

# Hula: Culture appreciation through dance

By Lynda Jo Gross

Sharing the Hawaiian culture through hula is Onie Kamakahiwaokalani Rendell's mission in life. In furthering this goal, Rendell makes Hula, Hawaiian dance, available to valley residents.

Rendell owns and operates Halau Kamakahiwaokalani; halau means school and Kamakahiwaokalani is Rendell's Hawaiian name, given to her by her aunt. Ka means the, Maka means eyes, Hiwa means dark, O means of, Lani means heavens—thus, her Hawaiian name means “The dark eyes of the heavens.”

Rendell began dancing at the age of 30. “I had always wanted to dance but the opportunity to learn was never available,” she said.

In 1969, Rendell became involved with the Hawaiian Club at Columbia Basin College. “Those first years were spent learning to dance and entertaining.

“The shows were few and far between but a lot of fun to do. Each time we would do a performance, I would be asked if I taught hula and



Photo by Lynda Jo Gross

**A Ka Luna O Kilauea Students of Onie Makahiwaokalani Rendell's Halau Makahiwaokalani performing Kilauea at St. Joseph's Mayfest on Saturday. The three different classes are performing together; in the front row are the babies performing noho (sitting down), the middle row is comprised of pre-teen kids, and in the back row are the beginning adults.**

her to provide classes, Rendell began accepting students in September.

When she began teaching hula, she had two women in her class. The following year, she had five adults and six children. “One of those children, Amy Lilinoe Lindholm, is still with me.”

Today, there are 44 haumana (students). Among her students is the Grandview Herald and Prosser Record-Bulletin Associate Publisher Danielle Fournier.

Fournier's interest was piqued after watching a different halau perform last year at a conference. “I have always loved Hawaii; it's a special place to me. I've always wanted to dance, but I never had the courage before.”

After returning from the conference, Fournier found the Halau Kamakahiwaokalani online. “I had a hard time meeting people since I move to the area last June—now I have a family.”

Rendell echoes that sentiment, and adds that because the students become so close, she strives to make the students focus on dance during class time. “I ask that all students leave your pohaku (stones which signify your personal problems) outside of the halau and concentrate on learning hula. I think that is the hardest to teach and to achieve. Because we become

so close in halau, there is a thin line between what pertains to hula and what is social.”

The word hula means to dance. “The hula is the visual enhancement of the stories and song of Hawaii...it's a form of storytelling,” Rendell said.

Says Fournier, “I want to honor the culture by learning the language, the story behind the mele, and all the tradition that is available. That is the only way I would personally feel comfortable dancing outside of my background. It's a huge gift to be included.”

Hula falls into two categories: “The Hula Kahiko, or the dances of ancient Hawaii, and the Hula Auana, the dances of modern Hawaii. The Hula Kahiko has strict rules and protocol, while the Hula Auana is free of those restrictions.”

Currently, Rendell's students are comprised of 18 children and 20 adults, ranging in age from four to 54.

“Each person within the halau has a purpose, from the youngest to the oldest (in years of learning) student. The youngest is there to learn by watching the older dancers and trying to achieve the fluidity and gracefulness of the older dancers.

“The haumana who have been with me the longest also have a job. It's up to them to share with love, patience,

and understanding what they have learned over the years. They are never to sit in judgement of their hula brother and sisters.”

Fournier said, “I had never danced before September. I was really scared I would never catch on. I've learned from everyone, older and younger... And Auntie Onie is a treasure. She helps anyone with extra time. She really puts her whole heart into us.”

Adds Rendell, “The learning never stops and when you get older and are not able to dance, there is still a place for you and other avenues of learning.”

Rendell refers to the hula as “the heartbeat of the Hawaiian people. It's what makes us unique. It is what the Hawaiian Islands are noted for.”

Of her goal to share Hawaiian culture, Rendell says, “The sharing of Hawaiian culture through the hula is my life. The knowledge that has been shared with me throughout the years has come with a price tag and that price tag is to share and perpetuate what has been given to me.

“We entertain but we also educate.”

New classes begin in September. To learn more about Halau Kamakahiwaokalani, visit Rendell's website at [www.allthingshawaiian.com/makahiwa](http://www.allthingshawaiian.com/makahiwa).



**Photo courtesy of Stan Phillips**  
**Onie Kamakahiwaokalani**  
Rendell with two of her youngest hula students.

how people could sign up for class.”

To this, Rendell would respond, “I do not teach, just dance.”

Today, that's not the case. Following a summer show for the Battelle Staff Association in the summer of 1971 and meeting the owner of the Tri-City Academy of Ballet who asked