



ISLAND MATTERS *Mufi Hannemann*

The Kumu Behind Hula Ka Noeau

I always marvel at the creativity of our local people. They're artists and musicians that can compete with the best; designers at the forefront of fashion; novelists giving voice to stories of Hawaii and its people; filmmakers and playwrights capturing life in these islands. Among these creative forces is definitely Michael Pili Pang, whom I consider one of our premier artistic leaders in hula.

Michael Pili wears many hats, all reflecting his artistry and creativity. He is kumu hula of Halau Hula Ka Noeau — celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. Michael

takes great pride in the fact that he learned hula as a devout student of the legendary hula master Maiki Aiu Lake. He also is director and artistic director of Muolaulani, and an administrator, producer, impresario, hula choreographer and cultural consultant. He's now a lecturer in hula for University of Hawaii at Manoa's Music Department's ethnomusicology program.

When I was mayor, Michael was my executive director of the Office of Culture and the Arts, where he upgraded the mission of that office big time as he brought his talents to staging inaugurations and

state-of-the-City addresses, numerous performances at Honolulu Hale and elsewhere, and large-scale events on city grounds. He oversaw the arts in public buildings program, ensured that the Hawaiian culture and the other ethnic cultures that make up Hawaii always were included appropriately in city programs and activities, and built a solid and reliable staff. He also was a Pacific Century Fellow, a program that is all about nurturing and mentoring the next generation of island leaders.

But back to his work in the world of hula. Honolulu-born Michael, a graduate



At Bette Midler's 70th birthday celebration at Michael Pili Pang's Halau in Pawa'a were (from left) Wendy Ford, Michael Pili Pang, Bette Midler, Cheryl Nakamatsu, Sheryl Kekahuna, Lehua Magno and Daisy Canite-Miyashiro

PHOTO COURTESY MICHAEL PILI PANG

of Saint Louis High School, opened Halau Hula Ka Noeau (HHKN) in 1986 in Waimea on Hawaii island. A few years later, he relocated to Honolulu to complete his Master of Arts degree at UH, having obtained his BA from University of Puget Sound and, at the same time, founded a second halau on Oahu.

Over the years, the halau has earned top honors at hula competitions throughout the state; is an annual participant at the Prince Lot Festival; helped found the Asia Pacific Dance Festival; and performed at community events in the Islands. The group has

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A Holiday Lesson And A Bright Tradition

performed (check this out) for Bette Midler, Dionne Warwick, Jason Scott Lee and President Obama. In 1996, HHKN was invited to be a part of Hawaii Theatre's inaugural season, and for the past 20 consecutive years he has produced and presented its annual hula concert, *HULIAU*, at this historic venue.

Michael then created one of the first nonprofit cultural organizations in the islands. This development has afforded the halau numerous opportunities to share and perpetuate the art of hula with people in Hawaii and around the world. They have performed for children in the Yukon, transplanted Hawaiians in New York City, lovers of culture in Japan, with indigenous groups in Taiwan, and for people from all walks of life here at home throughout the 808.

He and HHKN are respected for their academic excellence and often invited to conduct lectures, demonstrations and performances at universities in North America and Asia. In fact, the group will be heading to University of Massachusetts at Amherst and Slippery Rock University in Pittsburgh next winter to share their talents and their love for our Hawaiian culture with those academic institutions.

In the 30 years of the halau's existence, kumu hula Pili Pang has conducted seven traditional hula graduations. These 'uniki ceremonies have graduated 22 kumu hula, 15 ho'opa'a (drummer/chanter), and 20 olapa (dancer). These cultural practitioners have gone on to share the art of hula with others throughout the Hawaiian Islands, North American and Japan.

In 2014, HHKN moved into a permanent home in Pawa'a

on Punahou Street, where it has 15 classes a week. They come from all over the state to learn and perform under Michael's watchful eye and direction.

On Saturday, Dec. 17, Halau Hula Ka Noeau will host its 30th anniversary gala at Sheraton Waikiki Ballroom to honor those who have built the halau and supported Kumu Pili Pang and his haumana for the past 30 years. It promises to be an entertaining and exciting demonstration of the talents of the halau and Michael's impressive creativity, so don't miss it. It would make a wonderful Christmas gift, if you're looking for a memorable and entertaining evening during this holiday season.

Information on the celebration and HHKN is available at 285-4035 and artofhula.com.

Speaking of the holiday season, I got the sweetest letter recently from a student from Aina Haina Elementary. I get my fair share of gratitude and appreciation from people from all over the world, but this one from Joshua is worth sharing with you because of his tender age and what his example means for us as adults. He mailed a handwritten letter to me recently, saying mahalo for "fixing his street" when I was mayor. He wrote, in part, "The (city) truck ... (would) turn to round the coulddesack (cul-de-sac) and then, shift its tires so hard that it crushed the road and left a big hole. When you were mayor you help bring machines to fix the street. I hope you have an amazing Thanksgiving with lots of fun ... Then he ends with this PS: "(My) street is still doing fine."

Joshua, thank you for taking the time to write that wonder-

ful letter because it reminded me of two things that we need to do more of in our society — myself included. No. 1: Be quick to acknowledge all of those that help you bring about positive results in your line of endeavor. Certainly, there was a team of dedicated city employees that went out to fix the road and continue to maintain it until today, so I share Joshua's gratitude with them for this good deed.

No. 2: It is never too late to express your appreciation for something you are truly grateful for. It has been more than six years since I left City Hall, and somehow young Joshua felt moved and motivated to write his letter. Joshua, mahalo for your example!

Finally, I always have reminded people that, if you want to get into the holiday mood instantly, visit Honolulu Hale and Kapolei Hale during the Christmas season.

Joan Manke, who recently announced her retirement from heading up this popular event dedication and passion for Honolulu City Lights, began as director of customer services during my administration. I am, therefore, not surprised that she continued to do a great job all these years.

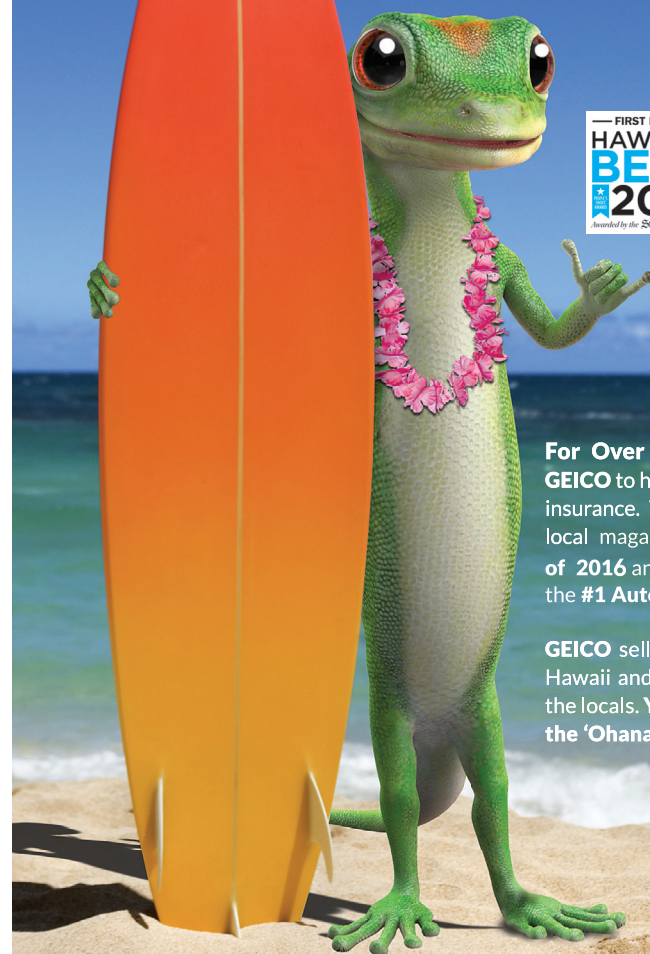
At the end of the day, we owe a debt of gratitude to Mayor Frank Fasi for having the vision and inspiration to start this great city tradition.

So, congratulations to the scores of volunteers and city employees who toil tirelessly throughout the year, even raising funds, to make this spectacular display possible and for keeping the tradition alive!

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