



## ISLAND MATTERS *Mufi Hannemann*

# It's Always All About The Aloha

It's that time again to take Team Aloha to Arizona to represent the 808 in one of the finest and largest basketball competitions held each spring in the western United States. Known as the Adidas Gauntlet Girls Basketball Tournament, it will be staged April 21-23 at Phoenix Stadium, home of the NFL Cardinals. This is the 11th time that I have led such an all-star contingent, and this year three leagues are represented: IHL, OIA and BIIF. The players are selected from a youth Basketball Jamboree that I have led for the past 24 years — all in the name of gender equity and promoting the late U.S. Rep. Pasty Mink's Title IX objectives.

Heading up this year's 10-person stellar squad is three-time Team Aloha member Cherilyn Molina of state champion Konawaena. Molina also was named the most valuable player in this year's Division I state tournament. She follows the pattern of older sister Chanelle, a starting guard at Washington State University, and Lia Galdeira, the first Hawaii high school player to be drafted in the WNBA — all of whom were selected to Team Aloha as freshmen. Joining the highly sought-after guard from



Team Aloha 2016 on the heels of their runner-up finish in Arizona. Seven out of nine players return as Team Aloha 2017 heads to Phoenix Stadium again to vie for a championship

PHOTO COURTESY K. OBREY

her Wildcats team this year are her talented running backcourt partner Mikayla Tablit and freshman forward Caiyle Kau-pu, who hopes to follow in the footsteps of Galdeira and the Molina sisters. State runner-up Maryknoll has the largest number of players, with four led by *Honolulu Star-Advertiser's* Fab 15 No. 2-ranked player in the state, sophomore Kamalu Kamakawiwoole, and the tallest prep post player in Hawaii, 6-foot-2 Bella Cravens. And one of the most versatile play-

ers in the state, Kamehameha Kapalama sophomore Kalina Obrey, was named again to Team Aloha. Other members of the talented squad include Team Aloha returnees Chayse Milne and Kodee Vienna of the Spartans, Brilie Kovaloff of Mid-Pacific Institute and Campbell's Gieani Balino.

One of the objectives of Team Aloha is to expose Hawaii's student-athletes to major college scouts and programs from around the country. Many of the young ladies from the

past have matriculated at places such as UH, BYU, Indiana, UNLV, Washington State, William and Mary, University of Alaska-Anchorage, Gonzaga, Idaho State, Utah State, New Mexico State, University of Portland and Saint Mary's, to name some examples. Through the years at these competitions, Team Aloha has won the overall championship twice and finished second on four occasions. In the last three years, Team Aloha has compiled an amazing record of 14 wins with

only two setbacks. Helping to bring about that exceptional winning streak were two highly successful prep coaches who headed up Team Aloha — Fran Villarmia-Kahawai, who won a state crown at Aiea and captured the overall Adidas Gauntlet title in 2014, and current Lady Bulldogs mentor Mona Faasoa, who has copped state titles at Kaimuki and very narrowly missed out winning the overall championship in OT in Arizona last spring.

This 2017 edition once again will be led by Kaiser High School vice principal Dana Takahara-Dias, former University of Hawaii Rainbow Wahine coach and player, and former Moanalua High School varsity head coach. Takahara-Dias masterfully skipped Team Aloha to its first-ever championship in its

2006 debut at the Nike Storm and Swish Tournament in California. That team included UH Wahine standouts Shawna-Lei Kuehu (Punahou) and Keisha Kanekoa (Honokaa); and Iwalani Rodriguez (Rosemead) and Jamie Smith (Iolani), who went on to shine at Utah and UNLV, respectively. One of her assistant coaches this year is Sherice Ajifu, MPI's girls varsity head coach, who in 2017 led the Division II Owls to its first state championship.

Team Aloha always represents Hawaii with pride and class, and I'm confident that this year's team will do us proud. Perennially well-coached and trained, the fact that a number of Hawaii players have and are succeeding in the collegiate basketball ranks demonstrates that our

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**Lani-Kailua Outdoor Circle**

## The Aloha Spirit

student-athletes can compete against the best in the nation if provided the exposure and opportunity.

In Hawaii, we know the reason for our hospitality industry's success is not only our sun, surf, sand and sea, but our aloha spirit. This is why we honor Hawaii's hard-working hospitality employees annually at Hawaii Lodging & Tourism Association's Na Po'e Pa'ahana Awards, where the nominees and finalists go above and beyond to share their aloha with our visitors. The finalists are recognized as the best of the best in Hawaii, and in years past we have had eight awardees who have gone on to become finalists on the Mainland at the highly prestigious "Stars of the Industry" award ceremony held in the nation's Capitol. One of my favorite finalist examples is housekeeper Leticia Gamiao from then-Aqua Waikiki Wave, who wrote daily thank-you notes to every single hotel guest accompanied by her special touch of aloha message. For her efforts, she won national recognition as Outstanding Lodging Employee of the Year in 2010.

Recently, the benefits of embracing the aloha spirit manifested in a very different and unique way. There was a story on KHON2 news about a waitress who was rewarded greatly for her special style of Hawaiian hospitality. Cayla Chandara was serving an Australian couple at one of the two restaurants in which she works at in Waikiki. They got along right away and began talking throughout dinner. The couple asked where Chandara was from, and she mentioned she had moved to Hawaii for school, but had to drop out and work two jobs because she could no longer

afford both school and the cost of living in Hawaii. To Chandara's surprise, the couple left her a \$400 tip that evening. After work, she went to their hotel to thank them with a card, flowers and desserts. The next day, the couple returned to the restaurant during her shift, and offered to pay off her student loans and debt, a sum of more than \$10,000, so she could continue the rest of her schooling. This story is so heartwarming because it shows that the spirit of hospitality and aloha can have a strong influence on both locals and visitors alike. Chandara's friendliness certainly impacted the couple in such a way that they felt compelled to help her situation, and in turn the couple's generosity changed Chandara's life for the better.

This story again evokes memories of many of our Na Po'e Pa'ahana nominees this year, such as a housekeeper who helps save his hotel money by conducting regular restoration projects, deep cleaning and repairing rooms to keep them in the inventory; or a club concierge who frequently stops by at the post office to pick up priority mail for guests who are without transportation. These are only a couple examples of the many incredible people working in our hospitality industry exuding the spirit of aloha. I believe Hawaii's employees are truly some of the best in our nation, and I hope the upcoming Stars of the Industry Awards in May proves that by signaling out another Hawaii representative for national recognition.

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