

Save Our Surf, founded by John Kelly in 1961, had 35 major environmental victories. He would be proud of the Surfrider Foundation's continuing effort toward beach conservation; Sharks Cove, part of the Pūpūkea-Waimea Marine Life Conservation District.



A Lifetime of Conservation

John Kelly's legacy is honored at the annual Surfrider Environmental Awards

Whether you're a surfer, environmentalist or a fan of Hawai'i's oceans and beaches, you need to know about John Kelly. In fact, Hawai'i's coastlines might have looked much different today if it weren't for the efforts of the legendary waterman and community activist. Kelly pioneered Save Our Surf, a grassroots, ocean-based environmental group that was responsible for saving 140 surf areas on O'ahu as well as stopping dozens of destructive developments in the islands. To keep his message of conservation alive, every year the Surfrider Foundation's O'ahu Chapter honors Kelly's legacy with the John Kelly Environmental Achievement Awards to recognize those who follow in his footsteps.

John M. Kelly Jr. was born in San Francisco and arrived on O'ahu with his parents in 1923, at age four. Kelly's mother and father, Katherine Harland and John Melville Kelly, planned to stay in Hawai'i for only a year, but fell in love with island life and decided to settle permanently. His parents were gifted artists who instilled in their only child an appreciation for Hawai'i's natural beauty and spirit of sharing.

The family built a home at Black Point where Kelly spent countless hours in the ocean becoming a skilled surfer and diver. In 1934, he crafted the first big-wave surfboard with his friend Wally Froiseth by trimming the tail of the board into a V shape. They coined the design the "hot curl" and were some of the first modern-day surf pioneers to

charge the waves at Mākaha on their new shape.

Kelly graduated from Roosevelt High School and joined the Navy Reserve, wanting to stay close to the ocean. He witnessed the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and later earned a Navy and Marine Corps Medal of Honor for his freediving work while stationed aboard a ship off the coast of Kaho'olawe. Kelly retrieved unexploded torpedoes at the bottom of the ocean with nothing more than a rope and a pair of goggles. Following his service, the talented Kelly attended the Julliard School of Music in New York. He graduated and moved back to O'ahu with his wife Marion, where they raised their two daughters.

In 1961, Kelly started Save Our Surf with longtime friend George Downing when the Army Corps of Engineers unveiled plans for a jetty in Nānākuli that would destroy a surf site. The plan was one of many coastal interventions popping up on the shorelines of O'ahu that threatened reefs, surfing and fishing areas, and other ocean resources. Kelly organized dozens of surfers to protest the plan, spreading the word with posters and leaflets and lobbying for realignment of the jetty. They won and the plans were modified.

Grassroots support for the organization grew steadily and by the mid 1960s Save Our Surf's weekly meetings were packed. Kelly was a natural leader and charismatic spokesman, mobilizing people with his

three pronged strategy: respect the intelligence of the people, get the facts to them and help the people develop an action program. Educate, organize and confront was his modus operandi.

The united group organized beach cleanups, rallies, protests and presentations. In 1971, over 3,000 Save Our Surf activists and supporters demonstrated at the State Capitol against coastal development. Some of the group's major successes included defeating plans for a freeway to be built along the reef from Kahala to Hawai'i Kai, halting a beach widening project in Waikīkī, saving 14 fishing families from being evicted from historic Mokauea Island, and lobbying for the creation of Sand Island Beach Park where shippers' had plans for an industrial facility. Save Our Surf had 35 major victories and dozens of minor ones.

Kelly fought overdevelopment in Hawai'i until his later years and continued to swim and bodysurf at his beloved home break at Black Point. After battling Alzheimer's disease and cancer, Kelly passed away peacefully at home on October 2007 at the age of 88.

In an effort to preserve the artifacts of Kelly's dedication to conservation, the University of Hawai'i provided a grant to the Hawaiian Collection of Hamilton Library to digitize the archive of posters, fliers and articles. The fascinating collection is currently available to view online.

The Surfrider Foundation's O'ahu Chapter and numerous other environmental groups have carried on John Kelly's commitment to environmental activism in the modern era, achieving victories he would surely be proud of. Some of the recent milestones have been the preservation of Pūpūkea-Paumalū, Kaka'ako Park, Waimea Valley and more recently, the Turtle Bay victory. Currently, Surfrider is fighting the Kyo-Ya development in Waikīkī and various development projects on the North Shore.

In 2003, the Surfrider Foundation created the annual Environmental Awards event to honor those individuals who display environmental leadership in the wake of Kelly. Awards are given in the categories of Lifetime Achievement, Environmentally Friendly Hawaii-based Company, and Professional Surfer. John Kelly received the first Lifetime Achievement award at the inaugural event, and his spirit continues to inspire those who are fighting to protect Hawai'i's coastal environment.

— Rosalyn Young

The Surfrider Foundation's O'ahu Chapter hosted its Ninth Annual John Kelly Environmental Achievement Awards in December 2011. Congratulations to the recipients.

Cora Sanchez - Lifetime Achievement Award for her efforts in helping to create the Pūpūkea-Waimea Marine Life Conservation District.

The Kona Brewing Company - Environmentally Friendly Hawaii-Based Company Award for their role in promoting sustainable practices at all their facilities and advocating for coastal preservation.

Kyle Thiermann - Professional Surfer Award for creating a five-part video series, *Surfing for Change*, to encourage individuals to change their life habits to help save the environment.

John Kelly was a charismatic spokesman, natural leader and avid surfer and diver.

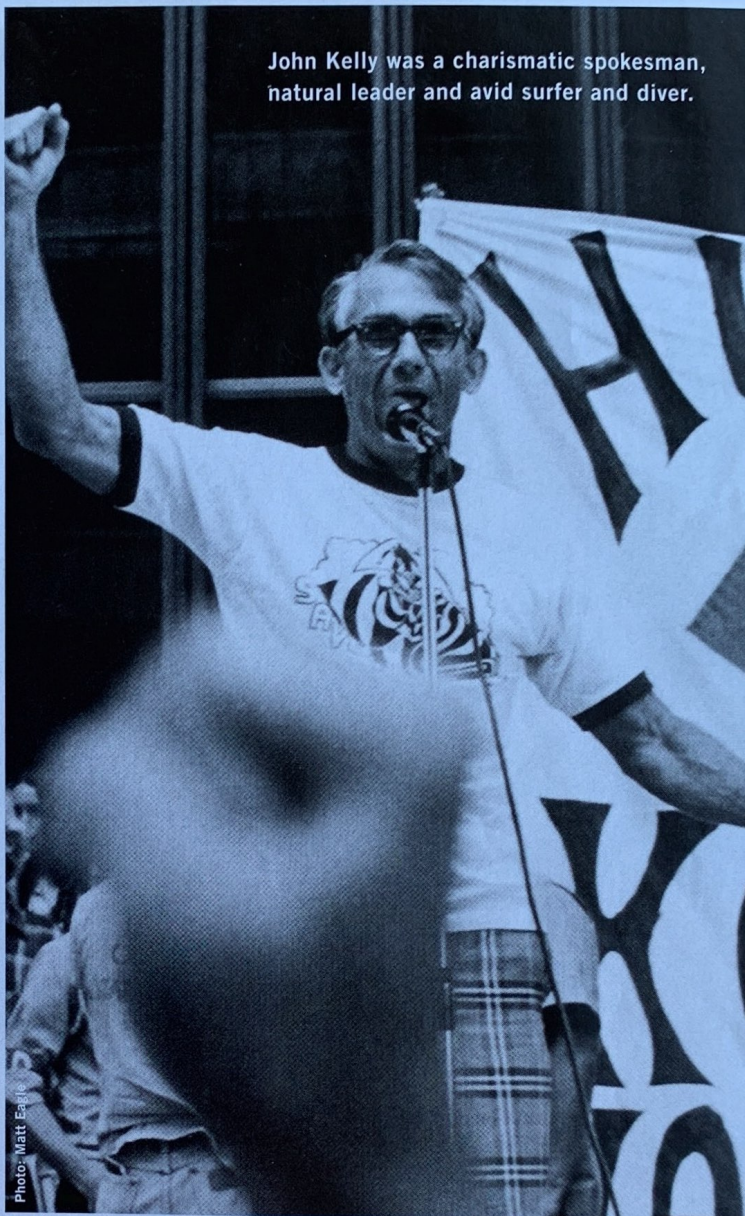


Photo: Matt Eagle

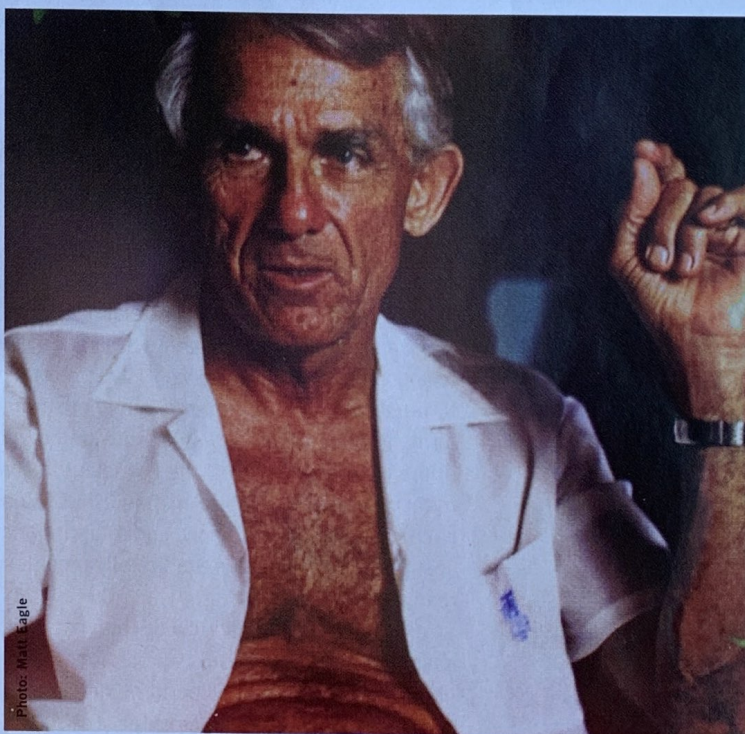


Photo: Matt Eagle