

Aloha News

In search of Hawaiians' secret to success

Overcoming hardships

Spa Resort Hawaiians is a nationally famous spa and Hawaii-themed park that has experienced many hardships and challenges.

The Joban Hawaiian Center (today known as Spa Resort Hawaiians) was opened in 1966 in Iwaki City, where the Joban coal mine was located.

According to Yukio Sakamoto of Joban Kosan Co., Ltd., the establishment of the resort had much to do with the energy revolution of the 1950s. As oil began to replace coal and became the main source of energy, the fortunes of the coal mining industry began to wane. To secure a new source of revenue and save jobs in the community, the company's management turned its attention to the leisure industry. Since Japan was enjoying rapid economic growth and the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games were close at hand, it was anticipated that an age of leisure would soon dawn. The company decided to construct a resort facility that would utilize the hot spring waters present in large volumes in the mines so they could recreate "Hawaii" in Japan.

Their prediction was right on the mark, and the opening of the resort proved a smashing success. In the 40 years that the resort has been operating, more than 50 million people have visited it, bringing in 380 billion yen in sales and creating an economic ripple effect estimated at 1,660 billion yen.

Then, on March 11, 2011, a massive, once-in-a-thousand-year earthquake

struck Spa Resort Hawaiians.

According to Sakamoto, there were a total of 617 guests at the hotel at the time, the majority of whom were day trippers. As it happened, the executives of the company were all in Tokyo that day attending a board meeting. Since the situation required a prompt response, they decided to entrust the young employees of the resort with the evacuation.

The staff worked hard to locate safe routes home for everyone and by the 13th of March they were able to transport all of the guests safely to Tokyo Station, using a total of 18 buses.

Because of the negative publicity following the nuclear power plant accident and the second earthquake measuring a lower 6 on the Japanese seismic scale that struck the area one month later, prospects for reopening the resort had become very bleak indeed. To demonstrate to the rest of Japan that Fukushima was a safe destination, Iwaki City organized a nationwide performance tour of hula girls employed at Hawaiians at the time, under the slogan "safe, secure, and healthy." The tour proved quite successful, generating much positive attention from the media. It even led the Japan Tourism Agency to declare the revival of Hawaiians as symbolic of the disaster



Sakamoto explaining the history of Hawaiians

recovery efforts.

The efforts made by the hula girls were an inspiration to all of the employees of Hawaiians. As a result of all the staff's hard work, the resort was able to resume operations in February 2012. The number of people visiting Hawai-

ians that year reached 1.4 million, which was higher than the 1.34 million that had visited the park in 2010, the year immediately before the disaster. The resort has maintained a high number of visitors to this day.

(Tokairin, Nakahara, Takasaki)

Hula girl Makalea

The bright-eyed dancer

One of the main attractions of Spa Resort Hawaiians is the hula girls. We had the opportunity to speak with one of the girls, Mai Makalea. Makalea has been a member of the hula girls for 13 years and one of the group's solo dancers for five years.

Wanting to become a hula girl, she joined the company right after high school and underwent a six-month training program. To become a member, applicants have to take a written test and perform a dance routine taught to them on the spot by the instructor.

Out of the 100 applicants this year, only 12 were accepted. Including new members still in training, currently there are a total of 38 hula girls in Hawaiians, with only eight



The hula girl, Mai Makalea

of them solo dancers like Makalea. According to Makalea, her name means "brilliant, radiant eyes" in the Hawaiian language, and was given to her by her teacher.

(Sakurako)

The story of the palm tree

In the movie about the Joban Hawaiian Center called Hula Girls, there is a scene in which the employees of the Center use stoves to try and keep the palm trees warm. According to Sakamoto, the scene is based on a real incident. In an attempt to create a Hawaiian atmosphere at the Center, the



Display space in Hawaiians featuring memorabilia from the movie Hula Girls

president of the company at the time had ordered palm trees from Taiwan.

The ship carrying the palm trees, however, happened to arrive at Yokohama ahead of schedule, and the trees reached the Center when the dome that was supposed to house them had not yet been completed. To keep the trees warm, employees brought in stoves from their homes but couldn't warm up the large area inside the dome.

Despite their failed attempt, the trees survived and grew splendidly. It seems that the abundant hot spring waters of Joban warmed the ground inside the dome and helped the trees grow.

(Ryuga, Itsuki)

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