

Saturday, August 06, 2011

Shinto shrine offers blessings for students heading back to school



In a back-to-school tradition that dates back centuries, a local Japanese Shinto shrine will hold a blessing for students from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday.

The ceremony will be at Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu, modeled after a shrine in southern Japan that celebrates a government official in ancient Japan who is considered "the deity of education," said a volunteer at the Hawaii shrine. The official, Michizane Sugawara, fell from grace because of political machinations and was exiled, but posthumously became the object of an "almost cultlike" reverence for his scholarly achievement, said the volunteer, who asked not to be identified.

"For some 1,800 years, students have been going to the shrine (in Japan) to receive divine blessings for their learning (and) to become more enthused about education," the volunteer said. "We've continued that tradition here in Hawaii."

The 10-minute ceremony is performed in traditional Shinto style, with a priest cleansing students of negative energies and blessing them with positive energy. Students of all faiths may participate.

The Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu shrine is at 1239 Olomea St. For information, call 841-4755 or visit www.e-shrine.org.

— Steven Mark