

Pacific Daily News

It was an exhilarating time at the Guam Community College last Saturday during the first official callout for delegates to the 2016 Guam Festival of Pacific Arts. Full of energy, high spirits and enthusiasm, the crowd of close to 250 people packed the multipurpose room, asked questions of the various committees, submitted their applications and offered their suggestions and ideas. The applications for delegate can be downloaded on the Guam Council of the Arts and Humanities Agency website at www.guamcaha.org or picked at the CAHA offices at the Terlaje Building in Hagåtña.

So what does it mean to be a delegate at the 12th Festival of Pacific Arts in Guam?

Put simply, it is an honor to represent our island in the largest celebration of art and culture in the Pacific. A delegate will share in the cultural exchange with all the 27 Pacific island countries and territories that participate in the festival. A delegate will present the Guam dance, song, art, story, crafts and traditions that make our island people unique among all. With a 4,000-year history, the Marianas and the Chamorro culture will take center stage in this “Olympics of culture” in the Pacific.

And while our community of artists and cultural practitioners prepares for the delegation selection here in Guam, our communities in the U.S. and abroad also make their preparations.

Led by Thelma Gumataotao Hechanova of Manhattan Beach, California, the Diaspora Committee continues to reach out to all our Chamorros, inviting them to participate, encouraging them to audition, and managing the process of selection, preparation and attendance at the festival in Guam.

Back in March, they had their first round of auditions during the Chamorro Cultural Festival in San Diego and in October they will conduct another round of auditions on the east coast in the Washington, D.C. area.

The Diaspora team is comprised of select individuals from around the country who are passionate about Guam and have volunteered to help bring 115 delegates back home next May. Each member is responsible for tasks that utilize their talents to the fullest extent, and the team “meets” biweekly via teleconference.

Members include: “Bubba” Artero, Lou Barrett, JoJo Borja, Mario Borja, Vince Diaz, Hechanova, Fran Lujan Henrich, Jay Pascua, Jaynina Smith-Prince, Bernard Punzalan, Heidi Quenga, Jay Rojas, Miranda

Salas, VeraLynn Sanchez, Trish Shook and Sandy Uslander.

The team continues to be involved in many outreach activities to not only showcase the first 41 delegates to the Guam Delegation, but also recruit cultural artists to audition.

The Diaspora Committee is focused on fundraising to help defray the cost of individual airfares to/from Guam in 2016. Promotional items with the Guam festival logo will be marketed and sold by delegates, their families and committee members, so be sure to be on the lookout for them!

To learn more about the Guam Diaspora and register to become a delegate with the Diaspora, please go to www.ChamorroArtsNetwork.com. Don't forget to also check out the profiles and stories of each of Guam's first delegates through the Diaspora's Facebook page, www.facebook.com/ChamorroArtsNetwork.

With only 309 days before the opening ceremonies, our Guam delegation will be representative of Chamorros both on and off Guam who will share among themselves and the people of the Pacific “Håfa Iyo-ta, Håfa Guinahåta, Håfa ta Påtte, Dinanña Sunidu Siha Giya Pasifiku,” or “What We Have, What We Share, United Voices of the Pacific.”

Happy Liberation, everyone! Watch for our FestPac Liberation Street Team at the parade passing out festival stickers. *Monica Okada Guzman is chairwoman of the Guam Council on the Arts and Humanities Agency. Thelma Gumataotao Hechanova is chairwoman of the Guam 2016 Diaspora Committee.*