



Project Profiles

AmericanSamoaRenewal.org

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Project Profiles

Profile 1: The American Samoa Culinary Academy

With the support of the NEG program, Chef Laautuvanu Sualua Tupolo helps Samoans eat healthier, build their culinary skills, and find new jobs – or make their own.

Chef Sualua has prepared food in some of the finest hotels and dining rooms in the world – on three continents – and served as Executive Sous Chef and Culinary Instructor at Weimar Center of Health and Education in Weimar, California. Now he is sharing his wisdom with aspiring food services professionals, health educators, and even moms back at home in American Samoa.

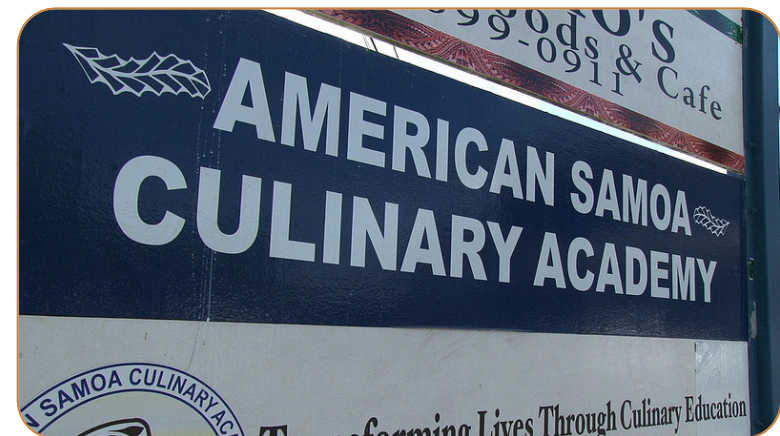
Like so many other Samoans who built successful careers on the US mainland or elsewhere, Chef Sualua returned to the island intent on “giving back.” It did not take him long to figure out what his contribution would be.

The absence of these skills among Samoans was impeding the development of globally competitive food enterprises and undermining healthy eating habits in homes and schools in the territory.

And no training program or other food-related professional development opportunities existed in American Samoa.

Chef Sualua began developing networks, offering public education on ethnic and health-conscious cooking and eating, and incubating ideas for diversifying menus and raising the standards for food preparation and service in American Samoa.

“Samoans are natural cooks – food is central to religious and cultural celebrations on the island. But most rely on knowledge passed down from generation to generation and lack an understanding of the science underlying food preparation – as well as nutrition and food safety.”



American Samoa Culinary Academy and student-run bistro in Malaeimi Village, American Samoa.

From Tsunami to Renewal: American Samoa

In 2010, Chef Sualua partnered with the American Samoa National Emergency Grant (NEG) program to launch the American Samoa Culinary Academy.

A hub of activity even before sunrise, the Academy opens its doors for classes at 7:30am. White uniformed students stream in each day for four months. The introductory level program provides training in four areas: cold food, hot food, baking and *garde manger* (cold storage just before serving). Chef Sualua insists on mastery of not just food preparation but culinary math, computer literacy, and job-readiness. His students study food science, prepare and cook food, and plate and serve meals, but they also develop resumes and practice their interviewing techniques so they can find jobs once their training is complete.

Students come with varying levels of experience – some have worked in food service, others have not; some have completed formal schooling, others not; and for some, the Culinary Academy is the first step to a first job, while for others, it's the chance to fulfill long-held career aspirations.

For Fa'afoi Fono, it was a life-changing opportunity.

Fa'afoi worked for Chicken of the Sea for 15 years. September 29, 2009, the day the tsunami struck, was her last day.



Fa'afoi Fono, Student, American Samoa Culinary Academy. Fa'afoi is also featured in the project's video collection at: AmericanSamoaRenewal.org/archive.

When she found the NEG program, she was just trying to find a job. But when the NEG staff told her about the Culinary Academy, it prompted her, for the first time, to consider building a career. She enrolled in the program, quickly becoming a top performer. When we met Fa'afoi, she had recently declined a job offer, opting instead to complete her apprenticeship with Chef Sualua in the student-run cafe adjacent to the academy.

"I wasn't ready to stop learning," she explained. "I want to learn all I can from Chef before I go."

From Tsunami to Renewal: American Samoa

The Culinary Academy is a social enterprise. It's one of few vocational training programs in American Samoa, and the only culinary school. It is in the process of attaining American Culinary Federation accreditation and building intermediate and advanced curricula in service of an eventual accredited degree program. It operates a catering business and student-run cafe that subsidize the training program, and has developed relationships with top-tier restaurants on the island and with high-volume enterprises such as the school lunch program.

Although questions about its long term viability remain, the Academy is betting that it can catalyze a virtuous cycle in which its skilled food service graduates raise the expectations (and the wages) associated with food-related occupations – or start more competitive businesses themselves – generating an increased demand for training.

The venture has created keen interest and enthusiastic support among neighboring businesses, even as cultivating relationships with smaller restaurants and food businesses has been a challenge. Quite recently, the Academy established a formal partnership with Native Hawaiian Holding Company (NHHHC), which provided needed access to growth capital and technical support for the enterprise. The purchase of two restaurants that could employ Academy graduates is also in the works, though this, too, creates new challenges (for more information, see the *Postscript* addendum to this report).

Online, supporters clearly outnumber detractors, with “Future Chef in the Making” commenting on one website “All that’s left to know now is...HOW TO APPLY!!!!”

At the writing of this report, 98 participants had enrolled in training and 95 have completed it. Fifty-two had found jobs.

Fa’afoi Fono is one of them.

Profile 2: The Construction Trades Academy Program (Guam)

The National Emergency Grant program, the Center for Micronesian Empowerment and the Guam Contractors Association Trades Academy teamed up to provide a unique training opportunity for American Samoans interested in construction trades and willing to work in Guam.

Guam and American Samoa are connected not just by their similar status as US island territories in the Pacific, but through the mutual respect and collaboration among their ancestors over decades and across the 3,600 miles between them.

During World War I, I'iga Pisa, a Samoan exiled to Saipan for resisting the German occupation, famously crossed the Straights that later bore his name – alone and in a canoe – landing in Guam, where a Chamorro fisherman saved his life.

“Islanders have long memories.”

Dr. Failautusi Avegalio

Years later, in the 1980s, American Samoans emigrated to Guam to assist with a massive infrastructure buildup on the island, a result of a surge in Japanese tourism. They performed well, cultivating a reputation as hard-working and enjoyable colleagues among their

peers from Guam and surrounding island nations.

And by coincidence, key representatives from the Guam Department of Labor were in American Samoa when the 2009 tsunami struck. The Guam program staff stayed on and helped Evelyn Vaitautolu-Langford, the Director of Human Resource for the American Samoan Government, and her team assemble its National Emergency Grant (NEG) request. The Guam team had experience with NEG grants and

the knowledge and infrastructure of a Labor Department to lean on. The shared experience of surviving and responding to the tsunami helped forge a bond between the staff of their respective islands.

So when a delegation from American Samoa attended a workforce conference hosted by the Center for Micronesian Empowerment (CME) in 2010, they were welcomed with open arms.



Dr. Failautusi Avegalio shares this story at the program's graduation ceremony. His speech is featured in the project's video collection at AmericanSamoaRenewal.org/archive

From Tsunami to Renewal: American Samoa

Guam is much larger than American Samoa – about 337 square miles – and is home to a population about three times the size and much more diverse than that of American Samoa's. About a third of the territory's 176,000 residents are native Chamorro, one in four are Filipino. The balance is white, Japanese, or Korean.

The US Military, air transport, and tourism dominate the economy, and the culture. High standards of product and service quality are a source of pride for the island – and have resulted in the highest skill requirements of the Pacific island territories.



Guam's construction boom is evident throughout the territory

Guam is again experiencing a construction boom – this time a result of US military plans for the reconstruction of the Guam Naval Hospital, upgrades to Andersen Air Force base and to the smaller installations that cover nearly one-third of the island, and the eventual relocation of over 16,000 marines and their dependents from Okinawa, Japan to the territory.

In response to the demand for construction workers the military build-up has generated, The Center for Micronesian Empowerment developed a model for helping workers from the Pacific islands in the region, such as the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau, transition to jobs – and life – in Guam on the theory that they could build careers that support their families in Guam, and return home someday with new skills and experiences they could put to effective use. At the same time, earnings sent home in the form of remittances would remain within the islands of the region rather than “leaking” out as occurs so often with foreign labor. Finally, firms would benefit from skilled workers who are US nationals afforded hiring preference over foreign workers under contracts with the US Military or agencies of the US Government.

Could a similar approach work for American Samoans who wanted to work in Guam?

From Tsunami to Renewal: American Samoa

Thirty American Samoans participating in the National Emergency Grant program opted to find out.

Selected from among 200 who had expressed interest, the students participated in a brief acculturation program in American Samoa, and then boarded a plane bound for Guam. For most, it was the first time they had traveled outside of American Samoa.

Participants lived together at the Ukudu Workforce Housing Village, supported by Cultural Liaison Tafa Lefiti who helped guide students to familiar food, local churches, and Samoan families already living in Guam, and even coordinated videoconferences between the students and their families in American Samoa.

This kind of cultural support has proven essential elsewhere, including on US Military bases in which Samoans are living – like Ft. Knox, Kentucky, where Tafa first did this kind of work.

After three weeks of assessments (including medical), acculturation training, and orientation, 30 students began an intensive, seven-week course at the Guam Contractors Association Trades Academy. Students were in classrooms, on worksites, or at the One-Stop Career Center looking for work full-time from the first day of the program.



American Samoa students graduating from the construction trades training

On graduation day, Saturday, May 26, 2012, all 30 donned their lava-lavas and puletasis,¹ and accepted their certificates in the company of Lt. Governor of Guam Ray Tenorio, dignitaries representing other island partners of the Center for Microenterprise and Construction Trades Academy, and National Emergency Grant program staff from American Samoa – accompanied by Savali

¹ Traditional Samoan attire, *lava-lavas* are skirts that tie or cinch at the waist, common for both men and women. *Puletasis* comprise matching long skirts and tops worn by women for formal or festive occasions.

From Tsunami to Renewal: American Samoa

Talavou Ale, the Speaker of the House of Representatives in American Samoa. By graduation day, 25 of the students had found jobs already and two more had advanced in their hiring process.

Fifteen students who showed particular aptitude were chosen to advance to the next tier of training, qualifying them for higher-paying jobs and an accelerated path to advancement in their careers.

Most of the 30 graduates were seeking to build skills and experience in Guam but planned to return to American Samoa eventually, anticipating a need for the skills they were developing in Guam back at home.

The program – and the students – seemed to make quite an impression at the trades Academy and at the workplace, too. Their colleagues responded well to their generosity of spirit and



Julie Brooks, Human Resources Coordinator for the Naval Hospital construction project hired student graduates

employers respected their talent and their courage – leaving home for the unknown and with a commitment to support family on-island is not without risk or hardship.

Julie Brooks, Human Resources Coordinator for the Guam Naval Hospital Replacement Project, hired nine of the graduates. “It’s made me realize what a huge responsibility we have in hiring and developing these employees. All of them were affected in one way or another by the tsunami, and working here, for us, is a way they can rebuild their lives and those of their families in American Samoa.”

American Samoa, like neighboring islands in the extended region, is not large enough to offer the kinds of construction training programs available through the Academy. Partnerships like the one established under the National Emergency Grant can expand the range of opportunities and create social, cultural, family, and commercial links so essential to the economic resilience of the Pacific islands.

Profile 3: The National Park Service: Economic Resilience and Environmental Stewardship, *Fa'asamoa* (the Samoan way)

Together, the National Emergency Grants (NEG) program and the National Park Service are growing a cadre of Samoan leaders to steward the *Paka O Amerika Samoa* (National Park of American Samoa) and build environmental awareness throughout the territory.

“OJT.” “WEP.” Few firms, agencies, or other employers in American Samoa had heard of these prior to the National Emergency Grant program. That’s changed. At the writing of this report, nearly 1,400 people had participated in one of these NEG programs with some 88 businesses, government, or semi-autonomous public agencies. Feleti Faatua’o was one of these people. A soft-spoken outdoorsman and rugby player, he was attracted to the idea of working outdoors and in a team – instead of at a desk. Referred to the National Park Service by the NEG program, he learned quickly and developed a deep appreciation for the environmental treasure that is the National Park of American Samoa.

OJT is an acronym for “On-the-Job-Training.” OJT participants work up to six-months in positions for which they receive training and are paid a wage subsidized by public programs like the NEG. When the OJT concludes, host employers are expected to hire participants into full-time jobs. The program serves as a bridge connecting people with aptitude for their desired job, but lacking in either skills or experience.

WEP stands for “Work Experience Program. In American Samoa, they were called “Work Experience Internships.” As in the OJT program, participants receive exposure to work, training, and subsidized wages, though for three months rather than six, and without the expectation of full-time work after the work experience period. Work Experience programs are ideal for people who are entering work for the first time or transitioning to a new industry or profession.

From Tsunami to Renewal: American Samoa

Feleti started with four other NEG participants who completed work experience internships with the Park Service. He thrived. He was offered a full-time position with American Conservation Experience, a non-profit organization that works alongside the National Park Service and offers a career path to a variety of conservation agencies including the National Parks Service itself. Today, Feleti leads his own crew.

The work is not easy. Most days, teams of five to ten enter the thick rainforest searching out and removing invasive species that threaten the health of the park, or planting trees to restore the native canopy. It's a physical job that also demands an understanding of complex ecosystems and specific knowledge of invasive plants, and requires precision in the collection of data and the use of GPS.

Leadership skills are also essential. Invasive species like the Tamaligi tree can harm the biodiversity of entire regions. A decade ago, over one-third of Tutuila – American Samoa's main island – was infested,

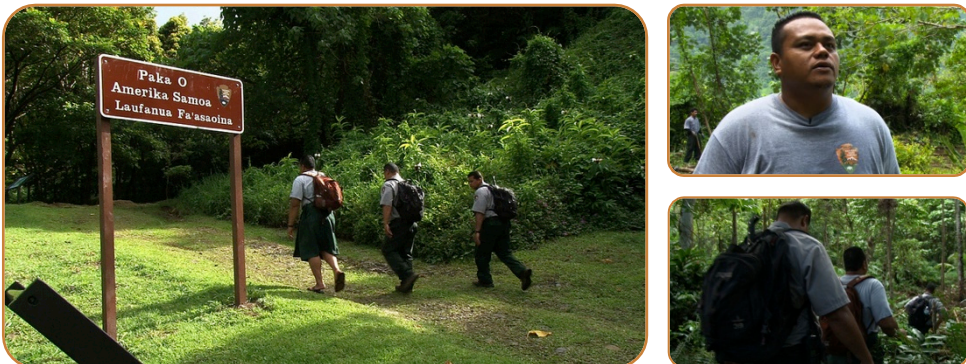
threatening the health of not only the forest canopy but the shoreline and the unique coral reefs for which the island is known. In 2001, the National Park Service launched a campaign to remove this fast-growing tree and its progeny. But as park Superintendent Mike Reynolds observed, invasive species don't stop growing at the park's boundary – they supplant greenery in the villages surrounding the park, too.

That's why the National Park Service emphasizes public education and community engagement in its work. Park Service employees work with Matai leaders to help villagers understand the dangers of invasive species and identify young men to help remove the unwanted plants from village lands – a practice cited as key to the success of American Samoa's efforts in a Pacific Southwest Research study published earlier this year (*Recovery of Native Forest After Removal of an Invasive Tree, *Falcataria moluccana*, in American Samoa*, 2012).

This kind of career demands skilled people who see their work as a kind of calling – a vocation. Workforce programs can help just such people connect with the right work opportunities as the NEG work experience internship program did with Feleti.

Feleti and his colleagues are on a mission. They are cultivating healthy ecosystems in the park and surrounding villages, and reinforcing a culture committed to preserving the natural environment for American Samoa's next generation.

With the help of programs like NEG, they are on their way.



Feleti Faatua'o with his crew in the National Park of American Samoa