

George Naope
A founder of hula festival

Naope tribute to be first of Big Island series

He's legendary as ambassador of realm of hula

By Hugh Clark

Advertiser Big Island Bureau

HILO, Hawaii — Statewide entertainment figure George Naope, a musician and hula master known as "the Menehune," will be honored by Hawaii County in its first "Tribute to Living Legends."

The program will be held from 2 to 5 p.m. Feb. 21 at Seven Seas Luau House in Hoolulu Park.

County parks director George Yoshida described the Naope tribute as the first in a series of "Living Legends" programs sponsored by his department's culture and arts section, focusing "on recognizing individuals who have contributed to the perpetuation of the many cultures of Hawaii."

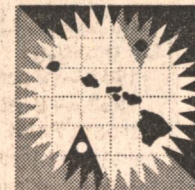
Naope is described by his close friend and collaborator, Dorothy "Aunt Dottie" Thompson, as "the original free spirit."

Naope and others in 1964 founded the Merrie Monarch Festival that gave rise to the claim of Hilo being the hula capital of the world.

Thompson has carried on its tradition as the festival's executive director for the last 24 years.

Naope, who was born in Hilo, lives

in Kona now, where he frequently entertains at the Keauhou Beach Hotel when he is not traveling. He lectured on hula in Canada last month and is in Japan now conducting a dance workshop.



Our Hawaii

Naope's career goes back to his boyhood. He began teaching the hula at a barbershop. Later he gave classes for 50 cents a month in a studio above a store on Haili Street.

He actually started his performing career not as a Hawaiian entertainer but by winning a Japanese song contest when he was a student at Hilo High School.

The rest is history. His recordings include his trademark "Green Rose Hula," composed by Johnny Almeida.

Naope's real talent is capturing the pageantry of old Hawaii.

"George loves pomp and ceremony; he understands it well," said Thompson, who met Naope in 1959 when he asked her help in organizing a Prince Kuhio Day tribute.

This year, Thompson initially was planning a birthday party for the spritely Naope, whom she describes as "something over 65 — who knows?"

The idea for the party gave way to the County's tribute.

Tickets for the Naope event are \$10 and include heavy pupus, refreshments and entertainment. Liquor will not be served.