

LOCAL NEWS

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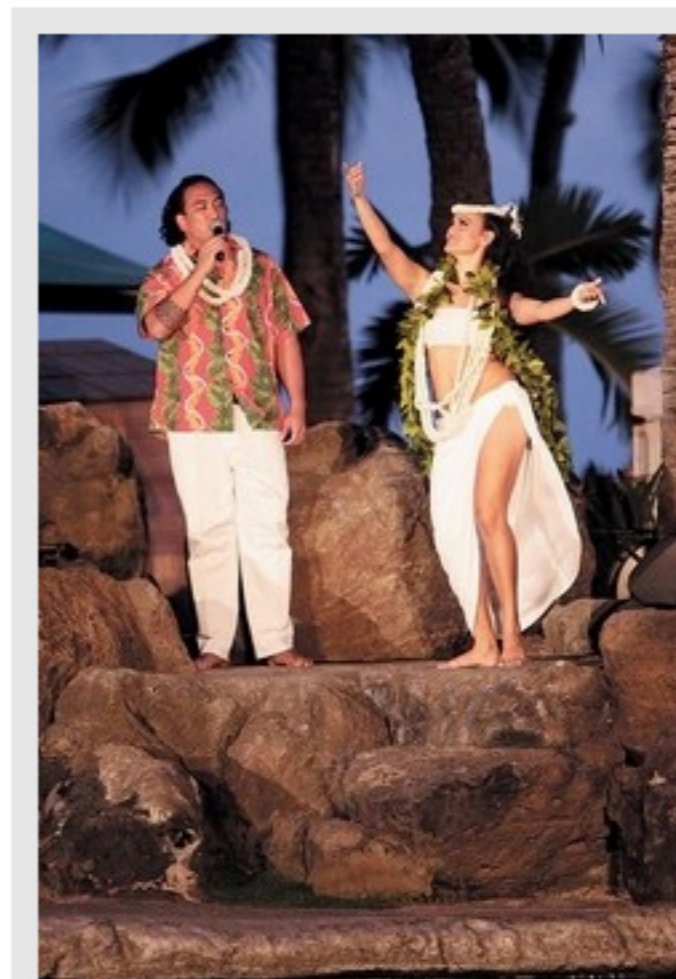
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D.C. lu'au could be boon for tourism

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By **Wayne Harada**
Special to The Advertiser

Performers from Tihati Productions' Polynesian shows are bringing Island song and dance to the White House's South Lawn Friday night to highlight a lu'au fit for a president.



Some cast members from Tihati Productions leave for the White House tonight for a Friday night lu'au.

Jay Metzger

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President Obama and the first family are expected to attend the picnic. A welcome side benefit: Publicity from the event could provide a shot in the arm for Hawaii tourism.

The Obamas will join congressional delegations from the 50 states and their families in sampling Island culture and feasting on a Hawaii-inspired menu created and prepared by chef Alan Wong.

"When we received the call from the White House to inform us that we've been chosen to perform for the president, I wondered, 'How do they know about Tihati Productions?'" said a pleased Jack Thompson, patriarch of the company. After "celebrating 40 years in the entertainment business, the opportunity to perform at the White House is the ultimate."

"I thought it was a prank," said Tihati's Cha Thompson.

Then she realized this was the real deal.

"Tihati is the ambassador of Hawaii to the White House for all of us — has been, for a long time," said Jerry Gibson, general manager of the Hilton Hawaiian Village, which is helping pay for the trip.

"I've known them for more than 25 years, when they opened at the Hyatt Regency Maui. All of us in the (visitor) industry here will benefit from

their performance — the spotlight will be on Hawaii, and it's got to help all of us ... in this economic time."

The Island delegation leaves tonight. The itinerary includes a tour of the White House arranged by Sen. Daniel K. Akaka.

6 FIRE-KNIFE DANCERS

Expect a lot of aloha along the way, said Cha Thompson.

The show will include hula by Thompson, who will perform "E Nei" in a rare return to the spotlight, and other elements from Tihati's showroom spectacles.

"The White House specifically wanted a Samoan knife twirler," she said. "Well, we will bring six fire-knife dancers, who will do a pyramid formation."

Tihati performances draw on the traditions of Hawaii, Samoa, Tahiti, Fiji, the Cook Islands and Maori New Zealand. To fill out the cast for this special performance, the Thompsons raided Tihati productions at the Sheraton Princess Kaiulani, The Royal Hawaiian, the Hilton Hawaiian Village, the Hyatt Regency Maui, the Hyatt Regency Kauai and the Waikoloa Marriott.

"We're pulling out our best, bringing four giant pahu, measuring 10 feet high and 4 feet in diameter," said Cha Thompson. "We'll do hula, Tahitian, everything ... and we'll feature that six-man Samoan fire dance pyramid."

'WE ARE HONORED'

Misty Tufono, daughter of the Thompsons, who is vice president of the family company's Maui Division and a performer in Tihati's new show at The Royal Hawaiian hotel, will perform a traditional oli, "Mele O Na Kai Ewalu," which she describes as a chant "that programs the eight glorious ocean channels of our Islands."

Tufono said the White House engagement will help stimulate interest in the Islands — to help distinguish and expose Hawaiian and other Polynesian entertainment forms — and perhaps help boost visitor occupancy in the future.

"We are honored to represent Hawaii," she said.

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