



COMMEMORATIVE EDITION  
**samoa news**

# Tsunami in Samoa

Tutufa'atasi... Fa'amalosi



PAGO PAGO, AMERICAN SAMOA

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2009



Photo: Richard Madsen onboard the *Barbarella*.

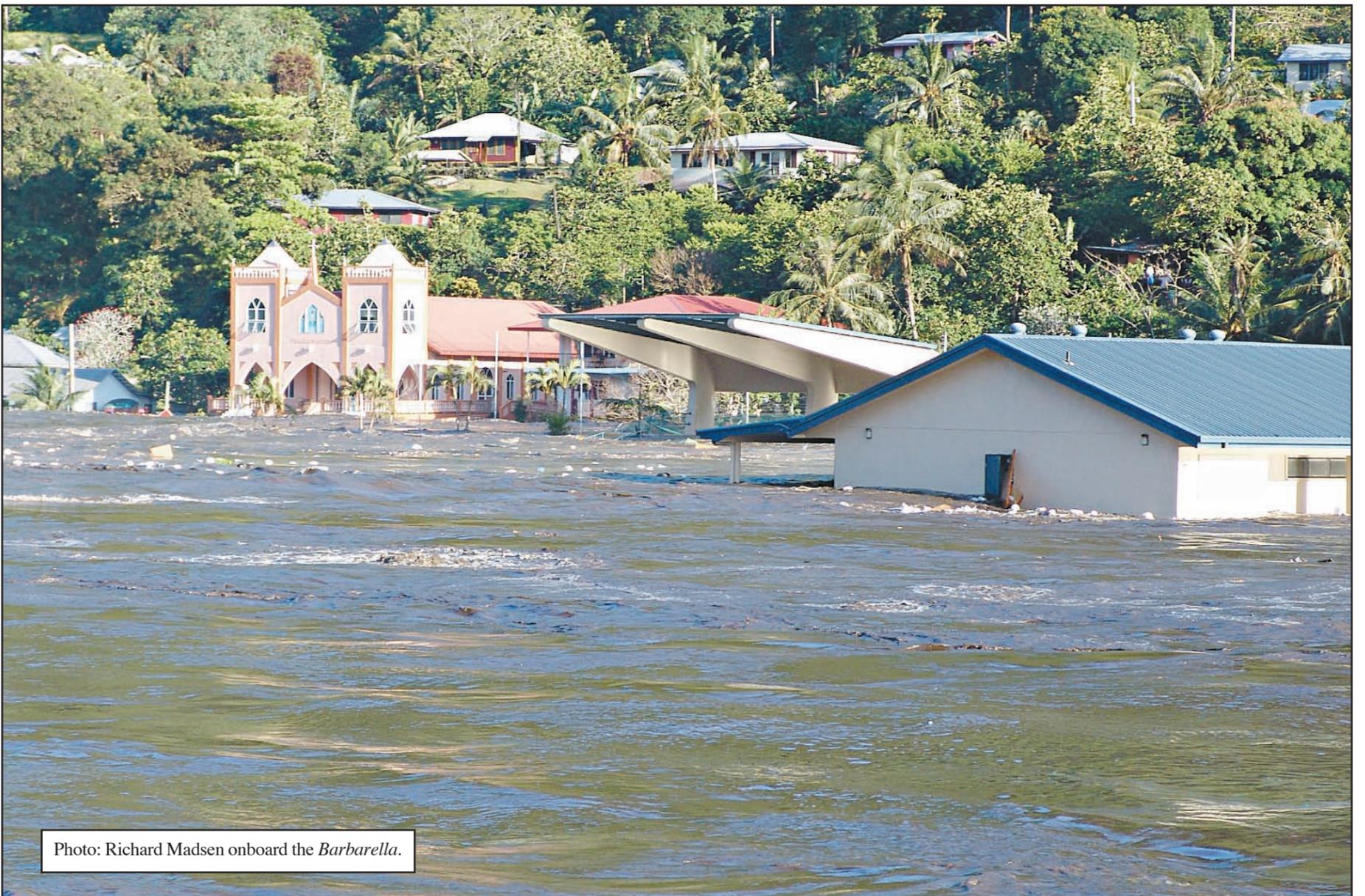


Photo: Richard Madsen onboard the *Barbarella*.

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## Sept. 29, 2009: The earth shook and waters rose

by Samoa News Staff

In the South Pacific, mornings are often so stunningly beautiful, they can take your breath away. Tuesday, September 29 was one of those mornings in American Samoa. School children were up early waiting for their buses, gardeners were out on lawns and malaes with their weed-eaters, and the bright morning light of late September came streaming through the jungle and glistened along the sparkling coastline with unusual clarity.

The turquoise sea, a sight worthy of great art, was beautiful. But the ocean, like beauty itself, can be deceptive, and Tuesday morning, the sea proved deadly. Residents of the Samoan archipelago, which stretches through both American Samoa and neighboring independent Samoa, were jolted out of bed — and into a nightmare — as the first terrifying trembler hit the islands, followed closely by a tsunami which leveled villages at sea level, turning structures into sodden piles of rubble, and tossing cars into trees.

Today marks one-month since the nearly 8.3 magnitude earthquake struck causing a massive tsunami that swept through American Samoa, Samoa and Tonga, killing over 100 people and leaving behind damage estimated in the millions of dollars.

At 8.3, the earthquake would have easily qualified as a “great quake” had it occurred in a heavily populated urban area. Fortunately, the islands are not densely populated, but that makes no difference to those who lost everything. Their lives were changed forever within the minutes that elapsed from earthquake to killer wave.

It was around 6:48a.m. on Sept. 29 that the quake was felt in the Tafuna area, “it was strong and it lasted for over a minute,” according to a local Department of Homeland Security “situation report”, which notes that at 7:29a.m. they received a report of “water inundating Pago, homes and buildings destroyed - vehicles floating upside down and taken by the waves.”

Many people in the town area, including Samoa News staff already on duty, felt the strong earthquake and evacuated to the parking lot. Across the street, dock and Port Administration workers also came outside.

In a span of about 10 or 12 minutes the first word came that a tsunami had been generated, as electricity went out and people from the harbor ran to higher grounds, and the first wave surged over the Pago harbor covering the main road in Fagatogo, the Fono compound and the Fagatogo malae.

Getting a call through the cell phones became difficult as lines were jammed and a cell phone call from the Leone side reported to Samoa News “massive

devastation.”

At 7:40a.m. Sept. 29, ASDHS received an urgent call from DPS/EMS for a 4x4 vehicle needed on the west side of Tutuila. At 7:45 “Another wave reaching land in Pago Pago. Two (heart attack) fatalities reported from Pago Pago,” according to the “situation report.”

The report also provided communication efforts between ASDHS with the local weather station and federal officials off-island.

“8:07a.m: Reports from ASTCA of Leone receiving big wave surges on land. DPS request[ed] to receive updated report on the progress of the tsunami. An elderly lady from Leone who was swept out to sea was retrieved,” the report says.

Around 8:29a.m., according to the report, “sea water continues to impact on land in Pago Pago”. By 9:05a.m. the number of fatalities in Pago Pago increased to 5, while the Emergency Operation Center was already contacted by federal government agencies that they stood ready to send help to American Samoa.

The report also outlined the people involved when the earthquake occurred. At around 9:10, the ASDHS recorded information coming out of Leone about the bridge being washed away, and one fatality so far. By 10:56a.m. the fatality count reached 17 and the tsunami all clear signal was given.

Lt. Gov. Faoa A. Sunia, who was acting governor at the time, went on KSBS-FM around 9:30a.m. to address the territory about the situation, asking the public for calm and patience.

Close to 3p.m. KSBS-FM radio was able to reach Gov. Togiola Tulafono via cell phone and the governor informed the community that he had sent a request to President Barack Obama for an emergency declaration for American Samoa.

News of the disaster spread quickly through the islands and beyond in the hours following the quake with reports of devastation coming in from Pago Pago, Leone, Poloa, Auasi, Alao and Samoa.

National and International media spread the word, arriving in American Samoa in the following days and filing reports for Associated Press, CNN and the U.S. networks.

### DISASTER DECLARATION

Unlike the federal hesitation in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, President Barack Obama made a major disaster declaration for the Territory of American Samoa the day it occurred, triggering the release of Federal funds to help individuals and communities respond to the devastation caused by the Earthquake, Tsunami and Flooding.

FEMA was in charge of coordinating relief efforts, and the National Park Service and the Hawaii Air National Guard had emergency responders en route to the Territory that night, arriving in the early morning hours of the following day.

W. Craig Fugate, Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Department of Homeland Security, named Kenneth R. Tingman as the Federal Coordinating Officer for Federal recovery operations in the affected area.

In a press conference on Sept. 30, Gov. Togiola said that Mike Sala, the director of the local Department of Homeland Security had been appointed Chief Coordinating Officer for American Samoa.

Togiola was accompanied at the press conference by U.S. Coast Guard Capt. Barry Compagnoni, Federal Coordinating Officer Kenneth Tingman of FEMA and Army Col. A. George. All arrived in the territory from Honolulu on board the C-130 aircraft with equipment, generators and other supplies.

The Governor noted the support of Hawai'i political leaders, Gov. Linda Lingle and Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann. He said two C-17 aircraft were en route with more supplies as well as members of the Hawai'i National Guard to provide support.

In addition, FEMA sent cargo aircraft from Texas with relief supplies and personnel from FEMA, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Corps of Engineers and the American Red Cross, according to a FEMA statement.

Compagnoni, the Captain of the Port of Honolulu that has jurisdiction over the Port of Pago Pago, told reporters that one of the USCG's goals is “to establish a commercial maritime transportation system so that we can continue to ensure that, that life line to the territory is completely functioning to capacity so we can continue to bring in commercial goods to sustain your population.”

Another aspect of the USCG's work as part of the recovery team was to identify and mitigate any hazardous material, or any type of oil that may be a threat to people, that may have escaped into the environment, he said.

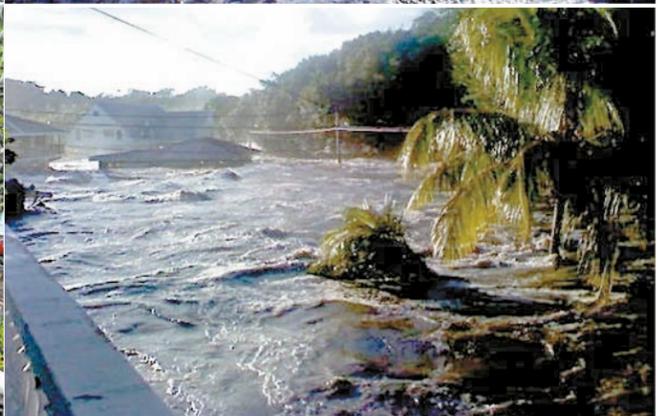
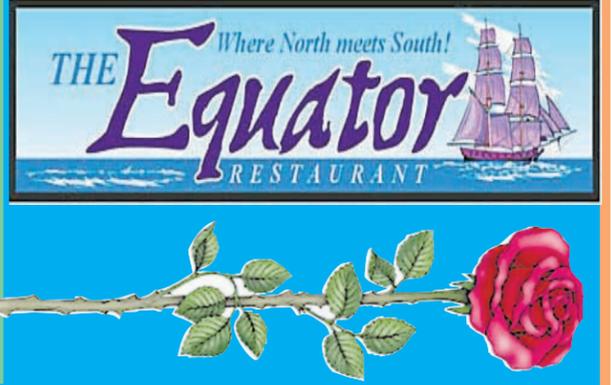
### ASPA RESPONSE

FEMA, working with the American Samoa Power Authority, started to restore power in some affected areas on the eastern side by Friday, Oct 2. Power at Samoa News was restored late in the evening of the 29th and Samoa News was able to publish without missing an issue.

(Continued on page 6)



*“Our Thoughts  
and Prayers for our  
Island Paradise”*



# Salon Sophia

Let us get you looking and feeling your best.

*“Our Faith and Trust in the Lord will get us through it all”*





# KS MART

"Something for the whole family"

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Photo: Richard Madsen onboard the *Barbarella*.

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“We have made power our priority,” said FEMA coordination officer Kenneth Tingman during a press conference Friday, Oct. 2. He said FEMA understands that not everyone has power and is working with ASPA, as well as a power team working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, with the U.S. Energy Department and others to get it done.

“We will be bringing in generators to support their efforts. Not everything will be done immediately, but we’re going to follow the lead of the locals, the lead of the governor, and ASPA people, who are telling us what it is that we need to do first and we will answer those needs right away,” he said.

After the tsunami waves inundated the bay area, the Satala Power Plant was flooded and many villages on the eastern side from Pago Pago to Onenoa and Tula lost power immediately.

Since that time intermittent power outages have been experienced around the island of Tutuila as emergency generators are put in place to take some of the load off the Tafuna Power Plant. The utility asked residents to unplug appliances and electronics in order to avoid damage caused by power surges when lines and power are restored.

This week on Tuesday, Oct. 27, the American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency (AS-EPA) issued a precautionary boil water notice for all ASPA water drinking systems on Tutuila island.

In a statement signed by AS-EPA Director Fanuatele Dr. Toafa Vaiaga’e, it says prohibited household cross-connections of untreated village water systems with ASPA drinking water systems continue to be found islandwide. These cross-connections contaminate ASPA drinking water with *E. coli* bacteria.

The precautionary boil water notice will remain in effect until further notice, says the AS-EPA.

### LOOTERS RUN RAMPANT

One big problem surfacing after the earthquake and tsunami was the looting of stores and businesses in the Bay Area. The Department of Health warned against consumption of food items which were taken as part of the looting, since they may be spoiled.

Just after the tsunami struck the Bay Area, and after the water receded leaving great damage to stores, offices, and other businesses, the looting got underway.

Samoa News witnessed youngsters in school uniforms removing goods and other items from stores along the shoreline in Fagatogo such as Shoe Tree and Seaside Store & Gas Station. At the Kruse store in

Pago Pago, it was everyone helping themselves to what was available on the shelves. Eyewitnesses said people were walking out of the store with loads of goods, while others waited their turn.

Similar reports surfaced from other parts of the island as the days passed and many damaged homes stood unprotected.

“It is with grave concern that looting has become a serious problem for our law enforcement officials and village police to control in view of more pressing duties in the post tsunami of September 29th, 2009,” Mike Sala said in a statement made Thursday, Oct. 1. “While this practice is commonplace in other parts of the world, it is not in the nature of our island community and people to benefit selfishly by the tragedies of others.”

Sala called on the Office of Samoan Affairs through the village aumaga “to vigilantly enforce the evening curfew not only during prayer hours but during the rest of the late evening hours until morning.”

“On behalf of all our leaders, government and people, let us show our federal and military partners who have traveled to the Territory this week to help with our recovery efforts that we stand firm on our belief as good Christians and our commitment to being responsible citizens of American Samoa,” he added.

### MIRACLES OF SURVIVAL, AID AND CONDOLENCES

Stories of the miracle of survival and loss of loved ones continue to pour into Samoa News with messages of condolence and offers of help, (too numerous to mention individually in this report) continue to be received by the territory and in independent Samoa and Tonga.

Samoa communities from around the world - in Australia, New Zealand and the United States as well as troops deployed in the Middle East held prayer services, fund raisers and sent words of love and comfort home to their families and loved ones.

With phone lines jammed, in the days immediately following the earthquake-tsunami, Samoa News staff relayed messages back and forth via the website to family members desperately trying to make contact.

As more contributions snowballed that first week, Gov. Togiola Tulafono called for the community to coordinate their efforts with the Emergency Operation Center (EOC).

“As we begin to receive donations, contributions and gifts for the relief efforts for the tsunami disaster, I

feel we need to acknowledge the people’s desire to help in this effort and we are most grateful for the kindness and generosity shown,” he said on Thursday, Oct. 1 in an e-mail to reporters.

At the same time, “I feel we should invite the community to please coordinate your donations and alofa” with EOC management, who is trying to make sure everyone is treated well and equally, Togiola said.

In yesterday’s issue, the public was assured that there will be a public accounting by the government. ASG plans to publicize donations received by the territory following the Sept. 29 disasters, and the effort is being coordinated by the newly established American Samoa Disaster Relief and Recovery Program (ASDRRP).

### TUTUILA MOURNS ITS DEAD

The first funeral service for one of the victims from the tsunami disaster was held Thursday, Oct. 8. Daniel Olszewski, 69, a native of Pennsylvania, arrived in the territory with his wife Joan onboard their yacht two weeks before the tsunami, said Evelyn Lili’o, who is Joan’s cousin. Olszewski and his wife were on their yacht when the tsunami hit the territory.

“Daniel’s request was to be buried at sea and we abide by his wishes,” said Lili’o, adding that the service at sea after local regulations were met, which includes approval from the EPA, U.S. Coast Guard and the Port Administration.

### VAIJORESA UPUTAUA NIUAVEVE FITIAO, TULUIGA SAUILUMA & COLUMBUS IOANE SAUILUMA

It was a heartbreaking scene at the Oct. 9 funeral service for two young victims

of the tsunami whose lives were claimed in Leone. Sobbing mourners wiped away the tears, six and seven-year old classmates lined the way to say good-bye as numerous testimonies assured: “the angels are in heaven.”

Another youngster, missing since Sept. 29, was also remembered during the service held at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Leone.

Two white coffins bore the bodies of Vaijoresa Upu-taua Niuaveve Fitiao, 6, and Tuluiga Sauiluma, 7. Tuluiga’s younger brother, six-year old Columbus Ioane Sauiluma is still missing.

He was remembered during the funeral, a small service held later in the day at the site where it is believed he was swept out to sea.

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# Island Queen Association

## THIS TOO SHALL PASS

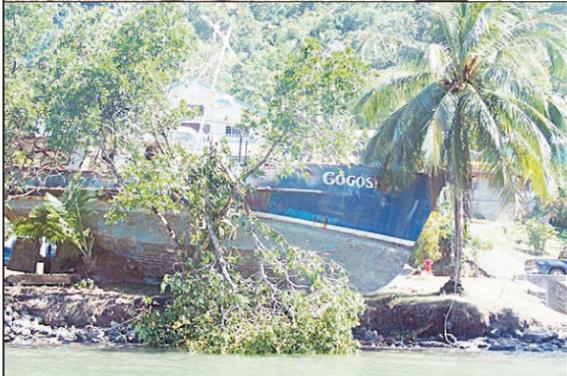


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# “LEST WE FORGET”

Photos by: Richard Madsen  
onboard the 'Barbarella' in Pago Harbor



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Photos by: Richard Madsen  
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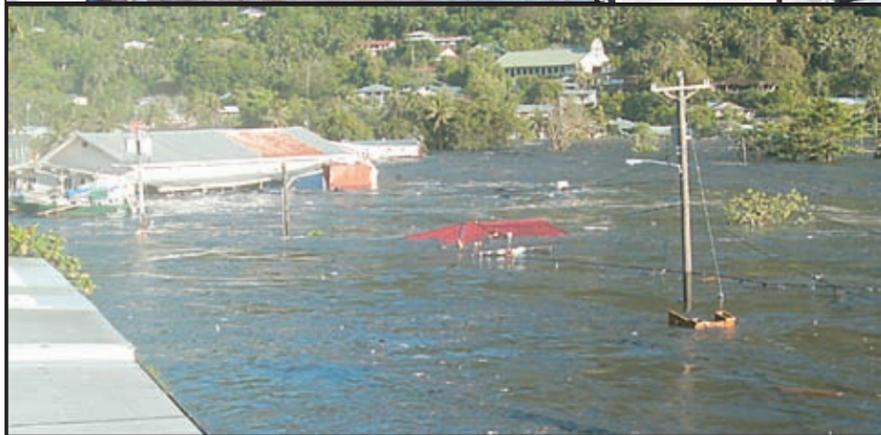
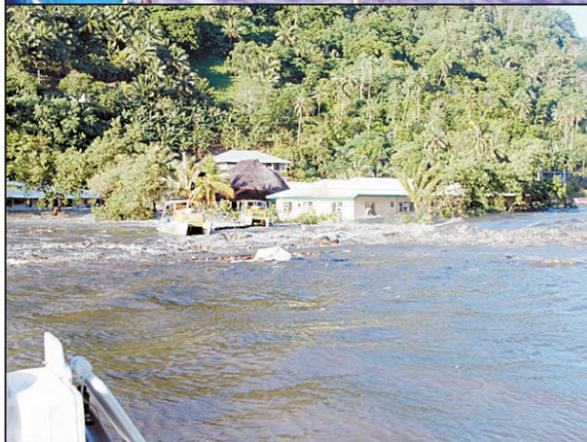


Photo: Richard Madsen onboard the *Barbarella*.

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### IN SAENG LEE; MI-JA SHIN AND PU-HEE WOO

A week after the tsunami devastated coastal villages of American Samoa, the territory's Korean community mourned the loss of two people while it continued its search for the body of an 11-year-old girl, who went missing in Asili, Tuesday, Sept. 29.

The three — Mr. In-Saeng Lee, 61, Mrs. Mi-Ja Shin, 47 and the missing girl Pu-Hee Woo, 11 — were remembered during a prayer service held Sunday, Oct. 4, at the Samoa Korean & Baptist Church in Ili'ili. About 150 people were in attendance, according to Lee.

### EVELINE & EVELYN TUA'ATO

Government leaders and employees crowded the funeral service of Eveline "Line" Tua'ato, 46, and daughter Evelyn Charlotte Tu'a'ato, five, at the St. Peter & Paul Catholic Church in Lauli'i Monday, Oct. 12.

Line's husband Paelo Puni remembered his wife, a mother of seven, a loving woman and his five-year girl, his baby, a bright, smart princess. He said the morning of Sept. 29, his wife, Line, his son Vernon and Faau-ma, their babysitter were on the road with Evelyn Charlotte near the Seafarer's restaurant in Chinatown, Pago Pago when the waves rolled in.

### SIASAGA TUFU

Mother of six and grandmother of two, Siasaga "Sia" Tufu, 48, born in Fugalei, Samoa, was laid to rest in front of her Aua home, overlooking the Pago Harbor Monday, Oct. 12. He remembered his wife as quiet, who was music conductor in church.

Recalling the events of Sept. 29, her husband Tautalafua Tufu, said she was at work at Pago Park a little after 5 a.m. and after he dropped off all the kids at school, he and his 9-month-old granddaughter Noralinda visited his wife at work after the earthquake. He spoke with his wife, she kissed Noralinda good-bye and he left with the baby girl.

### AIENAMU LEASIOLAGI

Aienamu Leasiolagi, 82, was laid to rest on the Columbus Day holiday following a service at the Fatuoaga Cathedral. The service was led by Vaopuni-matagi J. Quinn Weitzel, Bishop of the Samoa Pago Catholic Diocese.

Her son Francis Leasiolagi, a former Department of Education director told Samoa News said her children remember her as a humble, loving mother and devoted Catholic.

### LAGI FAAUMA LAVEA UELE MUA

Mua, 64, a mother of 10 and grandmother of 16, born in Leone, was a member of the Leone to'omaga. She was laid to rest, Saturday, Oct. 10.

"Last Tuesday, they called me that mom was a victim," said Lagi's son Otilia Sooalo, an Avele College teacher who traveled from Samauga, Savaii for his mother's funeral. "It wasn't something we prepared for and we do not know exactly what happened, but mom was at the to'omaga, she was a weaver, she wove fala, pola, fans, anything."

### FUATINO LATU ATUMATA SALAVE'A

Fuatino Salave'a, 69, mother of five and grandmother of 16, born in Moata'a, Samoa, was remembered Saturday, Oct. 10 as a vibrant, fun loving people person and a devoted Catholic who "carried her cross daily and used a stern voice in raising her children to be humble, fearing of the Lord," said Salave'a's eldest daughter Frances Salave'a Sefo.

"There's so much I want the world to know about my mother," Sefo told Samoa News. "It didn't take much to please her. As long as she had her coffee, cigarettes and \$20 for Bingo she was content."

Her mother's favorite hangout was at their fale o'o, home of the Jesus is the Rock Leone Senior Citizens, several members of which were claimed by the tsunami waves Tuesday morning along the Leone coast.

### ELENA FAUMUINA SALAVE'A

Wednesday Oct. 14 in Leone, villagers joined family members and friends of Elena Faumuina Salave'a, 80, to bid her farewell. Mourners crowded the service held at the 'Holy Cross-Le Koluse Paia Leone' Catholic Church, where she was a member, her home, facing the ocean that claimed her life just yards away.

Salave'a, who married Salave'a Senio, is survived by her 10 children and 17 grandchildren. Family members bearing pins declaring "Forever in our Hearts" gathered at Ma'o's home during burial services for Salave'a yesterday.

### SABRINA ANETTA TAFITI SEVA'AETASI

Sabrina Anetta Tafiti Seva'aetasi, 20, a young mother and Fagaitua High School honor graduate, was at work the morning the tsunami hit Pago Pago village, where she was killed. Sabrina was the daughter of Tutupu Fautanu and Moana Seva'aetasi of Nu'uuli.

During funeral services held at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Auto Ward, Tuesday, Oct.

13, fellow church members remembered her as being a quiet, obedient girl who enjoyed helping her family.

### GODOFREDA PALMA

Oct. 8 marked the ninth and final night of prayer for 62-year-old Godofreda Palma, a seamstress from the Philippines who was killed in the Pago tsunami. "This is traumatic for all the Filipinos...it pains us also," said Christy Dizon, 43, a Fa'saso Marist teacher. "She was a fellow Filipino...she had no immediate family here."

Since Wednesday, Sept. 30, a day after members of the Filipino community were presented with the task of identifying Palma at the LBJ morgue, Filipinos of all ages, have been offering up words of prayer — the Novena for the Dead.

### VA'ASILIFITI VAIPALOLO L. VIENA

Government workers clearing debris in the Evalani's area stopped and took their seats at a bus stop as a motorcade escorting the body of Department of Human and Social Services employee Va'asiliifiti Vaipalolo L. Viena, 49, was led to its final resting place in Papa'atai, Happy Valley Friday, Oct. 16. She was known to many as just "Palolo."

Family members cried as her casket was lowered into the ground while members of the Pago Congregational Church of Jesus in Samoa (CCJS) sang, heralding the mother of three's journey to meet the Lord.

### BILLIE GERRY LEOTA-PETELO

Mother of 10, Billie Gerry Leota-Petelo, 44, an avid bowler whose friends from the Bowling Alley were there to bid farewell to her — was remembered on Friday, Oct. 16 by family and friends as a humble, respectful, funny, simple woman, who loved her children dearly.

Her eldest daughter Dorecca Petelo, a student at the American Samoa Community College said her mom was "a cool mom", understanding and the type of person you could talk to about anything.

### FOLAALELA PESE-LAUOFO

Ta'u, Manu'a born grandmother of 25 and mother of nine, Folaalela Pese-Lauofo, 65, is regarded by her family as the most amazing woman who has ever lived, a selfless mother.

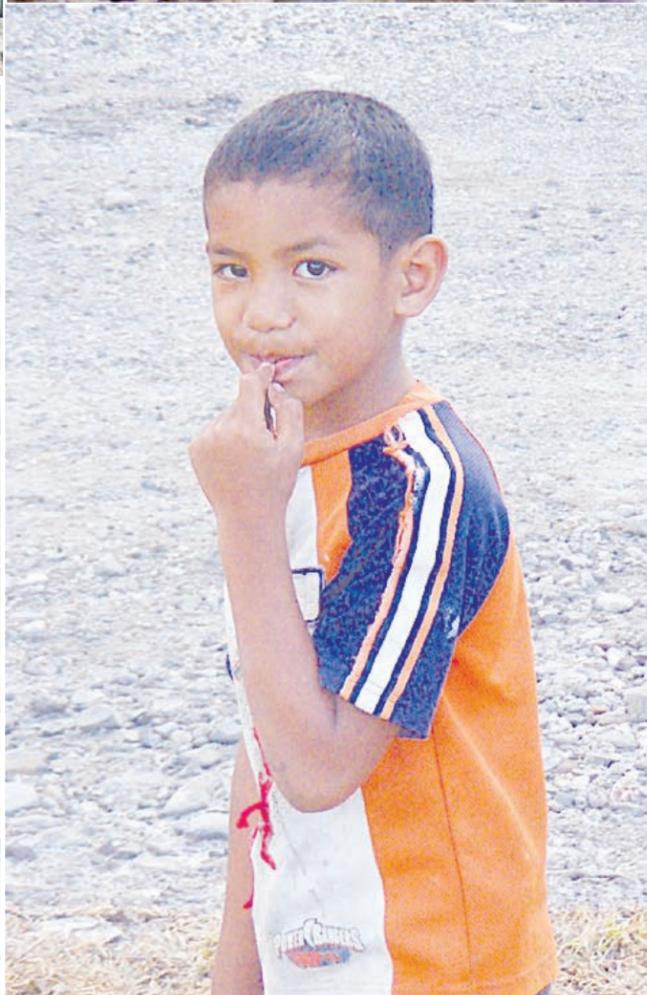
A daughter, who spoke during funeral services held Wednesday, Oct. 14 at the Lauli'i Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa (CCAS) said March 9, 2009 was the last day she saw her mother. Friends and family called her "Fola."

(Continued on page 15)

# Salon Sophia

Let us get you looking and feeling your best.

*“Our Faith and Trust in the Lord will get us through it all”*



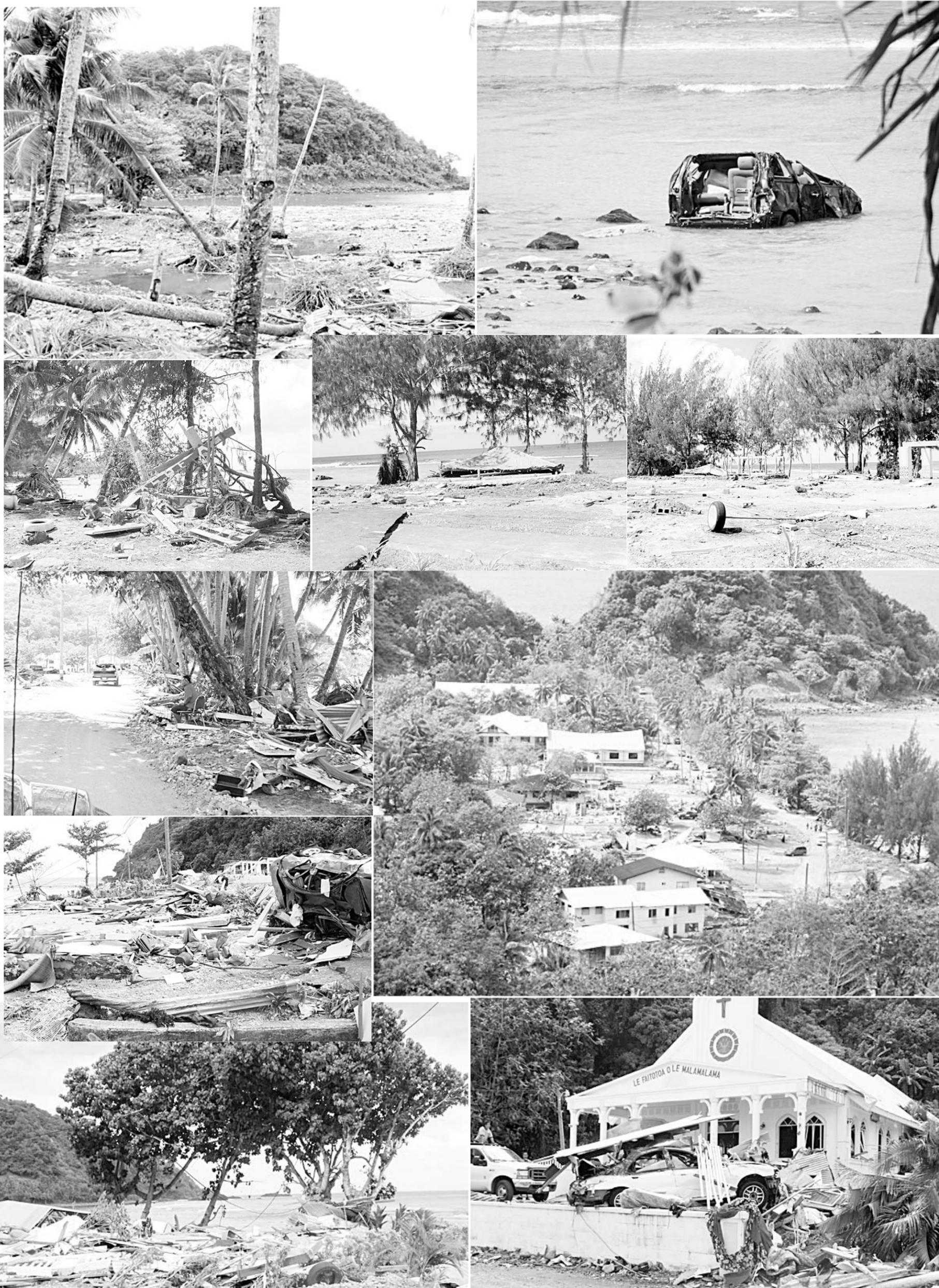


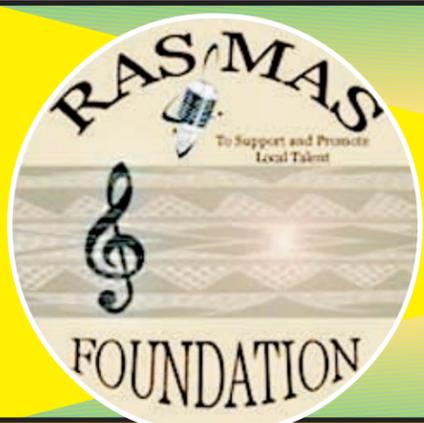
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WE SHALL  
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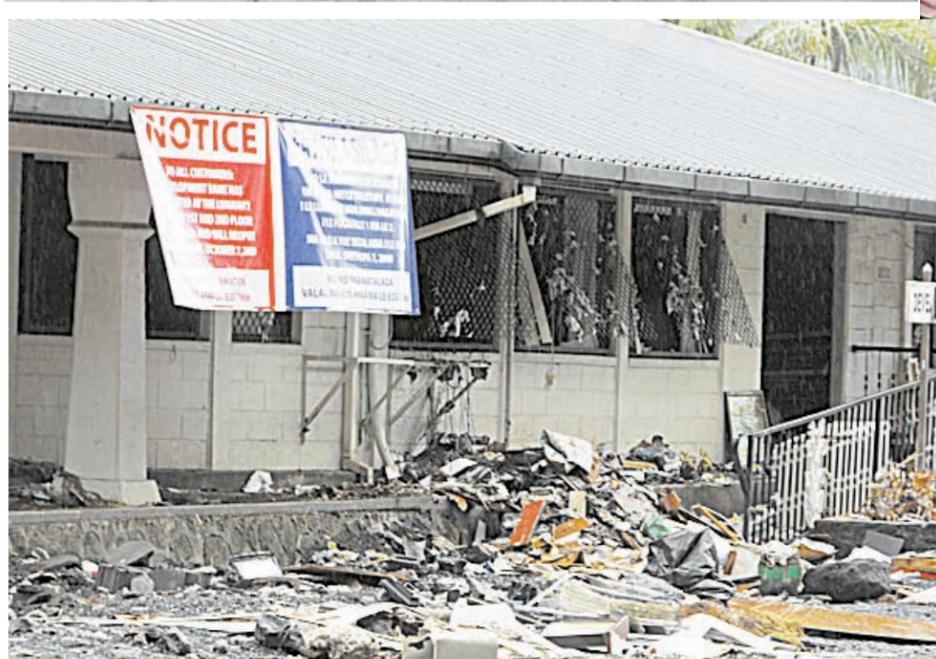


# RAS MAS Foundation

*Rise up and stand tall for our future depends on it, we ARE the People from the Sun and we will overcome...*

*My Sincerest Condolences and Regards,*

*Ras Mas*



# Island Queen Association

## THIS TOO SHALL PASS





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from page 10

### FALENAOTI MICHELLE PEARL ENELIKO

Falenaoti Michelle Pearl Eneliko, 56 — a longtime educator revered by those who loved and knew her as the ‘Queen of All Queens’ — was laid to rest Saturday, Oct. 17, amid a grieving, broken village that is still picking up the pieces from Sept. 29, when tsunami crushed homes and claimed the lives of several villagers.

In services held Saturday, family, friends, esteemed educators and members of the fa’afafine community, young and old, crowded the Holy Cross Le Koluse Paia Catholic Church in Leone to honor Michelle and say good-bye to a dear outrageous, loud friend who, a staunch advocate of education who lived her life serving others — church, family, village and her students.

### FAATAMALII SOOTO

In a grand display of love and respect, people young and old whose lives were touched in some way or another by 78-year-old Fa’atamali’i Pelenatete Lea’e Saka So’oto gathered in three services held to honor the mother, grandmother and great grandmother who got caught in the waves in Leone while hanging out with her Leone to’omaga friends Sept. 29.

“Mama was a great mother in every shape and form of the word great,” said her daughter Terisa So’oto Palmer, 44, a tsunami survivor. “And I say great because there is no other word to describe her. She had the wisdom to talk to us and she wanted us to be good people in our families, church and village.”

Terisa was hit ten-fold by the tsunami — she lost her mother. In addition, she lost several businesses run by her and her husband Al Palmer — a car audio shop, laundromat, internet cafe and Game Zone, a hangout built to deter youth from alcohol and mischief.

### CHEN LI

Members of American Samoa’s Chinese community joined the family of tsunami victim Chen Li, 46, Sunday, Oct. 25, during a farewell service to honor the father of three who was killed in the tsunami that laid waste to lower Pago Pago Sept. 29.

Li, a native of Changchun city, in the People’s Republic of China lived in American Samoa for 14 years. He owned Ellen Store in Pago Pago village that once faced the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints chapel, among the many thriving Pago businesses that were washed away last month.

### HELEN SEUI

Members of the Seui family, American Samoa’s international Catholic community, visiting relief workers and some US military personnel, yesterday, joined leader of the Diocese of Samoa Pago Pago Vaopunimatagi Bishop John Quinn Weitzel during a Mass of Resurrection in memory of Helen Seui, 21, a victim of the Sept. 29 tsunami.

The Mass, filled the Holy Family Cathedral at Fatuoaiga. Helen, a member of the Leone ‘Le Koluse Paia’ Leone Catholic church, died Oct. 1, 2009 from injuries suffered in the tsunami in Leone. Her mother was also injured in the incident and has been hospitalized in Honolulu. Funeral services for Helen are pending her mother’s recovery.

During the Sunday, Oct. 25 Mass, a list of 22 names provided to the Diocese by Samoa News, was read during a moment of silence to honor those who were lost to the tsunami.

### WHERE WE STAND NOW

The recovery effort continues and as of yesterday, American Samoa’s death toll from the tsunami stands at 34 and no missing people, said Betty Ah Soon, spokesperson for the EOC.

She said the Fijian woman that local officials have been trying to locate for her family in Fiji, was found in Apia. Ah Soon said she actually spoke to the woman on Wednesday.

As for the two “yachties” that were originally reported missing by their relatives, Ah Soon said these individuals have since been located and have made contact with their family in the U.S. “This is good news that these individuals are still alive,” said Ah Soon, who has been fielding international and local media questions since the day after the tsunami.

A month later, FEMA and other federal agencies remain on island working closely with the American Samoa government as the recovery effort continues.

“We are pleased and it’s encouraging to work with the American Samoa government, as they are not only able but willing to participate quite well in all aspects,” said FEMA external affairs officer James Shebl. “They are our good partners. They are open to discussions on various issues and they are patient with us, helping us better understand local issues such as the Samoan traditions and customs.”

Asked how long FEMA plans to be on island, Shebl said, “we will be here as long as we need to be here. Right now, we may be here until next Spring.”

FEMA and ASG are expected to issue a joint statement today on the status of recovery 30-days following the tsunami.

At the close of business on Tuesday, more than 7,500 people have come through the FEMA Disaster Recovery Center at the Governor Rex Lee Auditorium and more than 5,600 registrations have been taken since the DRC was opened more than three weeks ago.

“We have approved more than \$6.9 million in individual assistance and disbursed about \$6.8 million,” said Shebl. “We are very pleased that the processing of applications is happening very quickly for residents

of American Samoa.”

Monday, Oct. 26, StarKist resumed packing at partial capacity. ASPA continues to stabilize the electric grid with generators brought in by FEMA. All schools are open except for Taputapu Elementary in Poloa. All hotels, motels and guest houses on the island are fully booked and car rentals are almost impossible to find.

White Sunday was celebrated Oct. 11 with families remembering the lost and cherishing the living. Moso’oi Week is going on as scheduled and culminates with Tisa’s Tattoo Fest, Oct. 31 and Nov. 1.

### AFTERWARD

An Associated Press story published Thursday, Oct. 1, said because of a lethal combination of geology and geography, the people of American Samoa didn’t stand much of a chance.

Almost every condition that triggers bad tsunamis was in place this time, generating waves that raced toward the island territory at speeds approaching 530 mph, or as fast as a 747 jumbo jet. And there was almost nothing to slow the water down.

It all started with a type of earthquake that tends to generate strong tsunamis because of the angle at which the ground breaks. Also, the quake was extremely powerful, with a magnitude of over 8.0. It struck just below the ocean floor, which means very little lost energy. And it happened in deep water, which means bigger waves.

The deeper water also meant the tsunami sped along the ocean faster. American Samoa happened to be close to the epicenter, about 125 miles, and at just the right angle, with almost no shallow water to slow the speeding waves down.

Put that all together and there was less than 25 minutes, maybe as little as 13 minutes, between the ground shaking and the first tremendous waves swamping Samoa.

On Thursday, Oct. 22, acknowledging the earthquake as the warning, Dr. Guy Gelfenbaum, an oceanographer with the U.S. Geological Survey told a local audience that long-term planning and education are key factors the territory must consider in order to lessen the local tsunami risk.

Dr. Gelfenbaum presented the findings of several groups of scientists who were in American Samoa to study the Sept. 29 tsunami’s impact. He closed his presentation with this: “there is no easy solution to the local tsunami risk.”

“The earthquake is the warning. Long-term planning is essential. Education is the tool. Individuals must know what to do.”

Contributing to this report: Fili Sagapolutele, Tina Mata’afa, Teri Hunkin and Patty Page