



THE CHINESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF HAWAII

夏威夷中華總商會



LANTERN

NEWSLETTER

Jan/Feb/Mar, 2023

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Installation/Awards/ Holiday Banquet

by Sarah Moy, CFA

The Installation/Awards/Holiday banquet was held on Wednesday, November 30, at the Jade Dynasty Seafood Restaurant. It was a successful and very well attended event with 280 guests, including Mayor **Rick Blangiardi** and other VIPs. An evening of fun, great food and wines, entertainment, and networking for Chamber members and friends.

The 2022-2023 Executive Board was formally installed and the outgoing 2021-2022 Executive Board was recognized. Included in the ceremony was the symbolic passing of the gavel from immediate past President **Russell Lau** to current President **Jonathan Cook**.

The Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to **Frances H. Goo**, a former Chamber President as well as a long-time contributor and supporter of the Chamber. Recipients of the Chinese Chamber Foundation Scholarship were also recognized. The 2022-2023 Narcissus Queen **Jenalyn Ng**, First Princess **Laura Tan**, Second Princess **Mae Zhen Tonge**, Third Princess **Zena Li Demapan**, and Fourth Princess **Juliana Chang** as well as the nine 2023 Narcissus contestants participated in the program.

Big *mahalo* to all who attended and to the sponsors! Thank you for your continued support and participation, and we look forward to seeing everyone at our next Installation Banquet.

Narcissus Pageant

This year's 73rd Narcissus Pageant was held in a new venue, New Hope Oahu, on Friday, January 6. Located out on Sand Island Access Road, the facilities were quite state-of-the-art, and also featured a café and coffee shop for pre- and post-Pageant snacking. The evening started at around 7:00 pm. and surprisingly finished at around 9:00 p.m., albeit without an intermission.

Following the talent and gown phases, the question-and-answer 'speech' phase allowed each of the nine lovely young contestants to show off some of what they learned about their Chinese ancestry and culture in preparation for the Pageant. Special awards were presented to **Laura Ho**, Miss Popularity, based on souvenir book and Pageant ticket sales; **Jacelyn Ho**, Miss Congeniality, based on a vote by the contestants; and **Laura Ho**, Miss Talent, for her performance of 'Sway' on the saxophone.

And finally, the moment that everyone had been waiting for: Fourth Princess **Kelsie Ann Suan-Kon**; Third Princess **Jessica Lin**; Second Princess **Kelly Yee**; First Princess **Jacelyn Ho**; and Narcissus Queen **Laura Ho**. Congratulations to each of the nine lovely contestants – without all of you, there would not have been a Pageant. (And perhaps whoever puts the Pageant program together next year will know that it is a master or mistress of CEREMONIES, not 'ceremony').





President
Jonathan Cook

These last weeks have been a whirlwind, but all for the good. Hopefully, you got to be part of at least some it as we came home to a January Narcissus Festival and, best of all, a Chinese New Year together! Join me for some of the highlights:

Narcissus Queen Pageant. The new venue at New Hope was extremely impressive, from the huge video screens to the sound system and even a cafe and coffee shop in the lobby! All nine of our ladies in the Pageant should be proud of themselves, a feeling our packed audience shared from the sound of the cheering.

At the end of two hours, we had a new Court: Fourth Princess **Kelsie-Ann Suan-Kon**, Third Princess **Jessica Lin**, Second Princess **Kelly Yee**, First who has contributed his vast photography skills to the Narcissus Pageant and Festival for many years. He truly has ‘an eye’ and we have been fortunate to benefit from it. *Mahalo*, Paul! As always, we express our gratitude to **Michele Choy**, not only for her tireless work on the Pageant, but the rest of the Princess **Jacelyn Ho**, and Narcissus Queen **Laura Ho**! In addition, we honored the great and talented **Paul Hayashi**, Narcissus Festival.

Choy Cheng and Chinese New Year. There’s few feelings that could be better than what we all experienced returning to Chinese New Year celebrations together! The streets of Chinatown were filled with revelers, following the lion dance clubs and physical culture associations around for Chinatown Visitation and giving Chinese New Year greetings to the shop and restaurant owners. The Chinatown Cultural Plaza was packed with families on Friday and Saturday, happy to be together again at this time of

year. The vendors went home happy, too! It was truly a return to life as it should be after three years of COVID-19 restrictions.

A big *mahalo* to **Yu Shing Ting**, who arranged and coordinated all the TV news spots for us! It was blanket coverage and really lifted the events to another level. We also must acknowledge the hard work of **Leonard Kam**, **Sonny Zhang**, **Tina Ge**, our Narcissus Committee, and all of our booth volunteers, who did crafts with the *keiki* and made some smiles. A special acknowledgment to Narcissus Festival Chair **Michael Young**, who saw us confidently through this year of getting back on track. Although I’m looking forward to next year’s Chinese New Year, it’s hard to imagine it will beat the fun and joy of this one. Coronation Ball. Speaking of returns, we were finally back at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort as well. As our ‘dress -up’ event for the year, the attendees did not disappoint, from gowns to tuxedos. We bid a fond farewell to our outgoing Court and to 2022 Narcissus Queen **Jenalyn Ng**, who danced a wonderful custom mix of Peacock Dance and *hula*. Mayor **Rick Blangiardi** did the honors of crowning new Queen **Laura Ho**, escorting her down the runway afterward. The four new Princesses followed, escorted by their very proud mothers and one grandmother.

Along with the energetic Iolani Dance Team, we were honored with a performance by guitarist and *Hoku* Award-winner **Jeff Peterson**, joined for part of it by *ehru* virtuoso **Tsun-Hui Hung**. It was a privilege to hear such beautiful music. January 28 was a night with pomp and circumstance, appropriate for the occasion, but the warm hugs and smiles you’d expect in a local gathering were there, too.

Chinatown. Our mission to serve and revive the district continues on because, sadly, there is still much to do. One project recently was to get the word out to Chinatown businesses about the new Oahu Business Grant program. Along with City representatives, the Chamber group split up into two teams to canvass Chinatown, passing out information on eligibility and how to apply. The Chamber translated the application into Chinese characters and also offered assistance with the process if needed. The grants were good news for many of the struggling businesses there. Past Presidents **Elvira Lo** and **Wes Fong**, Executive VP **Sonny Zhang** and Vice President **Michelle Wong** all gave their time and energy to visit and help the businesses. We’re pushing forward with more initiatives in the next few weeks and beyond to support Chinatown even more as the district is still trying to recover from the consequences of the pandemic restrictions.

Membership. In February, we’re focused on strengthening both levels of our Chamber, starting with the full relaunching of our Young Professional program. We’ve got two great young ladies heading it up, **Tiffany Chen** and **Caroline Kodama**, who have contributed a lot already this year, including planning our Golf Tournament. You will be hearing more very soon.

We’ll also be holding our first new member orientation, for both recently added Young Professionals and regular Chamber Members. The goal is to get them acquainted with the Chamber, the opportunities for members, and how to get involved activities. It’s essential that our new friends get some guidance and feel a connection from the very start.

After the Thanksgiving-Christmas-New Year, January 2023 has been a hectic month, to say the least, but looking back it was worth it. Much *mahalo* to everyone who contributed.





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Narcissus Festival

The Chinese Chamber-sponsored Chinese New Year celebration was held at the Chinatown Cultural Plaza on the second weekend in January, 2023. Booths offering food, Year of the Rabbit t-shirts, and a variety of other goods were open from 5:00-10:00 p.m. on Friday, January 13, and 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. on Saturday. Also, Friday was the occasion of *Choy Cheng*, the event where lions from a number of Chinese lion dance and physical culture clubs and associations gathered at the Chamber building at 6:00 p.m. to offer New Year blessings and receive *li see*, then spread out to visit shops and restaurants in Chinatown and the Cultural Plaza until around 9:00 p.m.

Traditionally, the big event is Chinese New Year's Eve, the occasion for families to get together, which was on Saturday, January 21. It's a time for merriment, lots of delicious Chinese food, much of it symbolic of good fortune, and of course *li see* for the young ones. This ushered in the Year of the Rabbit on Sunday, January 22. *Gung Xi Fa Cai/Gung Hee Fat Choy* or *Xin Nian Kwai Le/Sun Nin Fai Lok!*

Then came the Coronation Banquet at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort's Coral Ballroom on Saturday, January 28. No-host cocktails began at 5:00 p.m., then the Hawaiian menu dinner began at 6:00 p.m., followed by the procession and crowning of **Laura Ho** as the new Narcissus Queen. Laura was crowned by Mayor **Rick Blangiardi**.

COVID-19 Update

The coronavirus emergency declaration is slated to end on Thursday, May 11. However, that doesn't mean that COVID-19 will magically disappear and will be lurking opportunistically. However, there is the latest bivalent vaccine which is effective in preventing serious cases requiring hospitalization or resulting in death. In addition, research is ongoing to develop a vaccine effective against all subvariants and not needing an injection. Nevertheless, while many Americans are fully vaccinated and 'boosted,' there is a significant number who are not. And while there was a 'tridemic' of coronavirus, the seasonal flu, and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) this fall, there was no winter surge of hospitalizations as there had been in 2020 and 2021. Nevertheless, many of those who died were 64 years of age or older, despite encouragement to these older Americans to get fully protected by the vaccines and boosters.

Once the emergency declaration ends on May 11, there will be some changes for vaccines, tests, and treatments. With respect to vaccines, vaccines purchased by the federal government are still covered by the FDA emergency use authorization (EUA) and will remain free for those with public (Medicare) or private (Medicare Advantage) insurance. Those without insurance or underinsured (some Medicare Advantage policies) may have to pay out of pocket. There may be charges for tests and treatments (such as Paxlovid), depending on your health coverage.

Social Security and Medicare

Most working Americans are aware that the payroll tax deductions under FICA for employees and the 'tax' under SECA (Self Employed Contribution Act) for the self-employed pays for Social Security and Medicare Part A. Ever since its enactment as the Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) Act of 1933, certain politicians have tried to scuttle the program. What they ignore is that the above-mentioned 'taxes' are actually premiums paid by all working Americans for 'socialist' insurance programs and are therefore constitute 'earned benefits' to which the payees are legally entitled to, not freebies or "entitlements."

In addition, there are the seniors' demographics to consider. According to the Congressional Research Service, 10.3% of those 65 and over live in poverty. According to the 2022 AARP Quick Fact sheet, Social Security lifts 16.1 million people in that age group out of poverty, reducing the number of those below the poverty line from 37.8% to 9%. And quite a few of the beneficiaries spent much of their working lives outdoors, summer and winter, not in the comfort of air-conditioned offices, and worked very "hard for the money" they're now collecting in their sunset years.

Yet politicians from one party have a number of zombie "reforms" to keep the program from becoming insolvent around 2035, unable to pay 100% of benefits. The president in 2005 announced principles to "privatize" all or part of Social Security, and now a member of Congress then and a possible presidential candidate in 2024 has revived that idea. Meanwhile, others want to raise the current age for receiving full benefits from 67 years of



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age, which Pulitzer Prize winning *LA Times* business columnist **Michael Hiltzik** calls “stupid and dishonest” in his Feb. 2 column.

Instead, attention should focus on the so-called “cap” on collection of the tax, which increases every year since first instituted in 1983. In 2023, the cap is \$160,000, and once they’ve collected that amount in salary, the rich and ultra-rich are no longer subject to FICA/SECA; for those making a million dollars or more, “freedom day” comes on February 28 this year. Meanwhile, middle class and working class Americans – 94% of all workers – pay the entire year. (There’s no “payroll deduction” if you are paid no salary, yet receive millions or billions in stock options and bonuses like **Elon Musk**, again the richest person in the world, who pays not a single penny in payroll taxes). As Hiltzik characterizes the cap, it “effectively gives the rich a free pass on supporting the program.”

Sen. **Bernie Sanders**, chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension committee, would raise the cap so that Social Security would be solvent for 75 years (a figure beloved by actuaries) while Sen. **Elizabeth Warren** would eliminate the cap entirely so that the program would be solvent indefinitely. Remember, if Congress does nothing all, Social Security would be solvent and able to pay 100% of benefits to 2035, and 80% of benefits thereafter.

Economic Outlook

For some Chamber members, 2022 was a tough year investment-wise, ending with a bear market. But history or past performance shows that there are usually no consecutive bad years in the stock markets. In addition, with the S&P large (500), medium (400), and small cap (600) indices made up of 1,500 stocks, they don’t all move in lockstep with each other; some are going up, others are plateauing, and yet others are going down. Moreover, according to a 2022 Gallup Survey, 58% of Americans own stock; according to MSNBC in October, 2021, much less publicized is that the wealthiest 10% of Americans own 89% of all U.S. stock, and during the pandemic, the top 1% gained \$6.5 trillion in corporate equities and mutual fund wealth. As **Charles Schwab** and other knowledgeable advisors say, “the stock market is not the economy.” Meanwhile, most middle class and working class Americans are more concerned with their wallets, particularly the cost of gasoline and food and other daily essentials. Fortunately, “sticky” inflation has been slowly coming down consecutively each month since August. With a currently strong economy, it may be possible to avoid a recession, despite actions by the Federal Reserve to tamp down the economy.



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Mar 3 • Fri

Chamber General Election Day

Chamber Office – 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Mar 21 • Tue

Executive Committee Meeting

Chamber Office – 6:00 p.m.

Mar 24 • Fri

Board of Directors Meeting

Election of 2023-2024 New Officers

Simply Sichuan – 11:30 a.m.

Apr 6 • Thu

General Membership Meeting

The Azure Ala Moana, Club Room – 5:30 p.m.

Apr 21 • Fri

Executive Committee Meeting

Chamber Office – 6:00 p.m.

Apr 25 • Tue

Board of Directors Meeting

Simply Sichuan – 12:00 p.m.

May 19 • Fri

112th Installation Banquet

Jade Dynasty Seafood Restaurant – 5:30 p.m.

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Hurricane Season

With the start of a new year, we may be able to enjoy a mostly quiet year, weather-wise. Hurricane season in the Central Pacific lasts from June to November, and for the last few years, there has been a *La Niña* condition, with very few hurricane alerts. However, according to the Climate Prediction Center in early December, a transition to neutral conditions is expected in early 2023, with high potential (82%) for a transition into El Niño conditions by late summer. So we may be in for some stormy weather later this year. Let's hope not, and hope that *La Niña* returns later in the year.

Member News

Elisia Flores, L & L Hawaiian Barbecue CEO, was on the cover of the Fall 2022/Spring 2023 Punahou alumni bulletin and the subject of a four-page spread as one of eight "Agents of Change: Punahou Women at the Forefront of Change." The *Bulletin* arrived in family, staff, and alumni mailboxes in late January.

Condolences

The sad news is that **Paul Hayashi** passed away in early February. "Bullet" as he was known to friends, associates, and a host of beauty/scholarship pageant contestants, was a renowned professional photographer. He began a sideline with the Narcissus Pageant, taking photos for some four decades of the contestants for the Pageant posters and souvenir books as well as each Narcissus Queen and Court. Over the years, his talents were called upon by other organizations sponsoring pageants too numerous to mention. Our deepest sympathies go out to his family.

Then on February 16, the "honorary mayor of Chinatown," **Joseph Young** passed away at home, surrounded by family. Following service in the Army Air Forces (USAAF) in World War II, he received his bachelor's and dental degrees from Washington University in St. Louis. In addition to years of dental practice in Honolulu, Joe was a member (and often president) of a number of Chinese community associations and was quite involved in efforts to improve Chinatown. As a WWII veteran, he was a recipient of the Congressional Gold Medal for Chinese American veterans. Joe was also recognized as the 1998 Chinese Model Father of the Year and the 2004 Chinese Citizen of the Year as well as serving as a director and *emeritus* director of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii. He will be missed, and our sincere condolences to his wife **Barbara** and his family.



THE CHINESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF HAWAII

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