

Spring awakenings



**Bonnie
D. Irwin**

When I lived in the Midwest, spring was a big deal. After months of cold and snow and ice, it was as if the world awakened to a new day, despite the fact that the poet T.S. Eliot once dubbed April “the cruelest month.” (And as a former English professor, I could spend a whole column explaining why he wrote that!) Flowers would bloom, birds returned, and spirits were raised as the often gloomy days and cold temperatures of winter eased away.

Here in Hilo, the transition from winter to spring is not nearly so dramatic, but springtime is still a season of joy. Merrie Monarch week brings thousands of people into our little city, and all the commercial assets of Hilo are on full display: people fill the restaurants, walk the streets in their aloha attire, and visit the numerous craft fairs. The halau hula bring spring to our community with dance, ‘olelo, culture, and color. The festival is its own kind of reawakening for our entire community.

Spring here at the university brings its own joy. When the students return

‘Earth Day will bring hundreds of keiki to our campus next week in what has become a signature event for both Hawaii CC and UH Hilo as we celebrate our ‘aina and work to protect it. In addition to events for children, students and employees will engage in Malama Honua Huaka‘i in Puna, Hilo, and Kona; we will host academic presentations throughout the week, and we hope community members will join us.’

from spring break, the pace of activity picks up. UH Hilo and ‘Imiloa hosted numerous Merrie Monarch activities this year, both for our students and for the community. Employees and students engaged in Merrie Monarch activities throughout the week, including marching in the parade on Saturday with our friends and colleagues from Hawaii Community College.

Earth Day will bring hundreds of keiki to our campus next week in what has become a signature event for both Hawaii CC and UH Hilo as we celebrate our ‘aina and work to protect it. In addition to events for children, students and employees will engage in Malama Honua Huaka‘i in Puna, Hilo, and Kona; we will host academic presentations throughout the week, and we hope community members will join us. Register here: tinyurl.com/563wb76j.

Celebrations of culture and ‘aina are quickly followed by numerous academic celebrations leading up to the UH Hilo Commencement on May 16. I always sav that

commencement is my favorite day of the year, and it is, but at that event, each student has mere seconds in the limelight, a very brief recognition of years of hard work to get to the finish line. Thus, in the weeks leading up to the big event, we honor students in smaller celebrations.

Each college hosts an event for their graduating students and scholarship recipients; athletics celebrates both athletic and academic achievement, Campus Center awards students who have performed notable service. We honor graduating Bonner leadership program students, Chancellor’s Scholars, and numerous others.

Each of these smaller celebrations is special in its own way. Some of the celebrations are planned by the students themselves. Some are also rites of passage, such as the pinning ceremonies for nursing and pharmacy students who are formally entering into their professions as well as graduating from college. We celebrate the teachers who are leaving us to go out into the schools

and pay forward the training they have received. Families and community members join us for many of these events, and just as is the case at commencement, the pride and affection of ‘ohana for their graduates is my favorite aspect of these celebrations.

Another important transitional activity in the spring that is not formally celebrated until fall is the awarding of tenure and promotion to some of our outstanding faculty. It is my honor and pleasure to review the dossier of each faculty member who has applied for tenure or promotion. This reading reveals to me the specifics of the care and innovation with which faculty teach their classes and the depth of their knowledge in their subject matter, including the esteem that colleagues both on and off campus accord them for their accomplishments. Service to the campus and the profession is also recognized in these files, and all this work lays the groundwork for our students’ own journeys.

Spring thus brings an ending of the academic year, but also a celebration of new beginnings for our students and our faculty. Spring has arrived, more vibrant than ever, and with it, a reaffirmation of our kuleana to serve our students and our community.

Bonnie D. Irwin is chancellor of the University of Hawaii at Hilo. Her column appears monthly in the Tribune-Herald.