



ISLAND MATTERS *Mufi Hannemann*

PIC Celebrates 25 Years Of Stories

I have been a longtime fan and supporter of the arts. For decades, we in Hawaii and the Pacific have been featured in literature, music and film, while many performers who hail from the Pacific Islands have found well-deserved recognition around the globe. Of late, people of the Pacific have progressed toward film producing and directing, and I would be among the first to acknowledge these pioneers and others who are working assiduously to prepare Pacific

Islanders for opportunities to not only perform in, but also make films. That's why I applaud the work of a local nonprofit, Pacific Islanders in Communications (PIC), which for the past 25 years has presented Pacific Islander stories to a global audience through TV broadcasts, Web streaming and community engagement via film screenings. Pacific Islanders are defined as those whose ancestors were the indigenous people of Polynesia and Micronesia. In keeping with its mission, PIC helps Pacific Islander stories reach audiences worldwide through the funding of documentary films, national broadcasts on public television, digital storytelling, training of filmmakers, and community and educational screenings.

When I was mayor of Honolulu, I was thrilled to help welcome to Hawaii the New Zealand film *Whale Rider* for a special showing and workshop sponsored by PIC and promoted by the Girl Scouts. The low-budget film, shot entirely on location in New Zealand, was produced for \$3.5 million and made nearly \$42



Pacific Islanders In Communications staff (from left) Ianeta Lei, Remington Taum, Cheryl Hiras, executive director Leanne Ferrer, Jade Villanueva and Maluhia Kaimikaua

PHOTO FROM PIC

million. It earned an Academy Award best actress nomination for then-13-year-old Maori Keisha Castle-Hughes, and won international acclaim at the Toronto and Sundance film festivals. It was based on a novel by Maori writer Witi Ihimaera and directed by New Zealander Niki Caro. The film served as an excellent example of the tremendous potential of a successful and popular movie conceived, produced, directed and filmed by people from the Pacific Islands region.

What PIC does, it does well. Last year alone, PIC provided 22 Pacific Islander films to PBS. Some of those were part of PIC's "Pacific Heartbeat" series, now in its fifth season, that broadcasts to more than 85 percent of TV households in the United States. The acclaimed series is co-presented with PBS Hawaii.

Another co-presentation PIC shares with PBS Hawaii has just debuted nationally. *Family Ingredients* is a local series featuring chef Ed Kenney and a weekly guest, such as chef Alan Wong and singer Tiara Hernandez (Bruno Mars' younger sister). The

guests discover the origins of their favorite childhood dish, and along the way learn more about their culture's contributions to Hawaii and their lives. The series is co-produced by PIC and production company Rock Salt Media, and now is starting to shoot its second season. Executive producer and co-owner of Rock Salt Media is Native Hawaiian Heather Giugni, daughter of the late U.S. Senate Sergeant at Arms Henry Giugni, who has developed quite a track record as a

talented and accomplished film producer and is heavily involved with PIC.

This brings us to another of PIC's specialties: producer training. PIC works with independent producers to create and distribute programs about Pacific Islanders that bring new audiences to public television, advance issues, and represent diverse voices and points of view not usually seen on public or commercial television.

By offering workshops varying from the art of making short films, to distributing films nationally, to tips on starting up your own small business, PIC strives to train Pacific Islanders and non-Pacific Islanders to tell authentic stories of the Pacific.

After 25 years in existence, PIC has helped to produce more than 100 hours of programming for national broadcast, trained nearly 400 filmmakers, and organized more than 200 community screenings worldwide reaching nearly 60,000 people.

Despite all of this success, PIC is eager to do more, such

as accelerate its recruiting efforts to identify more Pacific Islanders who want to be guided and mentored to tell authentic stories about the Pacific. And while PIC is very grateful to receive a majority of its funding from Corporation for Public Broadcasting, its members want to cast their training net wider by reaching out to Pacific Islander students as early as middle school and high school so they view media as a viable career.

Lastly, PIC is seeking to create a film development fund in partnership with Hawaii Film Office and other interested investors to fund feature films made by and about Pacific Islanders. This would enable our Hawaii filmmakers to create movies like *Whale Rider* that speak to all audiences universally, yet subtly expose the masses to Pacific Islander stories.

As part of PIC's 25th anniversary celebration, the group will be recognizing 25 honorees by releasing "25 in 25" video vignettes that highlight their

positive contributions to PIC's mission. Those being honored either have set the foundation for PIC's achievements, or are steering PIC toward future success. The one-minute vignettes are being unveiled weekly on PIC's Facebook page and website, piccom.org, until the 25th honoree is announced in September.

If you are an arts aficionado and believe in the mission of PIC, you should consider supporting it Thursday, Sept. 8, at PIC's 25th anniversary celebration at Bishop Museum Great Lawn with dinner, entertainment and, of course, captivating films celebrating the Pacific Islander heritage. Individual tickets and table sponsorships are available on the above-mentioned website.

• Despite the abysmal primary election voter turnout once again, with only 34.7 percent of registered voters casting ballots (a new all-time low for Hawaii), the highlight to me on a positive note were the victories of Harry Kim for Hawaii Island mayor

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Kim, Kong Do It Their Way

again, who won the nonpartisan race outright by copping 52 percent of the vote, and Aiea Rep. Sam Kong's re-election to state House District 33 because of no opposition in the general election.

Besides both men being of Korean ancestry, they share similar campaign styles, though I doubt if they ever conversed, let alone met. They both won by defying the conventional rules of politics. They both eschewed political contributions — in the case of Kim, the maximum he would accept was \$10, and Kong, who moonlights as a cab driver, accepts none. They both reveled in sign waving alone, not with the usual throngs of supporters. One Big Island resident related that, if you were driving by and saw Kim, now thrice elected as county mayor, standing all by his lonesome and offered to pull over to stand with him, he would tell you, "No need."

Kong also not only refused the help of willing Aiea neighbors to sign-wave with him, but he also refused to solicit or accept endorsements from organizations. In the waning days of the campaign that pitted two Democrats against each other, his worthy opponent did a mail out and conducted a media blitz. But that didn't faze Kong at all. "It's all about the people, and I trust them to make the right decision," he said. So when I congratulated him on eking out a 37-vote margin of victory, his response was typical of the low-key, soft-spoken former owner of Aiea Florist: "Unreal, ya? Thank you."

Yep, "unreal" is precisely the word to describe the success stories of Harry Kim and Sam Kong.

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