

Taste a Hawaiian island oasis in the desert

By Valerie Miller

Contributing Features Writer

Aloha!! A cool island breeze could be felt on Saturday night as a little bit of the Hawaiian spirit blew into Las Vegas when the UNLV Hawaiian Club held its annual luau.

Over 500 students, residents and visitors turned out for the food, fun and festivities that took place by the Thomas and Mack Center under a tent.

There might not have been any little grass shacks or tropical beaches Saturday, but you would never know it from the atmosphere as Hawaiian bands played the sounds of the islands and dancers performed the hula to thunderous applause.

Some of the most popular Hawaiian entertainers from both the local scene, as well as acts that flew in all the way from Hawaii, took part.

"We had the headlining groups Joy and Palolo flown in from Hawaii just for this event," said Mohsen Azizoltani, the faculty advisor for the UNLV Hawaiian Club.

"We paid for the chef and his crew to fly in from Hawaii and they had been cooking since Thursday at the UNLV Hotel College's kitchen," he added. "They even brought some of the food with them from Hawaii that would have been hard to find here in Las Vegas. We wanted everything on the menu to be very authentic Hawaiian."

The food at the luau definitely was traditional Hawaiian as guests were treated to such delicacies as poi, lomi lomi, opihi, poke, mahi mahi with capers, teri beef and kalua pig. For dessert, there was delicious haupia cake and coconut cake, along with pineapple and fruit punch.

Guests at this year's luau were treated to some of the best Hawaiian entertainment around. The Wala'au Brothers (pronounced "Braddahs"), Braddah Toma and Braddah Guy of the popular "Island Kine" radio show on KLAV served as the masters of ceremony for the event. The brothers proved especially popular with the ladies in the audience as they did their best rendition of the hula along with the other dancers.

Entertainment at the luau also included the Las Vegas Hawaiians Band, Kuma Hula Ipolani Silva of Halau O Moani Ke'ala dancers and serenaders of Las Vegas, Manoa and UNLV student dancers. Production companies L.A.V.A., Curly Koa (owned by UNLV instructor Katherine Pohndorf) and Roy Sakuma Productions contributed much of the night's entertainment.

Headlining group Joy and Palolo, both extremely popular contemporary Hawaiian recording artists, also flew in from Hawaii for the luau and were especially appreciated, although all the entertainment was enjoyed.

Of special interest to many was the fact that one of the most famous ukele players in the world, Lyle Ritz, performed with Joy at

the luau. Ritz has performed with most of the top recording artists of all time, including Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley.

The luau was put together by the UNLV Hawaiian Club and its students, many of who also danced in the luau. Azizoltani said that the large turnout for the event shows how hard the students worked on it, and he was quick to also point out that it would not have been possible without the support of the community.

"The size of this luau was pretty big. Five hundred people is pretty good for a student organized event where they are running it," Azizoltani said. "They did an outstanding job, especially when they had to transport all that food back and forth."

The spirit of Hawaii is com-

munity support, Azizoltani said, and that was certainly true for the luau.

"Hawaiians are very supportive of each other, their cultural background is that way," he said. "We wanted to get everyone involved in the event."

A fact that may surprise many about the UNLV Hawaiian Club, which was formed in 1989, is it is the biggest club on campus with over 350 members. Azizoltani feels that part of the reason for the lack of knowledge of the club may be due to the fact there is a common misconception about any clubs with an ethnic base.

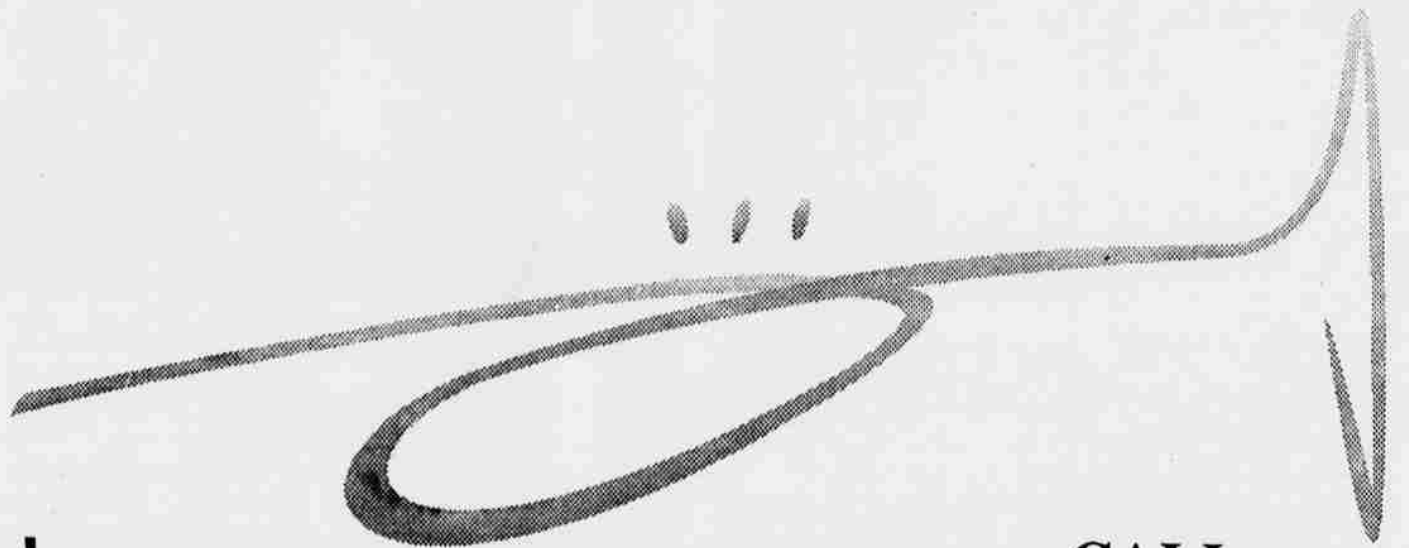
"This happens with all the clubs, where people believe they have to be from that area in order to join, but we encourage all students to join. We want people who

are not from Hawaii to join, because they can learn so much about the Hawaiian culture from doing that," Azizoltani explained, adding he is not from Hawaii.

"This is a club that is not just for Hawaiians, but for everyone," added Aaron Whiting, hotel administration senior, who is treasurer of the club.

There will be an end of the year party in May, and all students will be welcome to attend, or can call 895-3617 for more information on the party and the club, Whiting said.

From the perspective of a person who has never been to the islands, it was obvious that it didn't matter what your origins were, just where your heart was at that moment. As Bruddah Toma said, "It's the aloha spirit. Live aloha."



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