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A standing-room-only crowd gathered at Central Union Church in Honolulu on Saturday to celebrate the life of Samuel Cooke.

Philanthropist 'loved people'

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In a celebration of life as steeped in smiles and laughter as in tears, friends and family remembered Samuel Cooke on Saturday as a "visionary pragmatist," a "connector" and a man whose love of arts, culture and the environment was expressed in a half-century of philanthropic works.

An overflow crowd packed Central Union Church to pay respects to the retired senior vice president of Morgan Stanley and co-founder of the Manoa Heritage Center, who died on Dec. 2 at age 78.

"Sam loved people," said Kelvin Taketa, president and CEO of the Hawai'i Community Foundation and a friend of Cooke's for more than 35 years. "He was the bridge builder, the business executive who could walk down both sides of Bishop Street and who could represent the infamous Harry Weinberg in all of his shareholder disputes with the largest companies in Hawaii and still be friends with the beleaguered CEOs. He was

equally comfortable on Wall Street as he was in the parking lot of Misaki's in Kaunakakai."

A descendant of Amos Starr Cooke and Juliette Montague, who arrived in Hawaii with the eighth company of missionaries in 1837, Cooke had a long and abiding love for the islands that manifested in his many community affiliations.

Born in Honolulu, Cooke grew up on both Oahu and Molokai and attended Punahou School and Cornell University. In addition to his work as a financial adviser to public, private and nonprofit corporations, Cooke also served as founding chairman of the Board of Governors for the Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i and chairman of what was then the Honolulu Academy of Arts (now the Honolulu Museum of Art), founded by his great-grandmother Anna Rice Cooke. He was also chairman of the Hawai'i Community Foundation.

"Hawaii sustained Sam and he sustained it right back," said longtime friend David Lee.

Cooke and his wife, Mary

Moragne Cooke, founded the Manoa Heritage Center in 1996 to promote stewardship of the natural and cultural heritage of Hawaii.

They restored the historic home, Kualii, which was built by Cooke's grandparents, as well as the Kuka'o'o Heiau, believed to be the only remaining heiau intact in the ahupuaa of Waikiki.

Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell remembered his Manoa Valley neighbor as a "humble, humble man," whose good humor and down-to-earth demeanor belied the scope of his influence.

Among the hundreds who attended the memorial was Gov. David Ige, who praised Cooke's legacy of community involvement.

"Sam always saw the best in people and the best in situations," Ige said. "He was a healer who was able to bring the community together."

Cooke is survived by wife Mary; daughters Juliette, Catherine and Edith; and grandchildren Sam and Zoe.

The family welcomes donations to the Manoa Heritage Center, 2859 Manoa Road, Honolulu 96822.