



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Debra Gochros
- Jacqueline Levine
- Heather Kihara

Debra Gochros

Debra was raised in Colorado with a love of animals since early childhood, becoming a self proclaimed animal rehabilitator at age 12. Raising such creatures as baby ground squirrels, baby birds, snakes, and lizards with her ever loving dog Spot by her side, she was able to learn more about the world of animals through actual experiences. As time went on, Debra volunteered with exotic animals being trained for motion pictures. This gave her some unique experiences with lion cubs, black bear cubs, and even an introduction to wolves. Next came her favorite time of all, rehabilitating and researching hawks, owls, and eagles in southeastern Colorado.

In 1980, Debra relocated to Kaua'i and started a new life. She found herself involved with the visitor industry in a variety of roles but switched positions when offered an opportunity to work with parrots in a wildlife program at a resort on Kaua'i. In 1992 she relocated to O'ahu to attend University of Hawai'i at Manoa. She graduated with a degree in Secondary Education with a focus in Science while working full time as a reptile keeper at the Honolulu Zoo.

Moving back to Kaua'i, she started a teaching career as a middle school Science teacher. Debra loved turning on middle school students to Science and has heard from former students that she motivated them to focus on a career in science in college. She taught in several public schools, and a Hawaiian Immersion school, learning Hawaiian (although she was able to teach in English). Debra involved the students in conservation projects while teaching them the importance of protecting native plants and animals. She focused on turning students into science nerds by getting them involved in such things as butterfly houses, shearwater projects and garden clubs. Extracurricular activities included being chosen as one of 25 teachers across the nation to attend a NASA supported project of developing lesson plans with JPL and CalTech. In 2005, in collaboration with the University of Alaska, Debra assisted with writing a curriculum comparing continental and oceanic volcanoes.

In 2003 Debra joined Kaua'i Search and Rescue and became a K9 handler with her dog Astro, a wilderness search dog. They helped in searches with missing hikers, families lost in a flood, lost Alzheimers patients, and others in need of assistance. Debra also became a HAM radio operator and continues today assisting with communication across Hawai'i.

In December 2020, Debra started training her dogs Luna and Xena to become conservation K9s. As volunteers with the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Luna and



Xena detect native wetland birds affected by avian botulism. Debra and her dogs continue today going out to Hanalei Wildlife Refuge once to twice a week to survey for sick birds and retrieve the carcasses of those affected by botulism. In 2022 Luna and Xena were awarded 100 hour volunteer pins from FWS for their dedicated service, and Debra received the volunteer of the year award.

Currently Debra volunteers for a variety of groups: K9 handler for FWS, Wildlife interpretation at the Kilauea Point for FWS, Albatross in the Schools program for FWS, VP for the Friends of Kaua'i Wildlife Refuges non-profit, Communications for Kaua'i Search and Rescue, and now a board member of Conservation Dogs of Hawai'i. Debra also received the 2022 Mea Ho'omana'o award from the Kaua'i Chamber of Commerce for volunteering service.

Jacqueline Levine

Jackie was born and raised in Los Angeles, California, attended UCLA where she was an All-American swimmer, graduating with a major in geology with an emphasis in business.

Jackie then moved to the Utah/Idaho area becoming a successful entrepreneur creating three museum exhibits focusing on interactive education for children in paleontology and geology. Jackie developed her own fossil kits that were sold in 35 museums in the US and Canada and supplied museums globally with fossil, rocks, minerals. During this time she also wrote a children's book based on her experience of excavating fossils with her children and father. *The Adventures with professor Dig It! Digging With The Dinosaurs.*

Decades later, Jackie was approached to represent Lambertz, a 370 year German Cookie Company, as their Vice President of USA division concentrating on Specialty Markets. During her time with Lambertz, the USA division grew to over 300 million in annual sales; including private label accounts with Costco, Sams Club and Walgreens.

After raising her two children, Alex and Dana in Utah and Idaho, Jackie and her husband Maury migrated to the North Shore of Oahu to focus on their love of the ocean. They have been North Shore residents for 10 years.

Jackie has been involved in numerous philanthropic endeavors including major fundraising for International NGO Helpline; Drowning Prevention Program teaching life saving swim skills to Cambodian children. She also served on the Board of Directors for the St. Michaels Church on the North Shore and volunteers at the Medical Reserve Corp for Hawaii State Health Department.

Jackie's love for animals and her beloved labradoodle Hank led her to conservation nose work. Jackie and her dog Hank enjoy hiking and finding "devil weed." In Utah this summer they worked on finding elk and deer antlers and took a class in rattle snake detection.



In addition to swimming and surfing, Jackie is an accomplished distance runner and triathlete. She has completed over 30 marathons, 20 ultramarathons, and several Ironman Triathlons.

Heather Kihara DVM

Born and raised on the island of Oahu, Heather is blessed to be able to continue her career and follow her passions here in the islands. From a young age, everyone knew that she would become a veterinarian. She has always adopted and cared for animals and many locals remember her goat out in the lawn, and her dogs in parades as hula halau mascots. She enjoyed a great public school education at Leilehua High School and had wonderful teachers who fostered her love for agriculture and science. With those combined interests, veterinary medicine was a natural career choice. She received a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree at Colorado State University. After graduating, she returned home to Hawaii to join a very large and busy veterinary emergency hospital. From there, she has practiced at several hospitals until joining Hill's Pet Nutrition which has provided an amazing opportunity to visit almost every clinic in the state and become a more diverse part of the vet community. These connections have allowed Heather to become the current president of the Honolulu Veterinary Society and current president elect of the Hawaii Veterinary Medical Association.

At first Heather's involvement with CDH was to advise on first aid and safety protocols with the working dog teams. That changed dramatically when a highly energetic 8 month old terrier found her way to Heather's home! This dog is something else and we quickly realized she not only needed an enormous amount of basic obedience and behavior modification but potentially a job! Bear and Heather enjoyed their time at first just learning scent detection work (boxes will never be the same again) and then when introduced to the scent of rodents... Bear's inner terror (...oops I mean terrier) found its true calling!

While Heather and Bear fully enjoy being able to gather with friends, dance hula (Bear does go to class), and travel (Bear has also gone to the mainland), they do miss the days of the pandemic in which they could focus on dog training and gardening in order to social distance. Heather also likes to occasionally horseback ride and latin dance which she can not do with Bear in tow. Heather and Bear also share their household with Nacho, Taco, Frijole, Sopapilla, and Spaz, who are all considered Heather's fur-children but would rather spend their time on the couch rather than participate in CDH.



SCIENCE ADVISORS

Sheila Conant

Sheila's career in ecology and conservation in Hawai'i has spanned over 50 years. At the University of Hawai'i Mānoa, she served as the Chair of Zoology Department from 2001 to 2007, and as the Chair of the Ecology, Evolution and Conservation Biology (EECB) graduate specialization program from 1999 to 2001. As a researcher, she focused on Hawaiian birds, and has an extensive list of publications on their ecology, evolution, conservation and management. Sheila is also a Professor Emerita of UH, and her list of former graduate students includes many who are currently active and influential in the conservation of Hawai'i's wildlife.

In addition to her impressive academic career, Sheila is a long-time dog enthusiast. In the early 2000s when the use of conservation dogs was unheard of in Hawai'i, Sheila trained her Border Collies to do seabird detection, and later went on to conduct a few field surveys with them. Sheila has also participated in numerous dog sports including obedience, tracking, agility (with four dogs!), nose work, herding, and conformation. She has also served as a judge for tracking and obedience trials.

Julie Rivers

Julie's experience in animal behavior and conservation spans more than 30 years. She has a BS in Biology with a focus on animal behavior. During her field research years, Julie studied seabirds, arctic wildlife from an oil drill platform, marine mammal behavior, distribution and acoustics in several ocean basins, and briefly worked with Koko the gorilla. Julie also worked for the state of Hawai'i, maintaining O'ahu's hiking trails and working to combat invasive species. For the last 20 years, Julie has worked as biologist with the federal government, overseeing programs that focus on the protection of vulnerable marine and terrestrial species, and regulatory compliance.

Julie's interest in scent detection started in 2017 when one of her Labrador Retrievers began to lose her eyesight and they began nose work classes. Both of her dogs enjoyed scent detection as a hobby from then on, turning their skills to amateur truffle hunting from 2018–2020 when they moved to Italy. When Julie returned to O'ahu in 2020, she and her dog Ula joined CDH as a volunteer scent detection team. They are avid hikers and have been actively searching for devil weed on Oahu for the past two years, and look forward to expanding into other projects with CDH.



OFFICERS

- Lisa Kamae, President
- Roberta Bitzer, Vice President
- Julie Rivers, Secretary
- Kyoko Johnson, Treasurer

Lisa Kamae – President, Dog Handler

Lisa was born and raised in Hawaii and graduated from Kamehameha Schools. She received a BBA in Finance from UH Manoa and an MS in Software Engineering from the University of California at Fullerton. During the day, she works in the IT department at Pearl Harbor, and at night she turns into a “Crazy Dog Lady.”

Learning about K9 agility, herding, chicken training, scent work, canine body language, animal communication, and K9 Search and Rescue, culminated in her participation in Conservation Dogs of Hawaii. She is very passionate about using Hawaii resources to solve Hawaii problems – she believes that CDH is a perfect solution in using local resources including dogs, personnel and volunteers, to help save Hawaii’s resources.

Roberta Bitzer – Vice President, Dog Handler, K9 Trainer/Instructor

Roberta was born and raised in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 2006, she visited New Jersey as part of an exchange program for her master’s degree in environmental sciences. She met her future husband Jason Bitzer there as they both share a love of the ocean and bodyboarding. They eventually moved to Hawaii together. Roberta is a 3x US national bodyboarding champion, and has also finished in the top 10 in the world.

Roberta has been a dog handler and trainer with CDH since 2019. She and her Belgian Malinois Qana are founding members of CDH’s invasive species detection program and also one of the devil weed detection teams. Outside of CDH, Roberta is the K9 team lead at the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle Response Team, a collaborative partnership with Hawaii conservation organizations that aims to eradicate the invasive insect from Hawaii. As part of her position, Roberta supports the K9 teams with planning, record/data keeping, developing SOPs, training and surveying.

In addition to her K9 background, Roberta has a bachelors degree in biology and a masters in environmental sciences, and has over a decade of experience as an environmental consultant on the island of Oahu.

The rare opportunity of combining her love for dogs and the environment/conservation was what drew Roberta to CDH. Says Roberta: “CDH has taken the lead to establish a solid canine detection program in Hawaii to protect its



fragile resources and it is such a privilege to be involved. I can't think of a better way to give back to the islands that I now call home!"

Roberta and her husband live on the North Shore of Oahu with their two young children, Numa and James, and their dog Qana.

Kyoko Johnson – Treasurer, Acting Secretary, Founder, K9 Trainer/Instructor

Kyoko was born and raised in Tokyo, Japan, where she attended Seisen International School and the American School in Japan. College studies brought her to New York City, where she majored in photography at Parsons School of Design, after which she transitioned to a computer science career. After discovering surfing, she moved to San Diego and then eventually to Hawaii, where she again switched careers. Her love of dogs came from volunteering for various dog rescue organizations and shelters on the island. Kyoko started training dogs and their people in 2008.

Her passion for scent detection began with a pet dog named Luka that didn't like normal dog activities such as fetch, swimming and playing with other dogs, but absolutely loved and gained confidence through "nose work." Since then, Kyoko has trained numerous pet dogs and handlers in scent detection, for both sport and conservation work.

Kyoko began her career as an ecological scent detection dog trainer and handler in 2012 through an Oahu wind farm's habitat conservation program, which utilized canines to locate endangered seabird and bat fatalities to measure environmental impact. She went on to train and handle dogs for various conservation projects including: a study at Hanalei National Wildlife Refuge which measured the efficacy of utilizing detection dogs to lower avian botulism-related mortality in koloa maoli, an endangered Hawaiian duck; and a project that utilized detector dogs to monitor the eradication effort of invasive yellow crazy ants, a species that caused great harm to seabirds at Johnston Atoll National Wildlife Refuge.

Kyoko initially founded the non-profit organization Parts Per Trillion Foundation in 2016 to pursue medical detection dog studies. She then registered the trade name Conservation Dogs of Hawaii in 2019 so that the organization may support wildlife conservation. Through CDH, Kyoko hopes to facilitate the wider use of conservation dogs in the Hawaiian islands to protect its precious resources.