



## **Remote Pacific Islanders Awarded Scholarships**

(September 3, 2008, Columbia, South Carolina)

Six decades ago, the remote Pacific Islands of Micronesia were the site of intense battles between American GIs and entrenched Japanese defenders. Now the region is better known for hosting the reality television show “Survivor” and its picturesque palm-lined beaches.

The reality behind the television show is less glamorous. Literacy and life expectancy are low, even by developing world standards, and the isolation of the tiny islands poses a major barrier to economic development.

A small group of former Peace Corps Volunteers and American teachers is working to help.

Their charity, the Habele Outer Island Education Fund, has awarded over \$5,000.00 in tuition scholarships to island students who will attend private schools in the Pacific this fall. The scholarships are issued to children in grades kindergarten through high school as part of an effort to promote educational opportunity throughout Micronesia.

Neil Mellen, a Habele board member explains: “The Secretariat of the Pacific reports that fewer than a fifth of these islanders have access to acceptable sanitation and that infant mortality rates are five times higher than those in the United States. At Habele, our hope is that greater access to education will provide these students with the tools to help their communities address the problems.”

The six scholarship winners from throughout Chuuk and Yap States will travel to and from their schools with money raised by their families, and all of the recipients have signed performance contracts that tie their scholarships to strict academic targets.

Albert Fong, a native of Woleai who teaches at a public school on Ulithi, reiterated Mellen’s optimism: “Micronesians are proud of their long and close relationship with the United States. The role of charities like Habele is powerful. As a nation we recognize that continued improvements in K-12 education are vital. Working with local community leaders and traditional chiefs, Habele has a big impact on the lives of our youth.”

Habele has also sent more than \$2,000.00 in books and school supplies to community libraries this year. The charity works in conjunction with Peace Corps Volunteers serving in the islands and members of the non-profit Oceanic Society. David Reside, Country Director for the US Peace Corps in Micronesia said of the scholarships “it is particularly important that there be opportunities for those students who show great promise but are at a great disadvantage to accessing continued education. Habele is addressing this issue by providing modest educational grants to students from the more remote outer islands, students who might not otherwise be able to pursue these educational opportunities.”

Habele consists of donors and volunteers from across the United States and the Pacific. The Fund operates on a strictly volunteer basis with no paid employees and is still seeking support for its ongoing public school book drives. Visit [www.habele.org](http://www.habele.org) to learn more.

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