

The Maui News

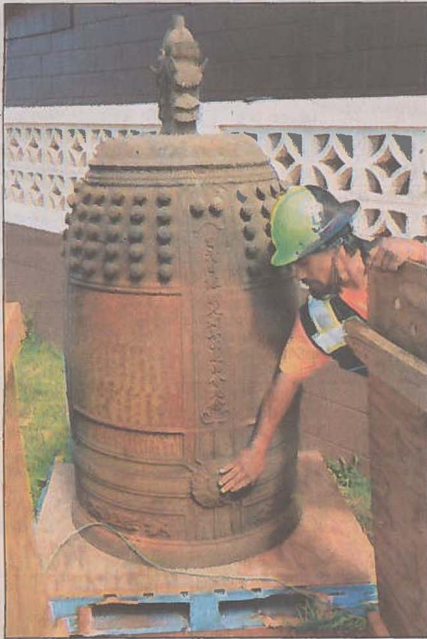
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Joshua Tagalog shows where the three-ton bronze bell is designed to be struck by its gong hammer Wednesday. The bell was scheduled to be rehung in the tower Friday.



The Maui News
MATTHEW
THAYER
photo

Historic Paia bell tower coming back to life

Structure bears special message for latest generation of artisans

By **MATTHEW THAYER**
Staff Writer

Tucked out of sight for more than a century, waiting for just the right craftsman to find it, a calling card waited inside the bell tower of the Mantokuji Soto Mission of Paia.

Pro Bilt Construction Co. Inc. owner Aldon Mochida found the hidden message in the tower's attic after historical preservation efforts began in 2019. The 1-foot-wide, 4-foot-long piece of Douglas fir covered with Japanese calligraphy bears the names of the artisans who built the structure around 1912.

If the list was a boast or cry for recognition, it would have been placed where people could see it. Hidden away as it was, it seems quite possible the inch-thick slab was left as a message for the future artisans who would someday be called on to make repairs.

"We built it, now it is your turn."

For the past three years, the refurbishing team has been walking in the footsteps of the original builders. As Pro Bilt carpenters disassembled dovetails and mortise and tenon joints that held the teak structure together, they marveled at the hand-tooled craftsmanship. Architect Lorraine Minatoishi supervised the peeling away of many layers of paint to reach a base coat and determine the original colors. On Friday,

a photographer was enlisted to take photos of the outer surfaces of the tower's three-ton bronze bell so the inscriptions and designs can be researched and translated.

"It's unreal how they put this together," said Pro Bilt foreman Joshua Tagalog Wednesday. "I give them respect. Since it is a historical landmark, we had to keep everything authentic."

"It's amazing that these guys did the carvings and the dowels with just hand tools," Mochida said. "It's amazing how they did it."

The tower is 12 feet by 12-feet at its base. It rises 22 feet, 3 inches to the heavy metal ball on its pitched roof.

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ARIES

Jade T. Monden, 56

Jade T. Mondeh, 56, of Kula, Maui passed away peacefully in her wife's arms on November 4, 2021.

Jade was an amazing woman with a wide array of knowledge and interests. She was a life-long learner starting with her Bachelor's in Art Education from UH Manoa, and then going on to Art school in Seattle and finally to California to obtain her Massage Certification years later. She was an avid Tai Chi, Kung Fu, and Chi Kung practitioner for well over 20 years. When Jade's mother began needing more help, she felt called to return home to Maui to care for her parents in their later years. It was this combined experience and her incredibly generous heart and compassionate spirit that made her such a support for everyone who knew her. Jade went on to work at her dream job as a Medical Case Manager with Maui AIDS Foundation, where she had long ago been a dedicated volunteer. This is where her selflessness, dedication, and passion really shined with all those she worked with. Jade had the biggest heart and was always thinking of others and doing random acts of kindness to make their day a little brighter. Jade was also an incredibly talented artist who enjoyed painting with oils and acrylics, and creating digital media fine art.

Jade is predeceased by her parents, Robert and Mary Monden. She is survived by her wife, Audrey Malasnik, sister, Linda Monden (Scott Sakakihara), brother, Brian (Mia) Char, and niece, Sarah Sakakihara.

Her family would like to express their deepest gratitude to all of those who helped care for and support her during this past year. Jade was beyond blessed to have incredible care and compassion from the Oncolo-

Bell

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Tagalog said he found a few handmade nails in the roof, but most of the structure was held together by precisely cut joints and wooden dowels. Termites and rot took their toll, but the tower's pillars and beams were salvageable.

"They (termites) ate all the other stuff that was there, but the teak was pretty much solid," Tagalog said.

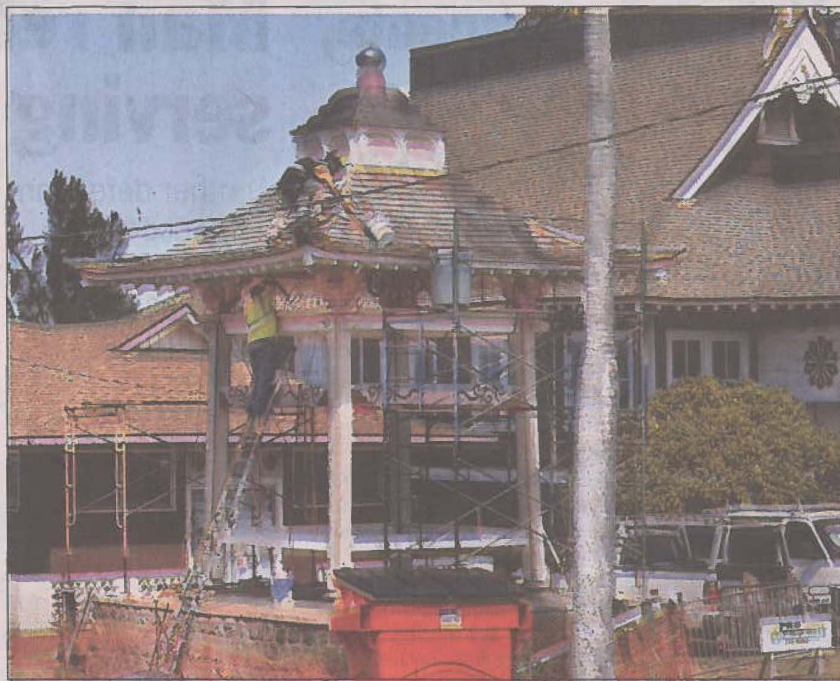
Mochida said high-strength structural epoxy was used to repair rot and termite damage in the teak. Another big part of the job was strengthening the stone foundation with concrete tie beams and bringing the structure up to more current structural codes. The tower is now anchored to its base with galvanized pipe anchors.

The weight of three-ton bell is the key that locks all those tricky joints, Tagalog says.

"The bell holds everything together," he said. He added that the highly decorated bell with 6-inch-thick sides is designed to create a tone that carries long distances.

Eric Moto, who serves as president of the Mantokuji Soto Mission of Paia's Administrative Board, said the bell was cast in Japan. It was brought to Maui in 1912 and placed in the bell tower in 1914. For reference, at 6,000 pounds, the bell weighs more than a base model 2022 Ford F-250 pickup truck.

The log that served as the bell's gong hammer was salvaged and repaired. Mochida said it is being outfitted with new manila rope and copper straps and will be ready to sound the bell at the blessing ceremony set for Jan. 9.



The Maui News / MATTHEW THAYER photo

Pro Bilt Construction Co. Inc. foreman Joshua Tagalog (on roof) and laborer Kalani Aki work on the Mantokuji Soto Mission of Paia's bell tower Wednesday as historical preservation efforts near an end.

Mochida said architect Minatoishi's sleuthing determined the base paints to be a mix of pink, green, red, beige and off-whites. He gave credit to artist Lanakila Makua of Lanakila Creations for her work in painting life back into the tower's icons and carvings.

Pro Bilt laborer Kalani Aki said the community's affection for the tower was obvious when the crew was using a crane to raise the roof onto the pillars. He said so many people stopped to watch, he had to put yellow tape around the site to keep them away from the crane.

"They were cheering us," Aki said.

Moto said the \$200,000 proj-

ect has been funded primarily through donations from members and friends of the mission, as well as grants. He said it was supposed to be a much shorter process, but ended up taking three years due to slowdowns caused by the pandemic, architectural changes and delays in some materials. It is expected to be finished early next month.

The mission sandwiched between the ocean and Hana Highway held its last bon dance in 2019. Moto said the next obon festival is scheduled for next summer. If Mochida has his way, somewhere on display that weekend will be the calling card left by the tower's original builders. He said he has cleaned

the board and will suggest it is hung inside the mission where people can view it.

Mochida said he plans to tuck a new calling card inside the tower's roof. It may take another 100 years, but when the next crew of craftsmen and women pry open the timbers, they will find a list of all the people who took part in preserving the tower this time around.

Moto says the credit is deserved.

"We're just grateful to Aldon and Lorraine and all the people who donated to this project," Moto said. "We're grateful to everyone."

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