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D.C. luau gets taste of Tihati

By Katherine Nichols
 POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jun 24, 2009
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When a representative called to tell Cha Thompson that Tihati Productions had been selected to perform at the White House, she doubted the authenticity of the information.

"I really thought it was a friend playing games," laughed Thompson, owner and executive vice president of Tihati. "I said, 'Yeah, right, and I live in the Brown House.'"

It's fitting that President Barack Obama decided to forego checkered tablecloths and burgers on the barbecue and transform the annual Congressional Picnic into a massive luau. Representatives from Congress and their families -- an estimated 2,500 people -- will join the Obama family tomorrow on the South Lawn.

"People think of us as a Polynesian show, but we're so much more than that," said Thompson. "This show is going to be predominantly Hawaiian with kahiko (ancient) chants."

Along with 10-foot-tall pahu drums, the 20 Tihati dancers and musicians from several Hawaii islands will bring homemade guava jams and jellies and approximately 10 boxes of yellow pua melia (plumeria) lei sewn by Thompson's grandchildren.

In addition, Thompson will make a rare stage appearance. Typically, she dances only when Polynesian royalty visit the islands.

"Now I'm going to be performing for American royalty," she said.

Said Afatia Thompson, vice president of Tihati, "It's truly an honor. We're completely ecstatic that we've been given this tremendous opportunity. We are humbled at the same time to represent Hawaii and our people here."

Tihati is a 30-year-old locally based company employing more than 1,000 musicians, singers, dancers, choreographers, artisans, writers and technicians.

Renowned Hawaii chef Alan Wong also will travel to the White House, with 14 assistants. His special menu will provide the foundation for the luau.

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Tihati Productions will perform at a luau tomorrow at the Congressional Picnic.
 COURTESY JAY METZGER

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