



Scholarships Awarded to Micronesian Outer Island Students

(July 31, 2007, Columbia, South Carolina) The Habele Outer Island Education Fund announced today that it is awarding over \$3,500 in high school scholarships to students from a remote and underdeveloped Pacific Atoll in Micronesia.

Habele, a South Carolina based nonprofit, is comprised of former Peace Corps Volunteers and other education-minded Americans with an interest in Micronesia, a Federation of islands in the central Pacific formerly administered by the United States Department of the Interior.

The recipients are two girls aged 17 and 18 from the islands of Falalop and Asor on Ulithi Atoll in Yap State. They will be attending classes at the all-girls Bethania High School in the Republic of Palau.

One of the awards, the Oceanic Society Sea Turtle Scholarship, is being granted through the support of the Oceanic Society in recognition of the community's ongoing support for a local sea turtle research and conservation program. The Society is a US based non-profit marine conservation group involved in environmental expeditions and education in Micronesia and around the world. Like Habele, the Oceanic Society recognizes the unique difficulties faced by students in the Outer Islands.

Neil Mellen, Habele's founder explained,

"These isolated atolls in Micronesia face a gamut of social, political, and economic challenges. Their remoteness and limited natural resources leave them dependent on government foreign aid which encourages the expansion of an inefficient public-sector-based economy. 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 the United States.

"Expanding academic opportunity and promoting educational accomplishment is an essential first step in promoting individual, island, and national sovereignty. Through scholarships to private schools and material donations to public schools, Habele is working with the Outer Island Communities to meet this goal."

Mario Suulbech, a Habele volunteer who lives on the Island of Falalop, echoed Mellen's optimism.

"These girls are the future of our islands. Sadly, some people here are still skeptical about the value of education and the role of women in our changing traditions. These particular girls are working hard to prove them wrong, to build a brighter future for their families, and our island community."

The scholarship winners will travel to and from the school with money raised by their families, and have signed a strict performance contract that ties their scholarships to academic targets.

Habele consists of donors and volunteers from throughout the United States and the Pacific. The Fund has no paid employees and is still seeking support for its ongoing public school book drives. Visit www.habele.org to learn more.

###