

HPU's bid to block program rejected

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Hawaii Pacific University officials last night asked the state Department of Health to reconsider the Blaisdell Hotel on Fort Street Mall as the new site of a job-retraining program for people recovering from mental illness.

But, citing state and federal anti-discrimination laws protecting the disabled, Health Department officials said they will not budge on the site they have chosen.

"They are protected under the law, and this program should be allowed to function in this building," department spokesman Patrick Johnston said.

The Clubhouse program, which will serve about 100 people and roughly 50 at a given time, is to move into the first floor of the building as early as the end of this month. The program will teach work skills and coping methods to help people with mental illness re-enter mainstream society.

HPU officials have objected to placing the program in the midst of the university's downtown campus.

"We think the Clubhouse is a wonderful program, and it's doing very necessary work," said Helen Varner, vice president of university relations. "This site is a very, very poor choice."

She said there is a bar in the building and no windows where the Clubhouse will be located. Nor will there be su-

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pervision of its members after 4:30 p.m., she said.

And the mall, Varner said, is a "very high-stress, high-traffic area that's not appropriate for people who are vulnerable."

Other businesses in the area have also opposed locating the Clubhouse at that site, she said.

Health Department officials last night answered questions about the program at a Downtown Neighborhood Board meeting at the Pauahi Recreation Center that drew about 100 people.

Johnston, earlier in the day, said Clubhouse members adhere to a planned schedule and are required to take any required medication.

"These people are intent upon improving their lives, and this program is designed to help them do that," he said.

The program has operated with great success for 10 years on Kauai and three years on Oahu in Waipahu, Kaneohe, the Diamond Head area and Palama, Johnston said. The Blaisdell Hotel will consolidate the program sites.

At its Aug. 13 meeting, the Downtown Neighborhood Board asked the Health

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— PATRICK JOHNSTON
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SPOKESMAN

Department to form a task force with HPU, neighborhood board members, businesses and residents to discuss the Clubhouse. That appears to be going forward, according to board president Burton White.

"There's still a huge discrepancy between HPU and the Department of Health," White said. "What we are trying to do is mediate this."

Johnston said the department is willing to provide any information about the program that HPU or others want, but is not willing to discuss changing the location.

"I think what people need to do is just sit back and take the time to learn what the program is about," he said. "There's a stigma attached to people with mental illness."

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