



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **GIRL SCOUTS OF HAWAI'I ANNOUNCES 2023 WOMEN OF DISTINCTION**

*Community Leaders to be Honored at Annual Fundraising Event*

HONOLULU (January 4, 2023) – Each year, Girl Scouts of Hawai'i recognizes a few of Hawai'i's most distinguished local leaders through its annual Women of Distinction event. This year, the Girl Scouts of Hawai'i will be honoring three prominent female leaders within our community – Diane S.L. Paloma, Meli James and Suzanne Puanani Vares-Lum – for their contributions to help create a better future. The three will be honored at the 2023 Women of Distinction Dinner on Friday, March 3, 2023.

"We are incredibly excited to honor and celebrate these three exemplary leaders, whose impact has been felt by so many—including all of our girls," said Shari Chang, CEO of Girl Scouts of Hawai'i. "Through their hard work and dedication to improving our communities, they've demonstrated that girls can achieve anything they set their minds to. Each one of our honorees has risen to the top of their respective industry, serving as inspiration to us all."

**Diane S.L. Paloma** is the president and CEO of Hawaii Dental Service, the leading provider of dental benefits plans in Hawaii with more than 600,000 members throughout Hawai'i, Guam and Saipan. Prior to joining HDS, she has held notable positions at the King Lunalilo Trust and Home, The Queen's Health System, the John A. Burns School of Medicine and HMSA. Outside of work, she volunteers for a number of organizations including Child & Family Service, the Hawaii Business Roundtable, Asian Pacific Islander Health Forum, Partners in Development Foundation, among others. Paloma graduated from Kamehameha Schools and the University of California, Los Angeles, where she received her Bachelor of Science in Psychological Science. Following her time at UCLA, she received a Master of Business Administration from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and a Doctorate in Healthcare Administration from Capella University.

**Meli James** is the co-founder of Mana Up, a Hawai'i-based product accelerator and venture fund building the state's next generation of consumer brands. She is also the president of the Hawaii Venture Capital Association. Born and raised in Honolulu, James lived in Silicon Valley for more than 10 years where she co-founded numerous startups including Nirvino – a #1 ranked wine app and Apple Platform Top 100 App, during its time. She has been recognized by Entrepreneur Magazine as one of five Women to Watch and as one of eight Women Leaders Who Are Disrupting Entrepreneurship. She serves on the board of UHA Health Insurance, Board of Regents for Chaminade University, and is a 2020 Omidyar Fellow. James is a graduate of Punahou School and Cornell University.

**Suzanne (Suzy) Puanani Vares-Lum** has served as the President of the East-West Center since January 2022. Born and raised in Hawai'i, with a mother from Japan and father from Maui, she is the first woman and Native Hawaiian president since the Center's opening in 1960. Vares-Lum's executive leadership experience spans several decades, culminating in five years advising the most senior officials at US Indo-Pacific Command, where she cultivated vital relationships with nations throughout the Indo-Pacific region. As a retired Major General with 34 years of service, Vares-Lum held roles addressing national security challenges in the region.

The 2023 Women of Distinction Dinner will feature a silent auction, gourmet meal, and other exciting activities, with scouts leading the event. All proceeds from the event will remain with Girl



Scouts of Hawai'i and will be used to support Girl Scout initiatives designed to help girls discover their potential and better serve their communities.

The public is invited to help celebrate this year's Women of Distinction at this special event, which will take place on Friday, March 3, 2023. For more information, to purchase tickets, or to donate, please visit [gshawaii.org/wod2023](http://gshawaii.org/wod2023).

**About Girl Scouts of Hawai'i**

Supporting over 5,000 girl and adult members statewide, Girl Scouts of Hawai'i (GSH) builds girls of courage, confidence, and character to make the world a better place. GSH's headquarters is located on the island of O'ahu, with three neighbor island service centers on the islands of Hawai'i, Kaua'i and Maui. GSH is chartered by the national office, Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) and is responsible for the leadership, administration and supervision of Girl Scout programs in the state of Hawai'i. For more information about GSH, visit [www.gshawaii.org](http://www.gshawaii.org) or call (808) 595-8400.

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