Supplies for needy kids bound for Micronesia

By Hunter Bishop

couple of tons of school supplies and an unlimited supply of aloha went winging its way from the Big Island to Micronesia Tuesday.

A group of parents, teachers and students from Mountain View School and Ka'u High School carted 112 boxes of books and household goods to the Aloha Airlines freight dock for the transpacific shipment to Kosrae, an island community in the Federated States of Micronesia.

The link with Kosrae is a project of the Connections program at Mountain View School.

A so-called school-within-aschool at Mountain View, Connections involves students whose classes remain intact as they advance from first through sixth grade with specifically assigned teachers at each level

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Mountain View kids Denise Rafferty, left, Marina Kelley and Brittney Buyuan pitch in to help load boxes of schoolbooks and household goods bound for Micronesia into a cargo container at the Aloha Alrlines freight dock on Tuesday. Marina, 6, is enrolled in the Connections program at Mountain View School.

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working cooperatively on curricu-lum and student development.

Sixth-grade Connections teacher John Thatcher had been to Kosrae on several previous occasions to teach teachers. The relationships he developed led him to invite several Kosrac teachers to a workshop last summer on an innovative science curriculum he uses in his Mountain View classes

On Thatcher's visits to Kosrae, however, he saw how much in need the schools there are for not only school supplies, such as pencils, paper, chalk and books, but for basics such as jeans and rubber boots.

You walk into their classrooms and there is hardly anything to work with," he said.

After a recent fund-raising garage sale for Connections, Thatcher and others looked around and wondered "what are we going to do with all this

"Let's send it to Micronesia," he suggested. And from there the idea

snowballed. Students and parents began collecting additional materials. Connections parent Loretta Raf-ferty, a long-term substitute at Ka'u High School, learned that the Depart-ment of Education was about to dispose of 1970s-era textbooks that were no longer being used in Hawaii classrooms. She arranged to salvage the books and box them for shipment to Kosrae.

"They can use any kind of books," said Sally Wilburn, a parent involved in Connections, "especially books in English on the elementary lev-

Rafferty arranged for students in the Ka Pono Academy at Ka'u, an alternative studies program for at-risk students, to help truck the 60 boxes

of books to Hilo Tuesday.

"We ended up collecting a lot more than we thought," said Thatcher, overseeing the loading dock operation at the Aloha Airlines freight dock at Hilo airport.

Another important link in the isle-

to-isle project involved the late Marion Saunders, whose work in education spanned decades in Hawaii.

Saunders, a former member of the state Board of Education, also served as educational administrator for the Trust Territory of Pacific Islands for students in Hawaii schools and universities, including Micronesia, from 1954 to 1960.

Saunders also was instrumental in a successful battle to keep the controversial Connections program alive at Mountain View School in the face of administrative attempts to dismantle it.

"It was an interesting connection we had there," Thatcher said. Saunders, 89, died in August just hours after a BOE meeting at which Thatcher and Wilburn and others testified in an effort to save the Connections program.

(Saunders) was still very involved in educational causes and was instru-mental in keeping the Connections program alive at Mountain View School," Wilburn said.

Thatcher had spoken to Saunders about Connections and their experi-ences in Micronesia just prior to the meeting, and he learned of her death a few days later while he was in Micronesia.

"She was familiar with our struggle. After I came back I kept thinking, what could we do?" With the collection drive under way, organizers decided it would be appropriate to dedicate it to Saunders' memory.

Aloha Airlines and Continental Airlines agreed to transport the shipment at no cost to the Connections pro-

gram.
"We were really pleased that Aloha Airlines and Continental were so willing," Wilburn said. "We're always talking about businesses working with schools. There was no hesitation

on their part."

And the airlines' contribution was all that Connections needed to make the final connection with their friends across the Pacific.