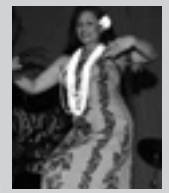


cultural
CLOSEUP



Polynesia says 'Aloha' to Broward County

BY SAMANTHA ROJAS

Preservation drives Dr. Rose Marie del Rosario's passion. As chair of the Polynesian Cultural Association, she works tirelessly with the organization's co-founder and president, Tama Leao, and 20 other dedicated volunteer members to keep the subtle and gentle nature of the culture and traditions alive for current and future generations. Oceans away, yet right here in Broward County, the Polynesian culture is represented through performances, workshops and festivals that serve not only to entertain, but also to educate and enrich the lives of those who have traveled far from their homeland, and those who know nothing of it.

Dr. Rose's concern is that the dance, culture and family values might not

survive without a path being cleared for them to be showcased and honored; the Polynesian Cultural Association is one organization with a mission to clear that path. "Local tourist establishments don't give a true representation of the subtle nature and meaning of the dance and its language," says Dr. Rose. "It is in danger of being lost."

This gently mysterious group of islands in the South Pacific Ocean carries a history and geography that are quite foreign to most other people. For example, did you know that it has been said that Samoa is the heart of Polynesia? Or that Guam was once called the "Island of Thieves" because Spain sent exiled slaves to live there? Most important,

Dr. Rose wants it to be understood that every Polynesian dancer is telling a story of prayer, thanks and nature with every twist of her wrist or sway of his waist.

Now in its fifth year as a Broward County not-for-profit organization working diligently toward exposure and honor of "true" Polynesia, this association has a focus to research, disperse and celebrate the history and future of the many islands referred to as Polynesia first by Charles de Broses in 1756. Geographically, Polynesia may simply be described as a triangle with its corners at Hawaii, Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Rapa Nui (Easter Island). Micronesia and Melanesia are also considered

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Polynesia

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part of this chain of islands in most contexts.

Working to provide educational opportunities to learn about the culture and help preserve it through a traditional perspective and also embrace its modern interpretation, the Polynesian Cultural Association has held an annual festival locally in which these subtleties can be shared and cherished by the migrated population and those Americans and visitors interested in learning new ways of life.

This year's festival takes place from noon to 8 p.m. on May 3 – during

Asia and Pacific Island Heritage Month – at Hagen Park in Wilton Manors. The night-time hours allow for the grand finale of the fire dancers to be seen in all their foreign beauty. A spontaneous dance by The Elders is likely to break out in mid-afternoon amidst local fare of chicken cooked with coconut milk, very spicy pork and lots of rice. Taro, a heavy root vegetable, is a staple ingredient in many dishes and the Samoan Noodle is a staple in the Samoan diet. Arts and craft vendors bring materials from Samoa, Tahiti and Hawaii and demonstrations include lei-making, weaving palm baskets, playing the ukulele and how to hula.

The Polynesian Cultural Association also offers dance workshops and demonstrations in the summer and spring months. Members are invited to schools and libraries for special workshops on history, islands and culture and offer occasional dance workshops for adults on the intermediate and master level, to give an understanding of the moves, the drumming, the language of the hands and the language of the hips.

In a time of diversity and comingling of ideas and cultures, we can take solace from a group of islands on the other side of the world, who bring us spiritual and peaceful senses and beauty in dance. Scottish novelist Robert Louis Stevenson and post-impressionist painter Paul Gauguin found a home in these islands, both in their life and in their death. This group of more than 1,000 islands, settled by a migrating group of Austronesians, is a world away in simplicity, subtle spiritual values and deep aesthetic arts and culture.

For more information or to get involved in the Polynesian Cultural Association, call (954) 938-9010, or visit www.polynesianshow.com.

Mahola. ★

Samantha Rojas is a freelance writer for the Broward Cultural Division.

CITY CORNER

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Hollywood CRA Offers Trolley

Visitors staying on Hollywood Beach through April 27 can catch a scenic ride to and from the Historic Downtown District and the Hollywood Beach Broadwalk aboard an air-conditioned trolley. The "HOT Express Beach and Downtown Circular Trolley" is offered by the Hollywood Office of Tourism (HOT) and the Hollywood Community Redevelopment Agency. The service runs on Thursday and Friday from 5 p.m. to 1 a.m.; Saturday from noon to 1 a.m.; and Sunday from noon to 9 p.m.

CRA Beach District Executive Director Gil Martinez said the trolley service is designed to enhance the visitor experience, foster redevelopment interest in Hollywood Beach and direct new business to the Central Beach Business District and Historic Downtown District. For information on the HOT Express, call (954) 980-9777 or visit www.VisitHollywood.org.

In other Hollywood news, the CRA was honored recently by the Florida Redevelopment Association with the prestigious 2007 President's Award for "Best Capital Projects/ Beautification" for the innovative ArtsPark at Young Circle, which opened in March 2007. ★