

# STUDENTS REACH FOR THE STARS

## ‘I can do it!’

### Internship helps Lahaina resident realize her dreams

By **CLAUDINE SAN NICOLAS**  
Staff Writer

KIHEI — Surrounded by scientists participating in an international conference, Maui Community College student Victoria Sensano recalled a childhood dream of becoming an astronomer one day.

“I always knew I wanted to do something in science,” the 25-year-old Lahaina resident said Tuesday.

But it wasn’t until this summer that Sensano started to realize her dream could become a reality as she completed the first year of studies for an associate’s degree in electronics and computer engineering at Maui Community College.

She grew more confident after completing the Akamai Internship Program, a project sponsored by the Center for Adaptive Options, the Maui Economic Development Board, Maui Community College and Air Force Maui Optical and Supercomputing, better known as AMOS.

Sensano was one of three students who provided a PowerPoint presentation on her internship project Tuesday afternoon during an AMOS Technical Conference held this week at the Grand Wailea Resort Hotel & Spa.

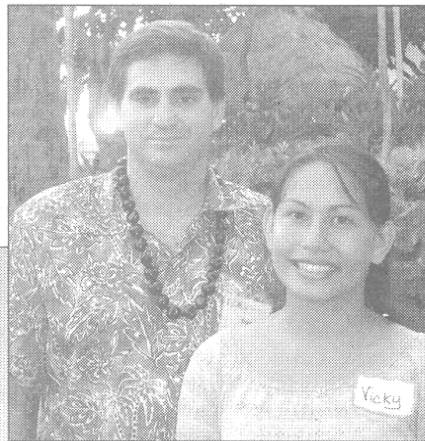
“This internship really helped me to see, ‘Hey, I can do it.’”

What she did is develop a computer program that assesses the quality of satellite images used by scientists at the Maui Scientific Research Center. Sensano ended the project at the technical conference with her presentation on “Computation of Statistical Information in a Parallel Environment.”

A Lahainaluna High School graduate, Sensano enrolled at Portland Community College following high school and earned a certificate of achievement and associate’s degree in computer software engineering.

She became homesick and gave up further studies in Portland to return to Maui. Once here, she took up a job as a hotel concessionaire.

Last year, she logged on to the Maui Community College Web site and started looking for options.



Maui Economic Development Board photo  
**Doug Hope**, a research supervisor at the Maui Scientific Research Center in Kihei, served as mentor to Victoria Sensano, a Maui Community College student working on an associate’s degree in electronics and computer engineering.



The Maui News / **CLAUDINE SAN NICOLAS** photo  
**Victoria Sensano** provided a PowerPoint presentation Tuesday on a project she completed during this summer’s Akamai Internship Program.

She eventually signed up for the electronics and computer engineering degree. From there, program coordinator and instructor Mark Hoffman recommended her for the internship and more recently, for a part-time job with Oceanit as a telescope operator technician.

The part-time technician post pays less than the \$15-an-hour job she had with the hotels, but Sensano said money isn't everything.

"The main thing for me is networking. I'm really up for this and I know I'll have better opportunities," she said.

Leslie Wilkins of the Maui Economic Development Board said Sensano may be earning less money as a part-timer, but she's confident when the student completes her degree studies and pursues a full-time job that salary and career opportunities will improve.

Citing figures from the Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism, Wilkins said the average hotel worker earns \$31,000 per year, while the average salary for an employee in the technology industry averages \$70,000 a year.

Wilkins has been at the forefront at Maui Economic Development Board in supporting the internship program and a Women in Technology program, both of which promote and support students in the fields of science and technology.

The internship program has led to several students going on to work in the field. Seven of the 18 interns in the first two summers have been hired full time in technology and four hold part-time jobs, primarily on Maui.

For summer 2005, two of the 10 students have been tapped for jobs while others continue their studies in college with high hopes of connecting with companies after graduation.

"This has really become a productive way to move students into the work force," said Lisa Hunter, associate director for education and human resources at the Center for Adaptive Optics. "We're very happy with that."

Aside from hooking up stu-

dents with jobs, Hunter said a spinoff benefit from the internship has been the development of a new astronomy lab course at MCC and the fine-tuning of other courses that better prepare students to work in the technology field after graduation.

MCC instructor Hoffman said the curriculum and approach to teaching have changed over the last five years to accommodate students interested in technology.

"We really want to feed that work-force pipeline," Hoffman said.

He said interest in the electronics and computer engineering fields has increased, as evidenced in the size of his freshman class this semester. The 25 students comprise the largest class he's had in the last five years.

In the Akamai Internship Program, Hoffman teaches a week-long course that students take before doing their respective apprenticeships with technology companies on Maui.

He said he's brought in students from previous internships and other experts in the field to help prepare interns for their summer program. The 2005 Akamai summer interns all completed a rigorous eight-week program that introduced them to scientific research methods and tools with an emphasis on adaptive optics science.

Besides Sensano, interns were Ryan Baptiste, who since has accepted a job with Northrop Grumman as a communications-electronics maintenance technician; Joseph Jeffrey Curamen, an MCC student; John Fujita, a fourth-year student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa; Brenton Kimoto, MCC student; Daniella-Dawn Manansala-DuBois, Kauai Community College student; Mark Akio Mizubayashi, San Francisco State University; Keith Molina, a Lahainaluna High School graduate attending the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Ryan Nora, a Big Island student attending Colorado School of Mines; Jonathan Olsten, a Maui student attending Purdue University; and

Jeremy Steel, a junior at Cuesta College in San Luis Obispo, Calif.

Each student was matched with a research adviser and integrated into the adviser's research group at various sites. Sensano, for example, had Doug Hope of the Maui Scientific Research Center as her mentor. Her research and new computer program are expected to be used in future work at the center.

This year, the Akamai Internship Program featured nine technology sites as participants: Akimeka LLC, Maui Community College, Maui High Performance Computing Center, Maui Scientific Research Center, Northrop Grumman, Oceanit, Pacific Disaster Center, Textron Systems and Trex Enterprises.

Wilkins said there are plans to offer the Akamai Internship Program in the summer of 2006. Registration probably will begin in December with a deadline to apply on Feb. 14, 2006. Interns should be selected by March.

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