



Left: Advanced apprentice weaver Banitha Jesse (center) teaches Neti Leon (left) and Newij Latdrik on the first day of class at Tinak, Arno. Right: apprentice Patricia Kaneko learns from expert weaver Ashken Binat in the house donated to the program by a local alab. Above photos by Tamara Greenstone Alefaio. Below: Participants and friends of the Mejit program with expert weaver Airine Jieta (at the back, second from left), and acting Mayor Duston Joel (holding mat, right) and wife Emla next to him. Photo by Susan Jieta.



Weavers teach on home atolls

The apprentice weaving program implemented by University of the South Pacific has been further extended to include Namdrik, Mejit, Tinak on Arno, and Ebeye, with three of these programs having started in recent weeks.

The first three jaki-ed (clothing mat) weaving apprenticeship programs were held in 2008 at the National Vocational Training Institute, from October 2011 to May 2012 in Majuro, and from April to May in 2012 in Ailinglaplap.

All were a huge success, which was visible to everyone who attended the 2012 annual jaki-ed auction at the Marshall Islands Resort in September. "The Ailinglaplap program was a pilot project and its success made it obvious that we should continue to extend the program to other outer islands," USP's director of Continuing and Community

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— Tamara Greenstone Alefaio



Education Tamara Greenstone Alefaio said.

The expert weavers' home islands are a key to the choice of locations, but enthusiasm shown by island representatives also played

a part, Tamara said. "All of the senators and mayors have been very supportive for all four programs. For example, I received an email from Namdrik Senator Matlan Zackhras at the time that the program was being run on Ailinglaplap: 'Great article on the MIJ's last edition. Any way of steering the program to Namdrik atoll where mats, hats, table mats, etc. is done? We would like to have a formal training with the ladies of your program to see how we can perfect the craft ... What do we need to do to make this happen?'"

Two of the four new programs began in early November, with Susan Jieta working with expert weaver Airine Jiet on Mejit, while Ashken Binat is running a program on her home island of Tinak on Arno.

"Ashken, myself and two

apprentice graduates, Banitha Jesse and Betty Lobwij, went over on a boat last weekend.

"It was wonderful having Banitha and Betty there and to watch them passing on their knowledge to the young ladies of Arno."

The weavers were given the use of a house on Tinak by Alab Lajouj. "A relative of his would come and watch the training and even took part," Tamara said. "One of the local councilmen, Anto Jibae, was especially welcoming and took a great interest in it. He stopped by on many occasions to see the progress."

The jaki-ed revival weaving program is funded by the National Training Council. "Each program includes an expert weaver, 10 apprentices and one 'lead trainer,' who is chosen from the community because of her existing skills."

Expert weaver Patsy Hermon will teach the Namdrik program. "She took off for Namdrik Tuesday morning on AMI," Tamara said. "She's very excited to be going back home to do this." The Ebeye program will be held in January and run by an expert weaver from Ujae.

As well as keeping the art of jaki-ed alive, an important aspect of the weaving program is the money participants earn from the sale of the mats.

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"President Loek took a jaki-ed over to Taiwan recently to present to the

President at his inauguration.

"MIVA (Marshall Islands Visitors Authority) recently bought two mats. One is for the airport, while the other mat pops up everywhere. It was hung up at the recent tourism meeting."

It's hard to evaluate the worth of a mat related to the hours it took to make. "It depends on so many things, such as its fineness or size," Tamara said. "And it may take one weaver three months to make a mat, while some of our ladies make them in just a few weeks."

"The good thing that's happening with the prices is that, excluding those sold in the annual auction, the weavers are setting the cost themselves. We also now take a small percentage of the earnings and put this back into the program to buy, say, materials."

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