



CHELSEA GROUP LIMITED

Hawaii-based building science consulting firm, Chelsea Group, is committed to caring for, and protecting the island of Molokai for present and future generations.

Andy Beth Miller

Breathtakingly beautiful, lush, and magical, the Hawaiian Islands are like no other place on Earth. And for those who have the privilege of calling Hawaii home, the protection and preservation of these idyllic lands should not only be a heart's desire, but also an undeniable responsibility that is ingrained deeply within us. Chelsea Group CEO George Benda is one Hawaii resident who takes the call of stewardship of Hawaii's 'aina seriously, making it a point to lead his company in the march toward utilizing both the firm's time and resources in this worthy endeavor.

"Preservation and restoration of natural lands, native plant species, archeological sites, and cultural practices in Hawaii reflects on Chelsea Group's commitment to be good corporate citizens of this unique State," Benda says. And one specific organization that Benda and his Chelsea Group supports is the Molokai Land Trust, of which, William "Butch" Haase acts as Executive Director, and Benda currently serves as Board President.

"The mission of our organization is to protect and restore the natural resources of the island, and to educate and perpetuate the native Hawaiian traditions that so uniquely describe or embody what we have here on Molokai," explains Haase, when asked—in a nutshell—to define the Molokai Land Trust's vision statement. "A lot of conservation groups set land aside to protect it from development, and that's kind of the end of the line, but with us, what separates us from everybody else is that our mission actually mandates us to go out and restore these resources."



Chelsea Group CEO George Benda leading a tour of the Molokai Land Trust

Haase elaborates a bit more on what this hands-on, proactive approach actually looks like: "Most of Hawaii has been transformed with human interaction and the introduction of invasive species. So, what we most interact with on the main Hawaiian islands is a completely transformed and non-native environment that does not represent the uniqueness of Hawaii, and so our job as land managers with the Land Trust is to go in and remove those invasive species, and reconstruct, and rebuild a native ecosystem that is suited for that site, based on available information and historical evidence."

Such in-depth stewardship is a tall order indeed, and one which Haase explains demands much, which is where contributions and collaboration from local companies and partnerships such as Chelsea Group really make a difference. "[Such efforts] are a huge undertaking which require enormous amounts of manpower to pull off, and we are looking at—on our island—resisting the

development pressures that have transformed the face of the other Hawaiian islands, so that Molokai still retains that 'old Hawaii' feel ... Because that's the vision that the community wants—to preserve the traditional characteristics and subsistent activity lifestyle," he says.

Haase reveals further plans that the Trust has in mind for Molokai and also the future welfare, and present well-being of its residents, explaining that "We are looking at utilizing our mandate for restoring our lands as part of the economic engine for the future economy of Molokai, so that through our restoration work, we are bringing in a lot of outside money to help with this restoration process, and it's starting to have an impact on local employment—spin-off benefits for local businesses, and offering opportunities for other sectors like the visitor and travel Industry, where folks who are coming to the island are now interested in coming out and participating in volunteer restoration activities and such."

But the above mentioned physical 'aina preservation is only a portion (or near half) of what the Molokai Land Trust is responsible for being stewards of, according to Haase. "The other half of our organization is the cultural resources side. [For example] if we come across any archeological sites on our land, we work with archeologists to invest practices in stabilizing and protecting those sites. And for our community, we offer a free access system for the community members to participate in those traditional subsistent activities, like hunting, gathering, fishing, and so forth," he explains, before sharing about an additional educational focus recently introduced.

"We also work very closely with the schools, so that we can integrate their Hawaiian immersion programs or their STEMS programs [Science Technology Engineering and Math]," an exciting and innovative education component which Haase says was added to the mission "as a result of the incredible demand we have from the education sector on the island to participate in, and integrate this into their system curriculum."

Apart from its pivotal role in providing donations and fiscal support to Molokai Land Trust—enabling these programs and the like to continue and grow—Chelsea Group also, according to Haase, has contributed to the cause in myriad other ways, including one specific upcoming Trust endeavor.

"One project upcoming on the near horizon is our new flagship headquarters and service learning center in Kualapuu, which is about a \$4 million project," says Haase, when asked what lies ahead for the Molokai Land Trust. "We're working ahead with dealing with the first major funders of the center, which is going to be a 10,000+ sq. ft. facility located in the old plantation town of Kualapuu, and it's located within one mile of at least 75% of our student body on the island, so this will offer new opportunities to expand our service learning and other programs—eventually after school programs, too—and then a location for native arts practitioners to be able to have a spot to present workshops and classes. It's also going to be a place for us to showcase some of the artifacts from our sites and have kind of an in-house reading library available on cultural and natural resources information regarding our island."

And that's not all, Haase reveals, adding that "On top of that, it's going to have the 8,500 sq. foot plant reduction facility, where students and community members will be able to work alongside us on producing the plant material that is necessary for our restoration work on our various land holdings." Here's where—according to Haase—Chelsea Group will prove vital.

“We’re looking at working with Chelsea Group and their contribution on this—on the engineering, LEED certification and the alternative energy, and those type of innovative approaches to construction ... they have a team of engineers, who are working on the various sustainability and efficiency components—we’re looking at alternative energy production systems, innovative energy saving components of construction, water catchment and reuse systems, as well as air-handling.”

Haase continues, not mincing words when it comes to his appreciation for the Chelsea Group’s and Benda’s coming alongside the Trust. “Those are the big contributions, as well as [the company’s] having made donations toward the capital program, which allows us working capital to keep a project moving forward until the other payments come in from the other grant sources, etc. so, understandably, the Chelsea Group contribution is just integral—for anyone who is familiar with business—for cash flow. It helps us have the capital to keep things rolling along while we are waiting to get paid from vendors.”

Benda himself is a resident of Molokai, and so sees both the need, and the benefit of the Trust. “Pat and I live on Molokai and we take our community duty very seriously – so when we prioritize our corporate giving, we weigh the needs of our community and find it is important to support projects here that offer a renewal of hope for our little island community to realize a brighter future. This project does exactly that,” Benda says.

Wrapping up the interview, Haase reiterates what a pleasure it has been to collaborate with Benda’s Chelsea Group and its staff ohana. “From everyone that I’ve met, working with the organization, I’ve always been impressed by the competency and professionalism from everybody involved. And I think that really goes to show what type of leadership—it’s a reflection of the leadership at the organization,” he shares. “I’ve just never had anything but the most positive interactions and results from all my activities with Chelsea Group.”

For more information on the Molokai Land Trust and how to donate visit:
<http://www.molokailandtrust.org/donate.php>

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ABOUT Chelsea Group

Chelsea Group is a Hawaii-based building science consulting firm specializing in preserving and enhancing the mechanical infrastructure in existing commercial office, institutional, retail, and industrial facilities. For more than 25 years, Chelsea's building scientists and engineers have solved problems and found opportunities that add asset value to these properties. The Chelsea team is widely recognized for its thought leadership in sustainable, high performance buildings.