

The Guam Chamorro Dance Academy



The Guam observance of Chamorro month spilled over in many ways to the Chamorro population in the US this last March. One important cultural promotion was the launch of the Guam Chamorro Dance Academy at the Che'lu Chamorro Cultural Fest in San Diego.

The Chamorro dance effort on this side of the Pacific faces the difficulty of resources being too few and far between. With some effort, costumes and music can be acquired. But how do you get the attention of a qualified dance instructor more than 6,000 miles away from the islands?

Recognizing this difficulty, the Guam Visitors Bureau has committed to helping existing and aspiring US based Chamorro dancers as part of their initiative to build capacity and excitement for the 2016 Festival of the Pacific Arts (FestPac) on Guam. Their program, funded under their Cultural Heritage And Community Outreach (CHACO) committee, is the Guam Chamorro Dance Academy.

The dance program launch was timed to take advantage of the concentration of dancers in San Diego for the Chamorro Cultural Fest on March 29th. Master of Chamorro Dance, Frank Rabon, arrived prior to the Fest and spent two days holding workshops with the Kutturán Chamorro Foundation in Long Beach, and the San Diego based Uno Hit and Imahen Taotao Tano dance groups, as well as the visiting and the curious. A few were learning the dance for the first time. Many learned additional choreography and technique. Everyone had a chance to hear from Frank Rabon and accompanying performers about their experience as Chamorro dancers and their own travels to prior FestPac events. Students' questions included, "How is Chamorro dance different than Polynesian dance?" as well as, "What was it like to travel as a Chamorro dancer?" The hope is that, as dancers or attendees, these young Chamorros will be enticed to return to Guam as the island hosts FestPac 2016.

Therese Arriola, the CHACO committee chair, promised that the launch at the Che'lu Chamorro Cultural Fest is just the beginning of many more Chamorro dance workshops. Workshops will be planned around major events that bring Chamorros together, especially in the largest Chamorro settlements of California, Washington and Texas. Said Arriola, "I would like to see this happen a minimum of three times a year."

The highlight of the launch was when the participants of the Guam Chamorro Dance Academy workshops came together on the Chamorro Cultural Fest stage. Dancers wore the respective costumes of their groups, but the combined performers danced as a single group. The image of the collection of dancers moving together embodied the theme of the festival, "Man Uno Hit" (We Are One). It would be nice to see more of this, courtesy of the Guam Chamorro Dance Academy.