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Samoan Heritage Initiative Program 2023: A Week-long Celebration of Faith, Culture, Community, and the Future Generation

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The vibrant spirit of the Samoan community in the state of Hawaii was on full display as the 2023 Samoan Heritage Festival kicked off with a spectacular opening ceremony at Ke'ehi Lagoon Park on July 29, 2023. The diverse generations of Samoan people were in full participation; it brought together families and communities to witness different aspects of the Samoan Culture and Heritage.

The captivating opening ceremony on Saturday, July 29th, marked the beginning of a week-long celebration. The ceremony featured a parade led by the Hawaii United States Marine Corps Band, special remarks by Honorable Josh Green, Governor of the state of Hawaii, and Honorable Lemanu P. S. Mauga, Governor of American Samoa. "Our Heritage Initiative holds significant importance as it serves to honor, educate, and rejoice in the customs and traditions that have been

passed down to us, ensuring they are preserved and cherished for the benefit of future generations,” remarked Governor Lemanu. A Proclamation was presented by Governor Green proclaiming July 29 - August 1, 2023 Samoan Heritage Week in the state of Hawaii. The opening ceremony concluded with a traditional Ava ceremony, a full display of an ancient Samoan chiefly custom, a sacred ritual of bonding and reverence.

On Sunday, July 30th, the CCCAS Kanana Fou Church was a beacon of spiritual unity as it hosted the renowned 2023 Samoan Heritage Church service and *to'ona'i* (potluck). This day revitalizes the most important aspect of the Samoan culture to give thanks and honor to God the Father, Creator and unconditional Provider of the Samoan race and the entire world.

The Kanana Fou Church was filled with harmonious melodies as various Samoan church choirs performed, highlighting the unity among different congregations. Reverend Elder Falelua Lafitaga delivered a sermon that drew parallels between scriptures and Samoan life, emphasizing the importance of service to family, village, government, and church. Governor Lemanu also delivered an address emphasizing the significance of faith, family, and community in Samoan society. The evening was a testament to the enduring cultural values, spiritual traditions, and communal strength of the Samoan people.

Following the service, a potluck ensued, a custom where Samoan church communities, villages, and families break fast after the morning church service, a tradition of old that has been carried forward to this day on every Sabbath.

In the evening, the Heritage program began at 5:00p.m. at the Ke'ehi Lagoon Park. It was transformed into a captivating arena as the Samoan community came together to celebrate and exemplify their faith and heritage. Various Samoan congregations participated in soul-stirring liturgical worship, showcasing their devotion through dances and songs that transcended words. Reverend Frank Papu highlighted the deep reverence for faith in God within Samoan culture. Attendees were reminded of the correlation between the life of a Samoan and that of a Christian, that their whole lives are meant to be in servitude.

On Monday, July 31st, the Samoan community came together for a full day of spirited competitions and cultural celebration at Ke'ehi Lagoon Park. The cricket game semi-finals were held earlier in the day.

The evening's momentum carried forward with an enchanting display of traditional performances by various congregations. Among the highlights was the graceful presence of Taupou Manaia from American Samoa, whose performance exuded elegance and significance. Additionally, mesmerizing dance troupes took the stage, eloquently conveying the depth of Samoan history

through captivating movements, effectively passing on the cultural legacy through this compelling oratory of dance.

The Samoan Heritage Initiative Program festivities at the Keehi Lagoon Park location culminated on Tuesday, August 1st leaving an unforgettable impact. The finale featured spirited competitions and cultural festivities, including a thrilling cricket championship and entertaining ethnic dances, celebrating the vibrant Pacific diversity.

The day began with a passion-filled cricket championship, showcasing remarkable talent and dedication. Cheers and roars echoed as teams battled for supremacy on the field. Following the game, the evening turned into a display of unity, with congregations presenting mesmerizing traditional dances, embodying the rich talent of the Pacific islands.

Deputy Secretary of the Samoan Affairs Office, Tauese V. Sunia's opening remarks set the stage for a night of meaningful celebration, enhanced by heartfelt prayers and musical performances. "Our language and culture remain resilient, impervious to the shifting tides of time. Amid changing times, our heritage stands strong, echoing its vitality from the past to the present," he remarked.

The grand finale of the Festival was the invigorating Samoan Siva Afi by the Intersections Toa o le Afi Group. This traditional siva afi is particular to the Samoan people and it honors the famous original fire knife dancer Paramount Chief Letuli Olo Freddie Letuli, who brought siva afi to the world, now used at every luau in the Hawaiian islands and Pacific Island entertainments.

The successful conclusion of the Samoan Heritage Initiative Program Community Festivities stands as a testament to the vitality of Samoan culture and the spirit of unity among Pacific groups. Through engaging activities, the program fostered connections and embodied heritage, social networking, and celebration of the people of Samoan descent.

The final Week Samoan Heritage Week with an uplifting gala that celebrated the contributions of the future generation of Samoans. The gala underscored the enduring impact of Samoan culture and its dedication to supporting and empowering the youth. The event saw the presentation of the First Lady's Scholarships, known as E.L.L.A. Scholarships, to 25 deserving recipients, providing them with opportunities to pursue education in their chosen fields.

The gala was a testament to the commitment of Samoan society to nurturing its youth and passing on the legacy of culture and community. Amidst a gathering of families and friends, the event highlighted the importance of education, resilience, and the spirit of giving back.

Reflecting on the occasion, Governor Lemanu expressed, "Our heritage is not just about the past; it's about the future we're shaping. The E.L.L.A. Scholarships stand as a symbol of our belief in the potential and dreams of our young generation. These recipients are a beacon of hope, and their journey embodies the spirit of our vibrant Samoan community."

The Samoan Heritage Week gala marked a touching conclusion to the week-long festivities, reminding all who were present, the significance of unity, culture, *tautua*, and investing in the future. The event showcased the deep bonds of community that define the Samoan people and their commitment to ensuring a brighter tomorrow. Governor Lemanu commended all those who participated in this year's Heritage Festival, together with the various organizations and companies who have made this year's event possible.

"May we continue to teach, perform, and network all the aspects of our Samoan Culture as we have done this past week. We are responsible for passing on the legacies of our ancestors, for they successfully passed it on to us. God has truly created the Samoan people for greatness and as one of the Samoan leaders, I encourage you all to continue weaving the net of our Samoan heritage from whatever corner of the world you are living in. Thank you all for your service and sacrifice," concluded Governor Lemanu.

Compilation of photos of these events are available on the following social media pages:

[American Samoa Government](#)

[American Samoa Government - Hawai'i | Honolulu HI](#)

[KVZK TV](#)

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