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Hawaii News | Incidental Lives

Horizons expanded in youth for islander living in Mideast

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COURTESY RICHARD GIMA

Richard Gima:

The Dubai, United Arab Emirates, resident grew up on Lanai but learned about the world when he was in high school

For more than 50 years, the nonprofit Pacific and Asian Affairs Council has provided international affairs instruction to public high school students. Today we conclude our monthlong look at people whose lives were meaningfully touched by their participation in PAAC.

As a child, Richard Gima took special pleasure in family vacations to the mainland and neighbor islands, trips that seemed a special luxury to many of Gima's friends on Lanai.

"Growing up, I always had a passion to travel and learn about new cultures," said Gima, 24. "From a young age I constantly looked through books and magazines about different cultures and essentially created my own bucket list."

Gima's interests were strongly influenced by his mixed heritage. His father, a social worker, is Japanese and Okinawan. His mother, a paralegal, is British, Mexican and Spanish, and can trace her family roots to one of the founding families of what is now Los Angeles.

In his sophomore year of high school, Gima was accepted to a summer study tour of China and Taiwan through the Pacific and Asian Affairs Council. The trip was full of unique, meaningful encounters, including visits to a rural women's school outside Beijing (for which he had personally raised \$1,200 in donations) and a Buddhist monastery in southern Taiwan.

"Participating on the summer study tour taught me that there's much more out in the world: different religions, ethnic groups, economic/social classes and a different way of life that is much different than Hawaii," Gima said.

Upon his return, Gima started the PAAC Club at Lanai High School in an effort to give his fellow students similar opportunities.

He spent his senior year participating in a U.S. State Department Youth Exchange and Study Program in Muscat, Oman. After high school he attended Richmond, the American International University in London; the American University in Cairo, where he was witness to the Arab Spring of 2011; and Mahidol University International College in Bangkok. He completed his education at the Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in 2014.

Gima remains in Dubai, where he works for a luxury hotel company.

"There is a difference between your dreams and your reality," Gima said. "My dreams growing up were to travel the world, see places that not many people in the U.S., more so in Hawaii, get a chance to see in their lifetime. PAAC was the foundation for changing my perception of the world, to see that there is much more to be discovered."

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