

Expansion in plans for North Shore school

By Caryn Kunz
Advertiser Staff Writer

What happens when a retired police officer becomes principal of a small Christian school?

"We have a very safe school," jokes Bob Prasser, former assistant chief of police and current administrator at Sunset Beach Christian School on O'ahu's North Shore.

Prasser, who retired in December after a 31-year career at the Honolulu Police Department, didn't expect to stay in Hawai'i after retiring. "I always felt that I would go on some kind of ministry when I left the department ... maybe China, or help plant a church," he said.

Instead, he got a call from the school — where his wife and later his children were students — asking him to teach science.

Now he's in charge. "I would have been really happy just (teaching) because I really enjoy working with the kids," he said. "But it seemed like there was a greater need here to organize the school and kind of reconstructing for the future."

Prasser has big plans. Starting next school year, he hopes to expand the private 64-student K-8 school by launching a high school curriculum. It would start with the ninth grade, with another grade following yearly until the school reaches its goal of K-12 enrollment.

Finding money to fund the expansion, which includes hiring more teachers and the possible construction of a new classroom building, will depend on private donations.

Sunset Beach Christian's small campus on Kamehameha Highway, just down the road from popular Pupukea snorkeling spot Shark's Cove, includes three classroom and office buildings, a chapel and several multi-purpose buildings. A grassy field and basketball court that students enjoy during recess are hidden from the bustle of the highway, giving the campus a safe, peaceful feel. No outside noise disturbs the classes in session, which are housed in two long, single-story buildings beyond the field on a low hill.



Daniel Williams, Melia Greene-Duate, Bryce Dvorak, Kelii Keaulana, Makana Puhipau and Dresden Moreland, left to right, work on a counting lesson they will present to their parents later in the day at Sunset Beach Christian School.

AT A GLANCE ...

Where: 59-578 Kamehameha Highway, near Pupukea Beach Park on the North Shore

Phone: (808) 638-8274

Web address: www.sbcshome.com

Principal: Bob Prasser, first year.

School colors: Unofficially, green and white.

History: Started in 1953 as a mission school. Funded by private donations and grants from various Christian congregations.

Computers: Computer lab with wireless Internet.

Enrollment: 64 students with a capacity of 120.

Since its founding in 1953, Sunset Beach Christian has operated on money donated by Christian congregations, many of them on the Mainland. Many of the parents, and some of the grandparents, of children now enrolled are alumni.

Prasser said local families will budget for the tuition because "they want the Christian environment, they want strong academics, small class size and individual attention."

Parents are key to the school's success, he said, volunteering for the annual Lei Day, Beach Day and Sports Day events. Community members Don and Corrine Germaine even offer the use of their catamarans and Hawai'i Shark Tours business to supplement the students' science curriculum.

Each year, the seventh- and eighth-graders have the opportunity to meet sharks face to face — protected by a diving cage barrier, of course. Beforehand, special lectures and instruction teach the students about marine ecology, shark biology and safety.

This year, the school plans to expand marine science outings to include whale watching in January and scuba diving/snorkeling in spring.

Each week, a different class is asked to lead the school's weekly chapel session, which gives students the opportunity to practice performance and public-speaking skills through dramas, skits and plays.

Bible study courses and active application in secular curriculum are taught with a goal to help students form their own conclusions about the way the world works. "I want them to think for themselves, to be able to work through arguments and fashion those arguments," Prasser said.

- What are you most proud of? Being able to provide a quality, affordable education to children on the North Shore, Prasser said. SBCS "continues to provide a Christian education not only for those who can afford it, but also those who can't," he said. A significant part of the school's operating budget and tuition assistance comes from private donations.

- Best-kept secret: SBCS has one of the lowest tuitions on the island for a private school: \$3,900 per year. "We try to low-ball the tuition so that we can get even the 'normal' families to be able to afford it," Prasser said.

- Everybody at our school knows: Ellie Otake, or "Ms. O," who has worked at SBCS in various capacities almost since the school's inception five decades ago. She's been the principal off and on, but currently serves as a fifth-grade teacher.

- Our biggest challenge: "Meeting the future needs of the community," said Prasser, who believes that expansion of SBCS to a high school is important toward meeting the need for a private high school on the North Shore.

- What we need: Sponsors to help with remodeling existing buildings and construction of a new classroom building. "It's time to start either tearing down or remodeling," Prasser said.

- Special events: Lei Day, Beach Day, Sports Day and the annual Christmas program.