the Kauai Fire Department responded to two separate rescues on Wednesday. The first call came in around one p.m. after a Californian tourist hurt her knee on the Waipo'o Falls trail. Just a few hours later, teams got another call of two hikers in distress on the Kukui Trail. No injuries were reported in that rescue but both hikers were airlifted to a landing spot at the trailhead.

Honolulu's long-awaited public rail line finally opens today. Skyline will opened the doors to its first nine stations at two p.m. All rides will be free between today and July 4th, but a HOLO card is needed to access the station gates starting tomorrow. The Honolulu Department of Transportation is concerned about Skyline being overwhelmed on its first day of operations. Officials are hoping crowds spread out among the nine stations.

A prominent Native Hawaiian defense contractor is caught up in a federal criminal probe. Earlier this week, federal authorities, armed with a search warrant, raided the Honolulu offices of Dawson. Dawson is a conglomerate of Native Hawaiian-owned companies and gets tens of millions of dollars in government contracts. Most of the contracts are with the Department of Defense. Federal authorities haven't said much about the investigation. But, witnesses tell the Civil Beat agents took company computers and cellphones on Tuesday morning. They say some of those federal agents were with the IRS.

Beginning Saturday, a new law prohibits carrying a firearm on the sand — and in other places, including banks, bars and restaurants that serve alcohol. Residents carrying guns in public is new to Hawaii. Before a U.S. Supreme Court ruling last year expanded gun rights nationwide. The high court's ruling found that people in the U.S. have a right to carry firearms for self-defense. It prompted the state to retool its gun laws. however, the new law prohibits people from taking guns to a wide range of places, including beaches, hospitals, stadiums, bars and movie theaters. Private businesses allowing guns must post a sign to that effect.

The state Department of Education is out millions of dollars on air conditioners that aren't getting the job done. The solar-powered systems either had to be disconnected, or don't do well cooling classrooms down. The DOE has installed the systems in 880 classrooms in the past six years. The total price came to 122-million-dollars, which amounts to about 138-thousand-dollars per classroom. Teachers have reported that many of the air conditioners only work half the day. Officials at a hotel in Waikiki are scrambling to relocate hundreds of guests. About 700 guests at the Waikiki Beach Marriott Resort and Spa are impacted by a water main break, which first happened Tuesday. A hotel tower with about 650 rooms has been without power ever since. There are only a few small areas with power thanks to a generator. The Honolulu Board of Water Supply still can't say when the water main will be fixed.

Hawaii's tourism industry isn't having as good of a year as it did in 2022. Domestic arrivals were down from the previous year in both April and May. And both months saw a drop in statewide hotel occupancy compared to the same months last year. In May, the hotel occupancy rate stood at 72-point-eight-percent, which was the lowest level all year. This comes as the rate of tourists visiting Hawaii from Japan continues to lag behind pre-pandemic levels.