

DIAMOND BAR

HIGHLANDER

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Around Town

Citizenship class

St. San Antonio College offers a series of free citizenship classes this semester.

Designed to help people with limited English skills prepare for the citizenship interview, the class will be held on four consecutive Saturdays and provide 20 hours of instruction and practice. A new class will begin every four weeks throughout St. SAC's fall semester.

Register in person through St. SAC's English as a Second Language Department in the Learning Technology Center, Building 4.

For more information, call (951) 944-2111, Ext. 2115.

Symposium

Cal Poly Pomona and the Council of African American Parents will co-host its eighth annual "Educational Symposium," from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 12, at the university's Bruce Student Center.

The event will include campus tours, a resource fair, and educational workshops designed to increase student achievement and parent participation.

Terrace Howard, an assistant professor in the UCA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, will be the keynote speaker. A panel discussion with high school students, college students, and parents will be held, along with presentations by the Young Black Scholars, College Board, National Society of Black Engineers, A Better Chance, and others.

For more information, call Ingrid Johnson at (951) 944-1750.

Special-needs care

"Support for Siblings," a

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Hula studio spreads Hawaiian spirit



Photo by HOYEN TSANG

LEINANI LIVORA, 40, right, teaches a children's hula dancing class at Da Hula Studio in Diamond Bar on Aug. 26. Vilora has been dancing for 30 years and teaching for the past 12. Her class is reflected in the mirror behind her.

Learning island dance requires coordination and grace

BY SHIRLEY HSU
Staff Writer

Diamond Bar lies over 2,500 miles from Hawaii and more than 20 miles (as the crow flies) from the nearest beach.

But there's a little pocket of town where the *aloha spirit* is thriving.

At "Da Hula Studio," a hula dance school in Diamond Bar, young girls wear *pa'u* skirts and flowers in their hair while dancing to the gentle strumming of a ukelele, while their mothers sit outside chatting

the evening away and braiding leis of ribbon and thread.

Children greet adults they're not related to as *auntie* and *uncle*, and students respectfully leave their shoes at the door of the studio before greeting the "kumu," or teacher, Leinani Viloria, with a kiss.

That's the *aloha spirit*, according to Kawika Viloria, who opened the *halau*, or school, with Leinani, his wife, two years ago.

Aloha is about "giving, loving, treating (others) with

respect, living a *pono* (righteous) life," Viloria said.

"It's about not reacting when someone cuts in front of you (in traffic)," he said.

The Vilorias, who grew up hula dancing and met in a *halau*, believe that hula dance is inseparable from this spirit. Kawika and Leinani Viloria opened "Da Hula Studio" partly as a way to pass on the Hawaiian culture to their land-locked children.

Their 12-year-old son, Josh, who plays the guitar, ukelele, and the conga drums, helps

provide musical backdrop for the dancers when he's not dancing himself. And 3-year-old Kehaulani, who has spent much of her young life hanging around the studio, is beginning to learn to *uwehe, ami, and slide* with the best of them.

The dancers must not only learn dance steps, but must memorize the words to Hawaiian chants called "*oli*" and songs that tell stories of Hawaiian kings, gods and goddesses, love, and the land.

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New buildings, improved classrooms awaiting students, Page 3



Photo by HOYEN TSANG

LIANNA GUNDERSON, 11, center, has been learning hula for four years and is a student at Da Hula Studio in Diamond Bar.

Hula

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"Hawaiian people live off the land, so many of the songs are about the land — fish, seaweed, what we eat to keep us alive," said Leinani Viloria. Storytelling through hula was an important component to the Hawaiian oral tradition, she said.

The rhythmic chant and dance, which is accompanied by ukelele, guitar, drums, and gourds, was developed in Hawaii by the Polynesians who settled there and was tied to religious practices. Protestant missionaries arriving in the early 19th century denounced the hula as a heathen dance, but it was soon revived during the reign of King David Kalakaua, who encouraged native Hawaiian culture.

"Hula is the language of the heart, and therefore the heartbeat of the Hawaiian people," Kalakaua is often quoted as saying.

Hula dancing is "fun and hard" said Josh, who was one of six boys taking the advanced class that meets Tuesday and Thursday nights. Many of his classmates have misconceptions about how difficult the dance is, he said.

It takes coordination, grace — and strong leg muscles — since much of the dancing is done with bent knees. On a recent Tuesday night, the students were visibly strained as they did an exercise in which they knelt on the floor and

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King David Kalakaua

leaned backwards, spines straight, until their heads almost touched the floor. Then, they raised their backs and repeated the motion over and over.

Later, each student had to recite his or her oli — a major component in scoring at hula competitions such as the 10th Annual "E Hula Mau" Hula and Chant competition, in which the team will compete on Labor Day at the Long Beach Performing Arts Center.

Kawika Viloria is normally a laid-back kumu who embodies the spirit of aloha, according to students, but this particular Tuesday, he was getting nervous about the upcoming competition.

"If there's one slacker that doesn't know their oli, do we have a winning team?" he admonished the students.

The Vilorias teach about 125 students, some of them have Hawaiian roots. Others have become interested in hula after a vacation to Hawaii, and some are simply taken by the culture.

Mona Madry, 31, a copywriter who lives in Ontario, joined the class a year ago because she has a friend who was a Tahitian dancer.

"For me, it's very calming," she said. "There's a sense of

beauty and belonging."

"I like that the dances tell a story," Madry said. Certain movements mean certain words, she explained; for example, two outstretched hands cupped upwards signify "flower."

Also, Madry added, "it's definitely a workout."

There are two styles of hula: kahiko, the ancient style of hula in place before missionary influence on Hawaii, and auana, the modern form of hula that incorporates European harmonies and instruments.

Outside the studio, Kauikeolani Hakanen and Mikala Kingi sat braiding a lei, waiting for their daughters' class to end.

The two women also dance hula, and between their own classes and their daughters' classes, they are at the studio four days a week. Often, they sew hula skirts to pass the time.

"Our friends think it's (hula is) entertainment, but it's not," added Kingi. "It's a culture, its life, its passion," said Kingi, who said she appreciates the respect for elders and family values that Hawaiian culture teaches.

"It's (hula is) a way of life," said Hakanen. "If the world had more aloha spirit, the world would be a lot happier."

Da Hula Studio is located at 351 S. Diamond Bar Blvd in Diamond Bar. For class information, call (909) 396-4775.

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