

Paniolo Preservation Society

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Community Invited To First Free 'Paniolo Artisans Showcase' September 18-19, 2009 At Waimea's Kahilu Theatre

There's much more to Hawai'i's paniolo heritage than superb horsemanship and cattle and land stewardship. The "tools" of the trade – most notably saddles, bridles and other tack as well as rawhide lariats – are not just essential equipment but also treasured, celebrated art forms that enjoy prestige and acclaim, albeit in ranching circles.

To focus a public spotlight on Hawaiian saddle making as both a livelihood and venue for blending functional work with the highest level of artistic achievement, the Paniolo Preservation Society (PPS) is hosting the state's First Invitational Paniolo Artisans Showcase September 18-19, 2009, at Kahilu Theatre in Waimea.

Third generation paniolo/saddle maker Alvin Kawamoto of Kohala is credited with conceiving the idea of bringing together Hawai'i's saddle makers who have preserved traditional methods of building tack in a manner unique to the Native Hawaiian cowboy.

Kawamoto first approached Dr. Billy Bergin, President of PPS, with his vision of hosting such a gathering of Hawai'i saddle makers while both men were part of a contingent to the 2008 Waiomina Centennial Celebration in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The idea came to fruition a year later with more than two dozen saddlers from across the state invited to be a part of this September's seminal "showcasing" of paniolo artisans.

Held in conjunction with Hawai'i Island Festival's 34th Annual Paniolo Parade and Waimea Ho'olaulea honoring the late beloved falsetto singer-storyteller Clyde "Kindy" Sproat, the free two-day Paniolo Artisans Showcase helps fulfill PPS' mission of ensuring that ranching continues to a viable, enduring tradition of Hawai'i.

The entire Big Island community is invited to learn about and celebrate Hawai'i's distinctive Hawaiian tree saddlery and loriner arts at this two-day exhibit and informal talk-story gathering with more than two dozen paniolo artists and crafters. The program will culminate with a Saturday evening ho'ike, presented in partnership with the Waimea Education Hui which involves most public, public charter and private schools in the district. The ho'ike will celebrate with music, film, traditional chants, stories and hula the history, heritage and people who have perpetuated this cultural tradition.

Also featured during the ho'ike will be a "hall of fame" presentation by PPS – singling out five master craftsmen of Hawaiian tree saddles -- two of whom are deceased — Hideo "Hide" Maeda of North Kohala and Harry Masashi "Cowboy" Otsuka of Moloka'i. Living honorees will include Henry Silva of Maui, Joe Manini of Kaua'i and Donald G. "Donnie" De Silva of Hawai'i Island. Also included in the evening will be what has become an annual PPS/Waimea Education Hui "tradition" of honoring the old-time practitioners by researching and then reading out loud the

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names of all the individuals who have distinguished themselves for perpetuating saddle making. Every effort is made not to overlook old time practitioners.

The ho'ike also will premiere a short new educational film about saddle making which is being created by Waimea Middle Public Conversion Charter School teachers in collaboration with members of the Waimea Education Hui, numerous North Hawai'i paniolo families and Kamehameha Schools' Mapuna Grant. The film will be made available to teachers throughout the state both to share Hawai'i's unique ranching traditions and to honor the paniolo for their significant historical role in preserving and perpetuating 'olelo Hawai'i – the Hawaiian language.

The following events are free and open to the public:

- **Fri., Sept. 18: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Kahilu Theatre, Waimea.**
Exhibits by and talk-story with more than two dozen saddle makers and rawhide braiders – primarily for kupuna and school students in conjunction with Waimea Education Hui.
- **Fri., Sept. 18, 6:30 p.m., Kahilu Theatre, Waimea**
Hawai'i debut of "Los Primeros," the fifth film in the Vaquero series by California documentary filmmakers Paul Singer and Susan Jensen. Filmed in Spain, Mexico and throughout the American Southwest, "Los Primeros" traces the history of the vaquero and the Moorish and Spanish horse culture. This event is for serious horse aficionados.
- **Sat., Sept. 19, Noon to 3 p.m., Kahilu Theatre, Waimea**
More than two dozen master saddle makers from around the state of Hawai'i will exhibit their craft and offer public presentations on every aspect of creating and adapting saddles to the unique requirements of Hawai'i's paniolo.
- **Sat., Sept. 19, 6 p.m., Kahilu Theatre**
A ho'ike that pays tribute to the art of Hawaiian saddle making. Open to the public, attendees will view a short film on the history, techniques and artisans of Hawaiian saddle making. The program also will celebrate the accomplishments of five master saddle makers in Hawai'i, and share paniolo music, chants, mo'olelo (stories) and hula celebrating Waimea and its paniolo heritage. Will begin with paniolo music in the lobby at 6 p.m. with Leabert Lindsey, Marcus Wong Yuen and Kimo Ho'opai along with samplings of paniolo smoked meat and steamed kalo. Program begins at 7 p.m.

Following are short biographical sketches of the five master saddlers to be honored this year:

Hideo "Hide" Maeda, native of Kohala, spent most of his adult life tending to the water resources of the Kohala mountain range, especially in the Kehena area monitoring ditch flow and reservoir volume. Working out of his mountain home, "Hide" took advantage of the abundant stands of neneleau (sumach) trees in nearby forests that yielded wood with qualities of strength, relative lightness in weight and amenable to carving, planing and shaping the four basic parts of the saddle. The fork, cantle and left and right side bars were deftly honed into shape and attached with dowel pinning and glue.

"Hide" quickly became known for his saddle trees among the cowboy circles of the Big Island, but his cherished market was the senior horsemen of Kohala's historic ranch lands who took pride in riding a "Maeda tree." "Hide's" finished trees stood out among those of his peers due to their

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consistent bleached steer hide appearance that was a distinctive “custard yellow.” His goatskin stitching of the hide over the tree was not only tidy, but extremely artistic.

After producing hundreds of trees over a four to five decade career, “Hide” left the world in 1990 leaving a legacy in the production of stout, functional and attractive saddle trees that gave comfort to the backs of many cowponies and the back sides of many appreciative cowboys of Old Kohala.

Harry Masashi “Cowboy” Otsuka, a Moloka’i native, derived his nickname for his perpetual presence at cattle gatherings on the Friendly Isle. A cowboy from boyhood, he was a familiar figure at brandings and cattle shipments for large and small outfits from Moloka’i Ranch to the homestead ranchers. He was always there to lend a hand.

As a service to his fellow cowboys and ranchers, he expanded his saddle making skills to doing repairs and rawhide braiding. His braiding expertise was admired by many who sought to own artistically made bridles, martingales, whips and lariats. In true vaquero tradition, “Cowboy” produced the Mexican *jaquima* (hackamore) headstalls with the *bosal* (noseband) and *fiador* (throat latch) braided knot keeper. Otsuka’s nickname, “Cowboy”, belied the fact that he also was a respected authority on planting, cultivating, harvesting and preparing different varieties of taro.

In early January, 2009, “Cowboy” graciously accepted the invitation to be honored at this September’s Paniolo Artisans Showcase. Shortly thereafter, PPS received a large package containing two pieces of his recent work—a full head stall and complete hackamore. Attached was a simple note of appreciation for the invitation and honor. Sadly, PPS received word in May that “Cowboy” died quietly at home on May 5. In his living room lay his saddle and gear which he was readying for shipment to the Big Island.

Joseph Punilei Manini, Sr. is a third generation paniolo with the more than 50,000 acre Makaweli Ranch on Kaua’i. In Joe’s paniolo career, he dedicated about 47 of his best years to this Gay and Robinson Ranch. His cowboy chores took him from brandings to slaughter phases of ranch life. Training, shoeing and grooming of horses were regular work routines, while saddle repair and maintenance skills grew out of necessity as no one else seemed to have the aptitude for it. Soon Joe became noted as a complete saddle maker from harvesting and curing the wood, carving out the parts, dowel pinning them together and covering the tree with neatly sutured rawhide. Joe finished his saddles in true Kaua’i tradition — complete leather covering with a shortened *pale huelo* (tailpiece) to protect the rider’s slicker. Today, Joe’s saddles are valuable collector’s items with some still in use on the backs of cowhorses throughout the Aloha State. Retired in 1994 at age 64, Joe devoted his sunset years to tending his 285 acre Pu’u Opae Ranch with his family. PPS is proud to present Joe as a master saddler for his work in preserving the essential gear of paniolo life, the cowboy saddle.

Donald George “Donnie” DeSilva is a Honoka’a born and bred cowboy who took to saddle making with passion. A consummate horseman, he spent the best years of his life as a Parker Ranch employee rising through the ranks from roughrider to the renown and respected “Cowboy Gang” before becoming foreman at the ranch cattle breeding station at Makahalau. In the early 1980s he was chosen to head up the entire horse program where he excelled in managing the 80 broodmare band, serviced by three and sometimes four Quarter Horse stallions.

Through nearly four decades on Parker Ranch, “Donnie” found time to hone his skills in saddle making from respected saddler, Kaoru “Yama” Horie, who showed special interest in “Donnie.” likely due to his sincere desire to excel in the art of making the rawhide *aweawe* (braided rawhide rigging) and all saddle parts requiring leather work. In essence, “Donnie” perfected the Parker

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Ranch Standard of saddle making, a trade he took on upon retiring from the outfit. Despite some physical challenges, he stepped up his role by taking in many interested young men who sought his knowledge, experience and discipline since this master saddle maker adheres to the old Hawaiian value of *kinaole*—do it right the first time, with the best of materials dedicating all energy toward proper technique. He is especially proud to pass this heritage on to his son Don and grandson Dillon.

Henry Silva hails from ranch country of the Maui highlands. A lifetime cowboy in loyal service to Haleakala Ranch, he developed an early reputation for saddle building and repair while moonlighting as a farrier. Over a four decade span as a saddler, Henry developed a unique style of making the *aweawe* in a manner that required no *ili hope* (rigging keeper around the cantle) due to its balanced distribution of pressure over a horse's back. Just as special is the very tidy and artistic braiding of the *maawe* (*aweawe*) strands in a manner so pleasing to the eyes of knowledgeable paniolo. Silva is a master at rawhide braiding of headstalls, quirts, whips and lariats (*kaula ili*) and has been a mentor to many young Maui cowhands who want to learn from the very best.

For more information about the First Invitational Paniolo Artisans Showcase, go to www.paniolopreservationsociety.org or call Dr. Billy Bergin (936-6220).

Paniolo Artisan Participants:

Wendell "Skip" Adams (Maui), Neal Asai (Kapa'au, Hawai'i), Donald K. De Silva (Waimea, Hawai'i), Donald G. "Donnie" De Silva (Honokaa, Hawai'i), Billy Dias (Pa'auilo, Hawai'i), Bill Ferreira (Pa'auilo, Hawai'i), David Fuertes (Kapa'au, Hawai'i), Justin Gaspar (Captain Cook, Hawai'i), Kris Gomes, (Honoka'a, Hawai'i), Pete Gorrell (Colorado), Palani Gouveia (Kea'au, Hawai'i), Frank Hess (Waikoloa, Hawai'i), Alvin Kawamoto (Hawi, Hawai'i), Kalei Lindsey (Kamuela, Hawai'i), Albert Moniz (Haleiwa), Charlie Onaka (Honaunau, Hawai'i), Clarence Rapoza (Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i), Keith Ryder (Kaneohe), Henry Silva (Kula, Maui), Clive Ushijima (Wahiawa), Stanley Valoroso (Kapa'a, Kaua'i) and Duke Wellington (Eleele, Kaua'i).