



## For Immediate Release

### Polynesian Cultural Center Celebrating 25th Anniversary of World Fireknife Championship, May 11-13

**MAY 9, 2017, Laie, Hawaii** – Twenty-five years ago, Pulefano Galeai of the Polynesian Cultural Center had a vision to create an annual competition honoring one of Samoa’s most revered and dangerously beautiful traditions, fireknife dancing.

In 1993, the inaugural World Fireknife Championship was held, drawing an initial field of competitors from Hawaii and the South Pacific.

This week, the Polynesian Cultural Center is hosting the 25<sup>th</sup> annual World Fireknife Championship from May 11-13, an international competition regarded as the world’s premier event for fireknife dancing. Competitors will come from Samoa, Japan, Tahiti, California, Florida and Hawaii. As the competition has grown in stature over the years, so has the quality of fireknife dancing.

“The Polynesian Cultural Center is honored to host the World Fireknife Championship and more importantly, seen it become the preeminent competition for practitioners of this ancient Samoan art these past twenty five years,” said Alfred Grace, President and CEO of the Polynesian Cultural Center. “Each year the competition draws the most talented fireknife dancers from around the world and the skills, style and acrobatics becomes more amazing as we determine the very best of the best.”

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the World Fireknife Championship at the Polynesian Cultural Center. During this annual event, the world’s most talented fireknife warriors come together for three nights of heated competition. From as young as six years old to the most experienced and celebrated performers, all will compete in their respective divisions seeking to win the coveted title of World Fireknife Champion.

The competitors in the elite Senior division present an incredible combination of dexterity, speed, power, risk, and creativity in choreographed routines that have them twirling one, two and sometimes three fireknives in front of their body, behind their back, and tossing them high overhead.

“As this is our 25<sup>th</sup> year of World Fireknife Championship, first place winner will walk away with \$7,500, second place \$5,000 and third place \$3,000. Attendees will be treated to a cultural experience unlike any other, and the best of the best will be crowned a World Champion in both junior and senior divisions,” said Steve Lualaba, Director of Islands for the Polynesian Cultural Center.

Traditionally known in the Samoan culture as the *nifo oti* or deadly tooth, the ancient fireknife was primarily used in close combat by warriors, but was also incorporated in ceremonial dances and rituals. This ancient weapon and the Samoan *lave*, or hook, were later combined to resemble the modern-day *nifo oti*, according to Galeai.

Over the years, young dancers developed skillful movements for the *nifo oti*. In 1946, Uluao “Freddie” Letuli from Nu'uuli, American Samoa decided to add flaming pads to each end of his *nifo oti*. It is said that both a Hindu fire-eater and a baton twirler inspired Letuli. Adding flames to the already challenging dance is a true test of a performer’s ability, creativity and dexterity.

The World Fireknife Championships is the main attraction of the PCC’s We Are Samoa Festival, Hawaii’s largest annual Samoan cultural celebration. The other featured event is the High School Samoan Cultural Arts Festival on Saturday morning (May 13, 9:00 a.m.) in which Hawaii students of

Polynesian and other ancestry showcase oratory skills, song and dance performances, and compete in traditional Samoan practices and life skills.

**Video** of three time World Fireknife Champion David Galeai who is also competing this year:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3Wc83im7Ww>

**Images** of World Fireknife Championship 2016:  
<https://app.box.com/s/9geyl6qlqiaoarqbw820xuz84uxu1pe3>

For more information about the World Fireknife Championships, please visit [www.worldfireknife.com](http://www.worldfireknife.com).

For information or to make reservations at the PCC, please visit [www.polynesia.com](http://www.polynesia.com) or call (800) 367-7060. In Hawai'i, call 293-3333.

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#### **ABOUT POLYNESIAN CULTURAL CENTER**

Located on Oahu's beautiful North Shore, the Polynesian Cultural Center (PCC) is the only cultural tourist attraction of its kind in the world and a favorite of all visitors to Hawaii. An engaging, interactive celebration showcasing the people, culture, arts and crafts of Polynesia, the PCC has entertained millions of visitors from around the world since opening in 1963. A non-profit organization, 100 percent of PCC's revenue goes to daily operations and to support the education of its student-employees from neighboring Brigham Young University-Hawaii. For more information, visit [www.Polynesia.com](http://www.Polynesia.com).

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