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RECONSTRUCTION RESTORES PALACE TO KALAKAUA ERA, ENABLES BUILDING TO RETAIN NATIONAL LANDMARK STATUS

KAILUA-KONA—The U.S. Capitol, Radio City Music Hall and New York’s Grand Central Station and Hulihe’e Palace have one thing in common: They all are historic landmarks that have been or are being restored by the same award-winning historic preservationist specialists.

“The Daughters of Hawai’i and their historic architects are doing a great job restoring Hulihe’e Palace in an appropriate way,” says Dave Riccio, principal of John Canning Painting and Conservation Studios. The Connecticut-based firm, which restored all of the above landmarks, is a major contractor involved with the current restoration at Hulihe’e Palace. The palace suffered \$1.5 million in damages during the October 2006 earthquakes and was closed December 10 for repairs.

“I personally have been on-site working at the palace and I think it’s a wonderful example of English and Hawaiian architecture and it’s interesting how the building represents a specific period of Hawaiian history,” continues Riccio.

That period is the late-1800’s, circa 1885, according to Fanny Au Hoy, Hulihe’e palace administrator. She says Hulihe’e is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and as such, must be preserved to a specified time period to retain registry status. Selection of that time frame also enables the palace to keep its two oceanside lanai and display its exquisite donated and on-loan collection of Victorian artifacts from King Kalakaua’s reign—including a koa armoire that was awarded a silver medal in the 1889 International Exhibition in Paris.

“By 1885, King Kalakaua had traveled around the world to see the castles of Europe and the temples of Japan,” explains Au Hoy. “He brought back ideas of what he had seen and decided to incorporate some of that grandeur into Hulihe’e.”

Known as “The Merrie Monarch” for his love of entertaining, Kalakaua soon embarked on a restoration of Hulihe’e. He enlarged the up and downstairs oceanside lanai to their current size, stuccoed the exterior’s rough-textured lava rock walls and re-plastered the interior. Decorative ceiling, crown and golf-leaved moldings were added to give the palace an elaborate air and crystal chandeliers and redwood pillars greeted guests in the downstairs front entry.

John Canning Studios, which was selected for its historically faithful preservation approach, is restoring or re-installing Hulihe’e’s interior and exterior plaster finishes. “The work is being done in

the same fashion, and using similar materials—local coral sand and lime—as what were originally applied,’ explains Riccio.

“We’re using a natural hydraulic lime stucco on the exterior because that holds up best in this climate and has flexibility,” details Scott Campbell of Chicago, the plaster job foreman. According to Riccio, natural hydraulic lime (NHL), which is quarried in France, was chosen for the job because it is “permeable and breathes.” NHL absorbs and releases moisture while curing, resulting in a strong set.

The building’s south wall, which sustained the most damage, is being partially rebuilt or repointed to restore its physical integrity. The three-foot-thick wall is comprised of lava rock stones and supporting wood beams. On the first level in the Kuakini Room, a wide, vertical crack goes deep into the wall adjacent to a window. From the inside, masons are removing the wall’s structural lava rocks to eliminate the crack and repair areas where the mortar has crumbled. The lava rocks, which are typically basalt fieldstones, are being cleaned by pressure washing and then set with hydraulic lime mortar.

“We’re shoring up the wall to support it and repointing it in two phases,” says Karl Kamada, of Affiliated Construction, a Honolulu-based masonry company. “We’re also using the hydraulic lime as it sets faster than ordinary lime and we need to establish immediate strength in the wall.”

At the top of the north wall’s gable, carpenters are adding cripple studs next to the palace’s existing studs, which suffered past termite damage. “In a historic project, we try to salvage existing materials so we don’t take out the original materials, if possible,” says Keith Higa, journeyman carpenter with Honolulu-based Stan’s Contracting, the project’s general contractor.

West Virginia resident Sarel Venter, a decorative plaster restorer, is renovating the damaged plaster walls inside the palace. He uses a mixture of hydrated lime and Portland cement. “This plaster will move with the structure; we don’t want it to separate from the wall,” he emphasizes. “In the 1880’s, builders used hydrated lime only and that required a lengthy curing process,” explains Venter. “Today, we add a small amount of Portland to accelerate it.”

Renovation of the palace is expected to take a year. In addition to the structural and aesthetic restoration of the walls, the palace is slated for some miscellaneous repairs involving dry rot, doors and decking.

In the meantime, as construction permits, the Daughters and their auxiliary group, The Calabsh Cousins, stage free monthly outdoor concerts that honor late Hawaiian royalty—as construction allows. They are also busy planning a gala fundraiser, Kahea ‘O Hulihe‘e, e hele mai e ‘ai - A Call From Hulihe‘e to Come and Share for Saturday, October 18 at the Sheraton Keauhou Bay Resort & Spa. Spearheaded by Chef Sam Choy, the benefit attempts to “Honor the Past to Preserve the Future” and includes multiple tasting stations, entertainment spanning multiple generations and a silent auction. Tickets are available by phoning the palace office at 329-9555, visit daughtersofhawaii.org/huliheepalace for details.

Also in an effort to raise monies, A Hulihe'e Restoration Fund has been set up and tax-deductible donations can be mailed to Hulihe'e Palace, 75-5718 Ali'i Drive, Kailua-Kona, HI 96740. For details of the earthquake damage, visit www.daughtersofhawaii.org.

After a recent day of plastering, Venter shared his feelings on the palace's importance: "It's an honor to be involved with the restoration of this significant landmark. I've made a friend every time I say I'm working here. People have a connection to this place; they really care about it."

The Daughters of Hawai'i was founded in 1903; the organization opens its membership to any woman who is directly descended from a person who lived in Hawai'i prior to 1880. Helping the Daughters in its efforts since 1986 are the Calabash Cousins; membership is available to all, 329-9555, daughtersofhawaii.org.