INFLATION IS ON PACE TO GO LOW

Hawaii's consumer price index increased 0.7 percent for the first half of 2015.

By Dave Segal
dsegal@staradvertiser.com

Hawaii historically has the highest electricity and gas prices in the nation.

But steep drops in both of those categories left Honolulu's inflation barely discernible during the first half of 2015 and on track to finish at its lowest level since 2009.

The consumer price index — the most widely used measure of inflation — rose a scant 0.7 percent from the same six-month period a year ago and 0.5 percent from the second half of 2014, according to data released preliminarily by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Typically, the six-month data for Honolulu and other select metropolitan areas are released in February and August, but program upgrades by the national of-
By Gordon Y. Ping

ate-night campers at Camp Erdman, usually elaborate games and musical routines. Service projects and beer bashes, at least when the drinking age was 18. A clique so large and inclusive that it would swallow up an entire wing of the University of Hawaii at Manoa’s Campus Center on a daily basis.

Is it any wonder some called it “A House.”

Part frat house and part community service club, the Atherton YMCA and its signature Fresh Camp have been major threads in the UH social fabric across multiple generations of students. Based at Atherton House just across the street from the Manoa campus, the “Y” was sometimes considered the oddball stepchild to both UH, where it thrived despite operating outside the university system, and to the YMCA of Honolulu, whose other branches focused mostly on youth and health programs. Kiman Wong, 57, said “A House,” as it was known to some, was a welcome respite from the dry engineering classes he was taking in the late 1970s. “This was a really good balance for me,” he said.

“I would go to class, and then after class I would be at the Y for the rest of the day — and nights, too,” said Wong, who now sits on the board of directors.

“I didn’t dorm, but I spent so much time there it seemed like I was dorming.”

In November the YMCA of Honolulu announced it was closing down itself of the Atherton House property, offering it up for sale or lease. Talks are underway with a prospective buyer, but a YMCA official said the branch will continue to offer programs.

In the meantime an enthusiastic group of alumni has organized a first-ever reunion for all former and current Atherton Y members to help commemorate the impending end of Atherton House as a cornerstone of campus life for 90 years. Saturday’s gathering will include dinner and a slide show, plus traditional Fresh Camp activities like trust-building games and campfire songs.

Reunion organizers, made up largely of Y members from the 1970s through 1990s, had forgotten many of the activi-

A reunion will honor a defunct Atherton YMCA program that helped generations of incoming UH students

Snapshots from 80 years of Fresh Camp high jinks at Camp Erdman in Mokuleia and at the university branch of the YMCA. Atherton House, top left, was built in the 1930s with funds from the Atherton family to serve as a residence for students and a center for YMCA activities. The organization is in the process of selling the property but promises to continue programs for the college community. The color photos date from the 1980s and 1990s; the other black-and-white photo is of a College Life Group from 1927-28.

PHOTOS COURTESY: KIMAN WONG AND ATHERTON YMCA
A dance routine is performed by members of the Showtime Express, another popular Atherton YMCA program from the 1980s and ‘90s.

Camp and other programs at the Atherton Y. Zan DeFeudis Timitim, a program coordinator for Communications Pacific, did not attend Fresh Camp, but was a member of the Y’s popular Showtime Express performing arts group that Matsutomo spearheaded. A member of the Y in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Timitim estimated she is among between 20 to 30 from Atherton who joined the ‘Ohia Productions theater troupe Matsutomo formed with Michael Furuya. (Matsutomo died in 2007.)

“A lot of us still hang with each other now,” she said. Timitim, 46, said she also took part in Y programs that helped special-needs kids and others. “It was a time in my life that was very influential and positive for me.”

By THE 1990s and 2000s, the Y had automated course registration and was playing a much larger role in preparing new students for college life. The impetus for Fresh Camp declined, and at the last camp, believed to have been held in 2009, there were more counselors than freshman campers, said Wong, one of the reunion organizers. Atherton Y Executive Director Ananda Cruz said the branch remains a vital part of the UH community, with community service programs that include mentoring homeless youths in Kakaako, shadowing and assisting doctors and nurses in Kalanapa, and helping to restore elementary schools in the Philippines and Japan. Among the Y’s centerpieces today is College Camp for disadvantaged public high school students entering their senior year. Over the course of a week, the teens learn about UH, dividing time between the Manoa campus and Camp Erdman. At each step, Y members serving as counselors assure them that college is an attainable and valuable aspiration, Cruz said.

Louise Sicosacion was a Farrington High School student in 2012 when he was among the first to take part in College Camp. Four summers later Sicosacion returned as a counselor to this year’s campers.

The different community programs he’s been involved with at the Y helped motivate him to “look beyond myself and find ways to help others,” said the 25-year-old, who intends to do that as a physical therapist.

Depending on the final terms of the sale or lease, the Atherton Y might or might not continue at the current site, Chou said. Regardless, the YMCA of Honolulu board decided to continue programs that serve university students at UH and elsewhere on Oahu, she said.

Reunion organizers like Timitim were pleased to learn the parent Y intends to continue the Atherton branch. “Anything positive that can help college-student engagement with others in the community, that’s a good thing,” she said.


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