

Hawaiian luau entertains hundreds

By Jodi Schneider McNamee
Correspondent

Aloha is more than a word of greeting or farewell. Aloha means mutual regard and affection and extends warmth in caring with no obligation in return.

In old Hawaii, every passerby was greeted and offered hospitality whether a total stranger or acquaintance, and the aloha spirit is a well-known reference to the attitude of friendly acceptance for which the Hawaiian Islands are so famous.

Fortunately, one doesn't have to cross an ocean to experience the aloha spirit; last Thursday it could be found right here in Sisters.

Hundreds of folks gathered at Sisters' Village Green to enjoy an authentic Hawaiian meal featuring traditional Polynesian dance and music for the 3rd annual Hawaiian luau presented by Sisters Park & Recreation District (SPRD) and The Rotary Club of Sisters.

The show offered up a trip through the South Pacific Islands with an accomplished cast of artists performing to the cultural music and dances of the Hawaiian and Tahitian islands.

Shannon Mokuahi Rackowski, SPRD's adult program coordinator and hula workshop instructor, was born and raised on the island of Oahu, Hawaii, and has performed the hula dance since she was five years old. The hula is accompanied by a chant or song that preserves the stories, traditions and culture of Hawaii.

"I dance all of them, but

my favorite is the hula, the traditional dance of Hawaii," Rackowski said.

Since the ukulele was first introduced to the islands in the 19th century by Portuguese immigrants, the delightful diminutive instrument has been an active part of Hawaiian music and culture. Today, its sweet and tender sound conjures up associations people have with Hawaii: the warm climate, the aroma of fragrant blossoms and an overall feeling of contentment.

Hawaiian music provided by Sisters Ukulele Group with instructor Peggy Tehan kicked off the luau, performing in front of the food area, as folks waited on the buffet line for a full Hawaiian dinner including kalua pig, lomi lomi salmon, sticky rice, fresh pineapple, coconut cake and orange passion-fruit juice.

A special highlight right before the dance performances began had Toni Abbott from England very surprised. Abbott is a teammate with the UK all-star girls basketball team, and it was her birthday. Rackowski arranged for all of Abbott's teammates, including Coach Pearl, to deliver a beautiful Hawaiian lei to hang around her neck as Rackowski led the entire audience in "Happy Birthday."

With hundreds of folks spread out on the Village Green lawn in their folding chairs or chaise lounges, Rackowski began her traditional hula.

Rosemary Miller, dance instructor for Halau (Hula) Uhane dance group from Redmond, had her group

ready for some Polynesian dancing. Ages ranged from 18 months up to adults.

"We have kids that have been dancing here for three years and have improved with age. Our goal is for the dancers to feel the dance they are performing," said Miller.

“ Our goal is for the dancers to feel the dance they are performing. — Rosemary Miller

Musician Kurt Silva plays everything from country to Motown, but he has a special place in his heart for Hawaiian melodies. Silva performed with Tanya Hackett, a hula dancer from Bend.

Then with tiki torches lit and traditional Polynesian music with heart-pounding Tahitian drumming began, a



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

Youngsters carried on the Hawaiian tradition.

talented cast of dancers from the Halau Uhane group performed a fast-moving Tahitian dance that brought a hush over the crowd.

Mele'uhane, a new group performing for the Sisters luau from the Island of Hawaii added to the fantastic lineup of the evening.

Twenty-one-year-old singer-songwriter Leokani Lindsey and his dad, Keikilani, kicked off the last set as the sun descended in

the summer sky, performing "Rain Song," a solo instrumental piece he wrote.

"We have been professional musicians for the past 13 years performing everywhere in Hawaii," Lindsey said. "Eventually we thought about expanding and started to branch out and network with other musicians. We've been touring around for the past year now from Colorado to Washington. Mele'uhane means 'The Spirit of Music.'"

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