

BIPC's Big Five

Five reasons the Big Island Press Club has survived for four decades and remains a watchdog for openness and credibility and a scholarship provider for 40 years.

1. Beginning: In 1967, Hilo was like a Greek city state with many divisions too numerous to repeat. The Guild at the T-H was just off a winning but bruising fight with Donrey Media (now Stephens) over technology changes and a failed union dissolution attempt. Feelings were raw, at best.

Radio folks did not talk to each other (with just three AM entities) and never to the newspaper guys or vice versa. Along came, Bill Arballo who coaxed the late Paul Mannen to host a steak fry with all sides invited. Not all attended, but it was a start. Next was a meeting at the Southward's upper Kaumana rented manse.

We organized over significant doubts from some key people. We were launched at the former Hilo Country Club with a charge from former editor-in-chief George Chaplin of the Honolulu Advertiser who urged we strive to be more than the then flourishing Honolulu Press Club and he delivered our logo, contributed without fee from cartoonist Harry Lyons. We were under way....

2. Launched: The BIPC was begun in controversy. First came the charter commission proceedings and we believed we needed an Openness in Government provision, a la the Brown act in California. We were ejected summarily as sort of uninvited guests.

But we dusted off our britches and returned and the late Yasuki Arakaki tried to broker peace, fearful the third in the charter attempts might fail if we were not neutralized. He, along with chairman Fred Koehnen, who added a whole subsection on emergency meetings that we accepted without reservation, got reconsideration and here we were in the bright lights as Section 13-20 (b) when the charter took effect Jan. 1, 1969, after voter ratification.

3. Legal battles everywhere. Because we had a terrific, unpaid legal adviser, in Steve Christiansen we used the courts to enforce the charter, even against some of our friends. The first fight and maybe the most significant came when then mayor Shunichi Kimura signed into law rules and regulations that made the ethics commission immune from open meetings, against our advice. Judge Nelson Doi recoiled against his one-time law partner and issued his profound "Right to Know" decision in which he said there was no more important right in a democracy. We later litigated through prosecutor Paul de Silva the illegal firing of police chief Ernest Fergerstrom who regained his retirement benefits and dignity on a criminal complaint filed by Eugene Tao, David Shapiro and Hugh Clark. Marcia Reynolds went to Honolulu to secure 13-20 (b) before the House Judiciary committee making it supreme over then newly enacted state Office of Information Practices, if it was more open. Many, including Arakaki, urged Gov. Ariyoshi to sign the bill. Yasuki proclaimed openness was not a bad idea after all. And Judge Kubota later upheld a challenge to the state law, made by retired Supreme Court Justice Kazuhisa Abe.

Then came the Hilo Airport shut down by the Hawaiian warriors of the era. Thirteen members of the media were arrested with the protestors. Most of the latter were BIPC members and attorney quickly discovered no basis for the arrests. Judge Kubota tossed out charges against everyone and the Hawaiian collected \$500,000 a year for their efforts.

4. Scholarships: The list is long and the results different. We have unwillingly educated lawyers, teachers and a court bailiff but we have some legitimate news folks supported through what has grown in four annual awards. It all began because of a feisty high school journalism teacher, Yukino Fukabori, who promised to join if we offered a scholarship. She never wavered nor did we. We used membership dues at the outset and then came W.H. "Doc" Hill, the defrocked publisher and state senator, who tossed \$1,000 our way after Robert C. Miller's initial talk. After Doc's death, widow Ouida Hill twice endorsed efforts with matching amounts. The Imus, a fool-around, good time roast of the press and politicians followed, and we generated a fund balance that stands at more than \$50,000 and the Fukabori family came through with an annual family endowment and Edna Christiansen honors our attorney-honorary member with a life scholarship. No one could have imagined the outcome, not even sometimes crotchety Jack Markey in whose name we honor a student each year.

5. Friends. Without friends, where might we be? A limited list includes: George Durham, our music man, the Imu arranger and devoted friend for 35 plus years; A.C. "Slim" Holt, the then big time transportation guy who gave us start up units for our first of four clubhouses and was a lifelong sustaining member; Paul Mannen, our finance guy – the Imu "boss" for negotiations for and productions and our host for scripting sessions, who served on our board longer than anyone without being able to vote for himself; the late Bobbye Hughes, the Honolulu PR lady who insisted each of her clients join us and provide an Imu ad; Tom Okuyama, a long time member who underwrote the traffic safety editorial contest and each year gave as a reward check for the effort and once hosted our Christmas event at his home.

That list could be expanded from Jeff Portnoy, our Honolulu attorney friend who once was featured as a scholarship event and sent back his expense check; the late Maury Zimring, creator of "Creature of the Black Lagoon" who spearheaded many early events; Shoichi Nakahra and Mary Earl (no, they were not a couple) but they mutually gave and gave without asking a thing in return. None ever tried to influence our professional decisions.

In 2004, after years of saying we wanted to, we obtained federal status as a 401c-3 outfit that officially made donations tax deductible, thanks to Rod Thompson's persistent efforts. Members, old and new, would take up several pages from board service, to being super watchdogs to Imu scriptors and performers. Our posthumous list has grown too long.

But darn, we are still here ready for good fight over a closed government session, thanks to more recent leaders such as the "tough titas" Tiffany Edwards and Pat Tummons who are not afraid to stand up to any bureaucrat, any time...

By Hugh Clark with memory help from Bill Arballo, Walt Southward, Rod Thompson, Eugene Tao, Marcia Reynolds, Hunter Bishop and Donald Miller, among others.