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MILESTONE 25th OKINAWAN FESTIVAL EXPANDS TO FOUR-DAY EVENT

One of Hawaii's most popular cultural events, the annual Okinawan Festival, will return to Kapiolani Park over the Labor Day weekend – bigger and better as it celebrates its 25th anniversary. “Sharing Uchinanchu Aloha” (“Uchinanchu” is the Okinawan term for a person of Okinawan ancestry) is the theme of the 25th Okinawan Festival, which this year will be a four-day celebration. The event is sponsored by the Hawaii United Okinawa Association (HUOA).

The Festival will begin Thursday evening, Aug. 30, with the staging of a play on the life of Kyuzo Toyama at the Hawaii Okinawa Center. Kyuzo Toyama is often referred to as the “Father of Okinawan immigration to Hawaii.” The drama, which begins at 7 p.m., will be presented in Japanese. Tickets are \$20 and can be obtained by calling the Hawaii Okinawa Center at (808) 676-5400.

The weekend events will begin Friday evening with an international parade through Waikiki, followed by the official opening ceremonies and a special concert on the Festival stage at Kapiolani Park. The parade steps off at Nike Town near Ft. DeRussy at 5:30 p.m. with Festival performers, visitors from overseas, HUOA members and others participating in the lively march to Kapiolani Park for the opening ceremonies. Several of Okinawa's all-time favorite entertainers will be coming to perform at the Festival. They will be joined by Hawaii's own Okinawan music, dance and karate schools and clubs.

The opening ceremonies will feature *paranku* drummers and a friendly *shiisa* (lion-dog) leading representatives of the HUOA's member-clubs, carrying their

colorful locality club banners, into the park. The banner procession will be led by 2007 HUOA president David Arakawa and Festival chair Jon Itomura.

The Festival is organized and run by an army of over a thousand volunteers from the HUOA's 49 member-clubs and their extended *'ohana* of Uchinanchu and Uchinanchu-at-heart. Kapiolani Park will be filled with the heart-pounding energy of taiko drums and the unique sounds of the Okinawan snakeskin *sanshin*; colorful Okinawan dances; and the tantalizing aroma of hot, fresh-cooked *andagi* (Okinawan doughnuts) and other Okinawan and Island favorites.

Headlining the Festival from Okinawa will be the popular contemporary musical group, the *Rinken Band*. In 2003, the group put on an exciting show before a packed house at the Les Murakami Stadium on the University of Hawaii's Manoa campus as part of the Worldwide Uchinanchu Conference.

Making their Okinawan Festival debut will be the young, multitalented dancers and singers known collectively as *Hanayakara*. Another headliner from Okinawa is *Naha Daiko*, which is making its second appearance at the Okinawan Festival. This high-energy eisa group thrilled the crowd during their 2004 appearance. Joining them will be *Radio Okinawa's Miuta Taisho*, the winner of the broadcaster's annual song contest.

The local performances will feature Okinawan classical and *minyō* music and dances, *eisa daiko* (Okinawan bon dance-style taiko) and a karate demonstration. Many of the local performers are third-, fourth- and fifth-generation Okinawans. Also scheduled to perform are the Royal Hawaiian Band, directed by bandmaster Michael Nakasone, and the contemporary local group, Calabash, led by the versatile Keith Nakaganeku.

The festival will open to the public at 9 a.m. both Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 1 and 2. The HUOA will provide free park-and-ride shuttle bus service from Kapiolani Community College (board near Diamond Head Road on the Waikiki-side) to the Festival grounds on Saturday and Sunday only.

On Saturday, with the exception of a few food booths, most of the festival will shut down at 5:30 p.m. to make way for the bon dance. The Sunday program will conclude at 5 p.m.

The bon dance, featuring Okinawan- and Japanese-style dances, is believed to be Hawaii's biggest bon dance. The dancing starts at 5:30 p.m. and continues until 7:30, and everyone is welcome to join the dance. There will be a half-hour break after the bon dance, and then at 8 p.m., the Rincken Band will take the stage for what promises to be a memorable concert experience.

The Festival is expected to attract over 50,000 people, residents and visitors alike, including some 400 participants from Okinawa and several hundred from the mainland U.S. and other parts of the world where Okinawans have settled. They will have lots to enjoy: cultural performances; Okinawan and local foods such as pigs feet soup and andagi (Okinawan doughnuts); cultural exhibitions; shopping opportunities; children's activities and more.

THE OKINAWAN FESTIVAL – A BRIEF HISTORY

The first Okinawan Festival was held in 1982 at McCoy Pavilion at Ala Moana Park and continued to be held there for the next two years before outgrowing the space. In 1985, the Festival moved to Thomas Square with some cultural activities held at the nearby Honolulu Academy of Arts. After four years at Thomas Square, the HUOA decided to move to an even bigger venue, Kapiolani Park, and took 1989 off to plan for the move. In 1990, the 90th anniversary of Okinawan immigration to Hawaii, the Festival moved to Kapiolani Park, attracting a larger, broader and more ethnically diverse audience. The move proved to be one of the most successful means of sharing the Okinawan culture with residents and visitors alike.

Proceeds from the Okinawan Festival are used to fund the HUOA's cultural programs.

The Hawaii United Okinawa Association is the umbrella organization for 49 locality clubs whose members are descendants of Okinawan immigrants, most of whom settled in Hawaii in the early 1900s. The first Okinawans – or “Uchinanchu,” as they are often referred to – arrived in Hawaii from Japan's southernmost prefecture in January 1900. Another wave of immigrants from

Okinawa arrived in Hawaii after World War II. Today, there are approximately 20,000 people of Okinawan ancestry in Hawaii.

The ties between Hawaii and Okinawa remain strong. A sister-state relationship between the state of Hawaii and Okinawa prefecture was formalized in 1985. Hawaii and Okinawa also enjoy numerous sister-city , sister-island and sister-university relationships.