

Canoeing more than a day at the races

□ Students learn strokes of Hawaiian history and community

"A strong crew without proper timing, even if they are made up of the strongest on the island, will be beaten by a small crew with good timing and a good feel for the canoe."
— The Hui Nalu Canoe Club Handbook

By Alan Matsuoaka
Star-Bulletin

A ponytailed girl who's pushing 4½ feet turns to her companion and confides, "I hate paddling when it's like this." It's 3:30 one afternoon this week and a group of kids are waiting at Maunaloa Bay park for canoe practice to begin, but dark clouds over Hawaii Kai threaten rain, the wind carries a bite, the ocean is silver and choppy.

The coach, Reney Ching, arrives and the gaggle turns cohesive, a unit. "One-two-three," and canoes are in the water.

"Boys, boys, come on, quickly everybody," Ching commands. Bad weather and a sewage spill delayed the start of the practice season for two weeks last month and the first race is June 4.

Ching, 33, shouts at a crew about 100 yards offshore. "Paddles up . . . dig! Now pick it up, pick it up. Mandy, get Erin to give a deeper blade. Mandy!" The canoe moves out.

"We try to get these kids ready for races but we don't only focus on that," she says. "You work with the kids, trying to get them to work with each other and trust each other, because in the canoe they have to realize it takes six of them to make a canoe move, not just one. Attitude's 50 percent of our program."

The program comes from Hui Nalu, the 81-year-old canoe club with a reputation as strongly competitive but whose members talk about a tradition of putting family and culture first. On Monday Hui Nalu — "The Club of the Waves" — will hold its second annual Family Day fund-raiser at Koko Head District Park, and the kids are invited.

"We normally, or most canoe clubs normally, have done beer busts," fund-raiser coordinator Sandy Combis ex-

plained. "In those days, people looked forward to that. But today, with the liability and all the kinds of negatives in a beer bust, we decided it wasn't a really good idea."

She added: "Society's really changed, Hawaii's a real rat race, people are on the go, I think a lot of families don't spend enough time together. They don't."

"They're so involved with this and that, with meetings, this is just one day out of their time, to come together and enjoy."

Last year the club's better idea drew an estimated 400 people. This year's fund-raiser — from noon until 5:30 p.m. — includes a petting zoo, Hawaiian entertainment (Kaleo O Kalani, Taro Bran, the Nu'uanu Brothers, among others), canoe and kayak displays, and "make and take" booths where people can learn lei-making skills in the haku, ti leaf, will and Micronesian styles.

The activities fit in with Combis' description of Hui Nalu as an "educating club," a way of passing on aspects of Hawaiian culture with the club's rich heritage as its qualification.

Old newspaper stories say it was formed in 1908 to take on the then new, and still archrival, Outrigger club (Combis, with a trace of envy, calls Outrigger "a Beverly Hills club" with lockers and showers, but notes Hui Nalu will have the same when it affiliates itself with a Hawaii Kai yacht club in a few years).

At first Hui Nalu concentrated on swimming, a reasonable idea when a founding father is Duke Kahanamoku, but soon it was conquering canoe races. Its roster eventually carried names that sound like part of the index to a Hawaiian history text: Dole, Castle, Wilcox.

RECENTLY, though, Outrigger has had the edge.

The club's current president is Myron "Pinky" Thompson, the Bishop Estate trustee. Thompson recalls hanging out with Kahanamoku at the Moana Hotel and says the family emphasis goes back to the fact that co-founders were the Olympic swimmer's cousins.

He sees canoeing as more than sport. "It's an opportunity to learn another skill about something that is uniquely Hawaiian," said Thompson (who, incidentally, got his nickname after his



By Ken Sakamoto, Star-Bulletin

Sandy Combis, foreground, coordinator for the Hui Nalu Canoe Club's Family Day, said the entertainment event came about as a way for the community to come together for a day of music, relaxation and learning about Hawaiian culture. Last year the event drew 400 people.

mother had two sons and, predicting he would be a girl, bought a pink layette).

"It builds their capacity for a group process and the whole business of doing something well, assisting a group to achieve a goal of, to put it in a kind of mushy way, to achieve excellence in whatever they do," he said.

Coach Ching, otherwise a Punahou cook and paddling and track coach, has seen that happen.

"I had a 12-and-under crew three years ago that was in last place, I'm talking about eighth place, they didn't even place," she said. "Last year they came in second, and that's the same crew, they all came back. So this year,

we're hoping that we can get it."

At the park Combis is watching Thompson's son, Nainoa, the Hokulea navigator, rig-up Hui Nalu's newest addition, a 45-foot-long sailing canoe colored in club black-and-gold for a test race this weekend.

The \$7,200 canoe rests on carpet remnants, some with pictures of Chuck E. Cheese on them. Standing by are Mike Harbold, Billy Robello and Kevin Olds, who are talked about as kayakers in the next Olympics.

The younger Thompson, 36, is still learning. The question is about canoe sailing. "It's like canoe paddling but