



Honolulu Lite



by Charles Memminger

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Hawaii will be the real star of the pageant

PRESS conferences are generally dreary affairs. As a columnist, I've found it immensely helpful to avoid press conferences like the plague.

I subscribe to the tenet that journalism is information people DON'T want you to publish; all else is publicity. And press conferences are where they shovel out information in heaps.

So how was it that I came to attend a press conference this week concerning the upcoming Miss Universe pageant? I'm not sure. I'm not really a beauty pageant kind of guy. But Miss Universe is the biggie of all pageants. It is happening right here in Hawaii and to ignore it would be like trying to ignore a hippopotamus hanging out on your lanai.

Also, as someone who is always coming up with kooky ways to promote Hawaii (i.e., airdrop a luau into Columbia Falls, Mont.; build our convention center in Las Vegas, etc.), I was wondering just how much good the Miss Universe pageant will do us.

The pageant, plus various connecting events (parades, receptions, balls and banquets), is being produced and organized by April and Al Masini. The Masinis are relatively new to the islands, having lived here only three years. But he is well known in the entertainment industry for launching such shows as "Star Search" and "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous."

It was just one of those lucky coincidences that the Masinis lived here at the very time Hawaii's own Brook Lee was crowned Miss Universe. Brook made it clear from the beginning of her reign that she would like Hawaii to host this year's pageant.

The Masinis stepped forward to volunteer to organize the effort, the state tossed in \$3 million to help finance it and, oingo, boingo, we're having a pageant, kids.

That all sounds nice and easy. But from the time Masini kicked off the press conference with a rundown of all the events, from the "Welcome Home, Brook" gala to the actual international broadcast next month, it was clear that planning something on this scale is just a little less complicated than launching a space shuttle. It's something like trying to organize a Martha Stewart wedding, a carnival, an inauguration, the Macy's parade and a television variety show -- all within a few weeks.

The point was driven home when April -- who has been working daily on it until 3 a.m. -- attempted to describe all the work that has been done and is yet to be done and broke down momentarily, unable to go on. Al stepped in and carried the ball until she was recomposed. If anyone at the press conference at first didn't believe the pageant organizers were putting their hearts and souls into this project, they became believers after that.

But when you strip away the glitter, pomp and circumstance of the Miss Universe pageant, what you have left is this: 85 countries are sending delegations to Hawaii and they are all bringing their own news media to take part in an event that will be broadcast live all over the planet. Some idiots have complained about the state kicking in \$3 million to stage the pageant. That's chump change for this kind of publicity. The only thing that would generate more exposure for Hawaii would be the Olympics. And then you'd have to spend millions to build all the venues.

There are anti-pageant feminists who just don't understand why hosting this event is important. Hawaii's economy is on the ropes. This is just the CPR the state needs. The global media will be here simply to tell the world how gorgeous and wonderful Hawaii is. Folks, in the world of public relations, it doesn't get any better than this. Now I'm getting choked up.

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