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Hawaii in your backyard

By MICHELLE RAI
Special to the Register
Saturday, June 23, 2007

If a trip to Hawaii is beyond your budget this summer, let "Manaleo" bring the beauty of the Hawaiian Islands to you.

Manaleo, a traditional Hawaiian music group, performs a free concert at the Napa Chef's Market Friday. The concert begins at 6 p.m. at the First & Randolph Street stage and features hula dancers from Pacific Union College's Hawaiian Club.

Manaleo is made up of Napa and Bay Area residents, including several Hawaii-born members who have settled in Napa including Earl Britos, a slack key guitarist. Steel guitarist Sean Allen, another featured member, teaches at the Napa School of Music.

"Our goal is to spread the beauty and awareness of the native Hawaiian culture through our music," said Napa resident Jerry Gillgren, lead vocalist and manager for Manaleo. "Our music is based on the timeless form of Hawaiian folk music, including slack key guitar playing and chanting, or 'Oli.'"

In addition to spreading the "Aloha Spirit," Gillgren is proud of the authenticity in Maneleo's music. "We are so blessed to have native Hawaiian musicians to help us accurately represent the culture," said Gillgren. "Our secondary goal is to help regenerate the culture through our music and dance to help Hawaiians pass on their traditions to future generations."

Manaleo plans to spread the "aloha" of Hawaii through a recently established nonprofit organization, the Manaleo Hawaiian Cultural Foundation. The foundation offers scholarships in Hawaiian music, dance, arts and crafts, and language arts. Plans are already underway for the first Aloha Festival in Napa next year.

"Manaleo," a Hawaiian word meaning "native speaker" or "spirit voice of truth," is a combination of "mana" meaning "spirit" or "thoughts" and "leo" meaning "to speak forth with confidence and truth." The group was established in 2004 and performs regularly in California, Nevada and Hawaii. Info, www.manaleo.com.

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