

# On the Town: School teaches culture to islanders and Hawaiians at heart



Hula teacher Keoki Wang plays the ancient drum "ipu heke" and chants while dancers perform hula routines honoring Hawaiian leaders of the past. (Photo by Joyce Rudolph)

By **Joyce Rudolph**

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**“H**ula” knew a dance school that pays homage to the Hawaiian islands is alive and well in Glendale?

It’s called Hula Halau Na Mamo O Pana’Ewa, which translates to “Offspring of Pana’ewa.”

Pana’ewa refers to an area near Hilo on the Big Island of Hawaii, said Keoki Wang, hula teacher and owner of the nonprofit school. He inherited the school from his grandmother whose family is from that part of

Hawaii.

It has been in Glendale for six years. It's more of a cultural preservation society, he said. Participants not only take classes in hula, but learn the culture and the ancient chants as well as make the costumes and some of the musical instruments.

They compete at — and win — dance competitions and have two public shows a year — one in spring, the other in the fall.

I was invited to the recent ho'ike, (show), by Glendale's former first lady Linda Weaver, wife of former Mayor/Councilman Dave Weaver. Linda Weaver is from Hawaii and the Weavers' daughter and granddaughter are members of the group.

The event was held in John Wayne Performing Arts Center at Glendale High School and drew roughly 700 people.

Whether it's the hand gestures and sway of the barefoot dancers, females and males, the beautiful costumes or the mesmerizing drums, called 'ipu heke, one can't help but walk away with a sense of peace and tranquility.

For the dancers, who range in age from 4 to 77, it's great exercise with low impact on the body, Wang said.

"It has stretching, reaching and full range of motion. It's good for the young ones to learn about their body and older dancers to be able to reconnect and utilize their bodies to the fullest," he said.

The portions of the show featuring ancient drums and chants honored the past famous chiefs, kings and queens and places in Hawaiian culture.

The modern dances illustrated future generations leading the way. Those dances also honored the places from where they came, Wang said.

A highlight was the musical accompaniment of the trio known as Keauhou, made up of Nicholas Lum, Zachary Lum and Jonah Solatario. They flew to the mainland just for the show and left early to fly back to Hawaii for another performance.

The show's delightful master of ceremonies was Leonard Leiwalo, who has danced with Wang for many years. Wang calls him his hula brother.

Leiwalo provided a bit of comic relief when he left the stage and came back in a grass skirt and lei. His partner, a female dressed in a male dancer's costume, giggled throughout.

The audience was asked to stand up and hold hands during the last song "Hawaii Aloha" as a sign of unity and peace.

The school draws people from Hawaii as well as those with diverse backgrounds, who Wang calls Hawaiians at heart. New student enrollment continues throughout October and the next public show will be May 19, again in the John Wayne Performing Arts Center.

For more information, visit [hnmop.com](http://hnmop.com).

## **Campbell Center benefits from bowling event**

The Campbell Center clients and community supporters will be vying for the first-place trophy at the 26th annual fundraising Bowl-A-Thon on Nov. 5 at Pickwick Lanes in Burbank.

Proceeds help the center provide its programs and services to its developmentally disabled client population. Sponsorships are still available, as are spaces for teams.

The donation for a team of four bowlers is \$150. Donors can also sponsor clients' participation at \$40 each. Deadline for sponsorship and registration is Friday.

For information, contact Rita Tomassian-Hopkins at (818) 242-2434, Ext. 312 or [rita@thecampbell.org](mailto:rita@thecampbell.org).

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