

Ebeye ladies learn fine weaving

They're creating them on Ailinglaplap, Majuro and Mejit. Namdrik and Arno, too. And, starting in early January, they began to make them on Kwajalein.

That's six atolls that simultaneously have small groups of young women learning how to make the traditional Marshallese jaki ed (finely woven clothing mats).

The program, which is implemented by University of the South Pacific and funded by the National Training Council, had its humble beginnings at the National Vocational Training Institute in 2007. That is when expert weavers Patsy Harmon and Susan Jieta taught a pilot program at NVTI, giving students insight the ancient skill they learnt as children.

Patsy is today the lead instructor for a weaving apprenticeship program on her home island of Namdrik.

Meanwhile, on Ebeye, expert weaver Tobep Bokin from Ujae Atoll has taken on the same role and is passing on her skills to 10 women aged between 18 and 22 in a four-month program.

"Tobep was invited to take on the role by the jaki ed program's patron, Iroij Mike Kabua," USP's Coordinator of Continuing and Community Education Tamara Greenstone Alefaio said. "Her



Ujae's Tobep Bokin passes on her jaki ed skills

husband is Thomas, a master canoe builder and navigator and he also came to Ebeye for the program. Tobep is being assisted for the first month by weaver Susan Jieta, who has been involved in the jaki ed program since its early days."

Susan and Tamara flew to Ebeye for the program's opening

ceremony, which was held at Mon Mike, the Iroij and Senator's "entertainment center."

"It's a wonderful location for the program," Tamara said. "It's an indoor-outdoor space with great facilities."

In contrast to the more remote atolls, where the new apprentices

already had a grasp of weaving, the women trainees on Ebeye are new to weaving. The women meet each weekday and work on their mats from 10am to 3pm. "The program provides all the materials, while Mike is generously providing the space."

During the opening ceremony,

Expert weaver Tobep Bokin shows three young Ebeye ladies the basics of beginning a jaki ed. The apprentices are, from left, Alicia Bolken, Marlene Mawilong, and Rise Wajar. Inset, USP's Tamara Greenstone Alefaio with Iroij Mike Kabua and expert weaver Susan Jieta.

which was emceed by Alab Jesie Riketa and included remarks by Mayor Johnny Lemari, Mike spoke of the importance of passing on this intricate skill. "The Iroij made a point of explaining that he's extremely supportive of this project, in particular because the skill needs to be shared by everyone. In the old days, it was only certain people who were allowed to learn this art, but now he believes it's no longer just for a few people to know."

National Training Council's Harden Lelet also spoke at the ceremony, while its Director, Allison Nashion, came to see the program in action during the first week. "It was just perfect that he was able to come and witness the work the women were doing and see the energy involved as NTC has been a strong financial supporter of the program."



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