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Spectacular Finale at the 2024 Samoan Heritage Festival: Cultural Night, Cricket Championships, and *Toa o le Afi* shine at the Ke’ehi Lagoon Park

The Samoan Heritage Festival concluded with a spectacular Cultural Night on Tuesday, June 18, 2024, at Ke’ehi Lagoon Park. Showcasing the community's unity and cultural richness, the event highlighted the collaborative spirit of various Samoan church organizations, which shared their knowledge and traditions through captivating performances.

Bishop Siufalala Sagapolutele of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Waipahu Samoan Ward shared that the Samoan community stands united in a shared commitment to faith, language, culture, health and education, blending tradition with Christian living. He stated: “Embracing our language and heritage is not only a source of strength but a beacon of hope for the future, particularly for the rising generation who are our future leaders.” He emphasized the importance of choosing righteousness, following the path of Christ, and recognizing our role as stewards of our lands. The intertwined nature of language, respect, and motivation further highlighting the essence of our culture.

Paramount Chief Mauga recognized the presence of Honorable Lemanu P. S. Mauga, Honorable Fiamē Naomi Mataafa, Honorable Lieutenant Governor Laapui Talauega E. V. Ale, and Speaker of the House Talavaou Ale in Hawaii attending FestPac and Heritage week. The leaders journeyed overseas to lead their delegations in these important events, with the goal of safeguarding the Samoan cultural heritage on a global scale.

Paramount Chief Mauga further remarked, “*O le agaga ia ave lo’u leo, e le lava upu ma ua tagi le loto, i le va’ava’ai atu i le sagisagi mai o ekalesia, o alo ma fanau, tamā ma tinā, ma latou o lo’o aumau i Hawaii ma motu tele o Amerika*”. Mauga conveyed his profound sentiments of appreciation as he witnessed the community: church organizations, sons and daughters, fathers

and mothers who have made Hawaii and the mainland their home come together to embrace the essence of the Samoan Heritage Week. He further recognized Director Tuiafono Vaiuli Sua and the Government Office in Hawaii, leaders of church organizations, and all involved individuals' commitment & dedication that enabled the American Samoa Government to host another successful Samoa Heritage 2024.

Paramount Chief Mauga Tasi Asuega shared wisdom and insights with the Samoan community reminding all present to cherish their culture, honor their way of life, and stay connected to their Samoan roots while choosing to serve God. He drew upon the ancient wisdom of Joshua, recounting the significance of the 12 stones placed by the children of Israel in the River Jordan. Just as these stones served as a memorial for the children of Israel, he urged the community to remember the origins and the mighty hand of the Lord we serve, that guides and protects us. Paramount Chief Mauga also emphasized the importance of passing down traditions and stories to future generations, ensuring the legacy of the Samoan people endures. He urged everyone to remember their heritage and the path that led them to where they stand today.

Paramount Chief Mauga closed with reiterating the Bishop's sermon, "*Samoa e ofu, e te ola iai. Alo ma fanau faapea o lea a e alu i le militeli, ia ofu i le faa-Samoa, o lau tu ma savali, tulou. Ia iloa e le lalolagi o oe o le Samoa*". Wear your faa-Samoa with pride. Its tradition extends to children, grandchildren, and even those serving or are planning to go into the military, reflecting in their posture and mannerism. Embrace your Samoan heritage and showcase it proudly to the world.

Mauga concluded his speech by reenacting the Samoan battle cry in Senator Togiola Tulafono's remarks on Monday - International night, demonstrating pride in the Samoan culture and heritage.

As the evening unfolded, attendees enjoyed a display of talent and heritage as church organizations took the stage to showcase their unique cultural contributions. Among the organizations that participated in this cultural celebration were The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Waipahu, Maili Kai and Moanalua Samoan Ward), Katoliko Samoa i Hawai'i, Lighthouse Outreach Center, EFKAS Amataga Fou, EFKS Waimanalo, EFKAS Waianae, and Sinoti Metotisi. The performances highlighted the importance of preserving and sharing cultural traditions across generations, fostering a sense of unity among all present.

The evening's highlight was witnessing the Samoan Heritage Initiative Program in action. This initiative aims to celebrate and preserve the rich heritage of the Samoan community, fostering cultural exchange, education, and community engagement. The success of the cultural night reflects the community's dedication to preserving, promoting and perpetuating Samoan cultural traditions.

Teams from near and far showcased their talent and passion for cricket at the Samoan Heritage Festival Cricket Tournament. In the Women's Cricket Championship, Teine Samoa Moni claimed the top spot, while Teine o le Motu secured second place and received the Sportsmanship trophy for their exemplary conduct. Usoga clinched third place, and Pago Girls placed fourth. The Mauna Kea, Hilo Cricket team clinched the 2024 Samoan Heritage Festival Men's Championship title, with Samoa 2 Da Bone securing second place and Mosiula from Seattle, Washington taking third. King Samani from Alaska finished in fourth place. In a gesture of appreciation and recognition, all participating teams were awarded generous prizes, including monetary rewards, medals of distinction and cases of tuna. The trophies presented to the winners and participants were generously provided by Katerina Savaiinaea, reflecting the spirit of community support and celebration of sports excellence.

The evening concluded with a captivating display of Fire Knife dancing, a powerful reminder of our history and cultural legacy, showcasing the resilience and artistry of our people. *Toa o Le Afi* enthralled the audience with the performers' skill and precision, transporting them back in time. The return of fire knife dancing to the forefront of our cultural expression highlights our roots and celebrates the lasting traditions that define us as a community.

Afioga Sea Koneferenisi Nuusa, leader of the Samoan Methodist Church Synod in Hawaii delivered words of encouragement and gratitude for a successful ending to this year's Samoan Heritage Week. "*Viia le Atua i lenei aso, ua tau lau o le faamoemoe. Ua tatou taunu'u mai i le si'ui o le faamoemoe sa lalafa i le Atua.*" He proceeded to acknowledge the collaborative efforts of church organizations, state offices, businesses, and NGOs for their meticulous planning, ensuring a seamless and smooth Samoan Heritage Week.

Bishop Siufalala Sagapolutele of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Waipahu Samoan Ward delivered the benediction followed by the singing of "*Lota Nu'u.*"

Tofa To'oto'o Tauese V. K. Sunia reiterated Senator Togiola Tulafono's Faalavelave concept as a good source for knowledge on Samoan tradition and customs. He adds, "*o le maota fo'i o le feagaiga e le gata i le maua'a i tu ma aga Faa-Samoa, faapea a'oa'oga faatalalelei ma le Tusi Paia*". The pastor's dwelling not only holds a strong link to Samoan culture but also gospel and biblical teachings. Tofa To'oto'o Tauese V. K. Sunia culminated the evening with, "*Ua faapopo ni aso ua, ae le tuua ni aso folau, ua fia moe ma ala ma tofo ua ea a'e i le taisamasama na tafa ai ata.*" The statement emphasizes the importance of sailing and navigating through challenges.

The combined efforts of the entire community, including both private and public sectors, ensured a successful outcome for this year's Samoan Heritage Week. The event was a triumph, highlighting the power of unity and collaboration in honoring Samoa's rich cultural heritage.

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