



International Festivals & Events Association

Muriel A. Anderson 2008 IFEA Hall of Fame Inductee Hawai'i Tourism Authority



Born, raised and educated in Hawai'i, Muriel Anderson has been a part of Hawai'i's visitor industry, the main economic engine for the state, since 1965.

Her career began with the Makai Corporation, the consortium that included Sea Life Park, Hotel Hana Ranch (Maui), the Lahaina-Kā'anapali and Pacific Railroad, and Royal Hawaiian Air Service, all of which provided her with her first taste in event planning. She then served as Executive Secretary at Sheraton Hotels in the Pacific.

From 1976 to 1984, she worked as Promotions Manager for Hawaiian Airlines, immersing herself in event sponsorship, operations, and marketing. To promote the airlines and the visitor industry, she organized hula groups and integrated authentic Hawaiian culture into trade shows and events. When the NFL brought its annual Pro-Bowl to Hawai'i in 1980, Hawaiian Airlines became a major sponsor of the event, and Muriel co-produced the half-time show, reaching millions through its January TV broadcast with Hawaiian dancers and singers, sunshine and aloha.

One of her important contributions was managing the airlines' brand-new sponsorship of the Miss Hawai'i Scholarship Program. Since the program had and still has no paid staff, Muriel became not only its lead-sponsor representative but also part of its de facto working committee.

She headed the Hawai'i Tourism Office of the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism from 1984 until its transition in 1998 to the Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA), the lead agency and advocate for tourism in Hawai'i. She currently serves as its Vice President of Tourism Product Development and is responsible for the HTA strategic initiatives and programs in Access, Hawaiian Culture, Natural Resources, Research and Planning, Tourism Product Development Safety & Security and Workforce Development.

She serves on the board of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and is also a member of its Sustainability, Communications and Government committees. She is chair of PATA Hawai'i Chapter and is on the advisory committee of the Hospitality and Tourism Program at Kapi'olani Community College. She also represents the HTA as a member of IFEA and was recently appointed to the IFEA Global Roundtable Council.

At the HTA, and as part of its Tourism Product Development initiative, Muriel honed her passion for the exciting and wonderful attributes of Hawai'i that were reflected in the state's many festivals and events. She was responsible for developing a Festivals Strategy in 2000. She worked with IFEA to raise the quality of festivals and has helped them launch pilot projects. To

ensure events are sustainable, she has gained approval from HTA to provide substantial funding for festivals and events. Under her leadership, the HTA identified brand values for its festivals and events both statewide and for each major island. She subsequently launched HTA's first post-arrival campaign for festivals and events which won five gold, one silver and two bronze awards at the 2007 IFEA Pinnacle Awards, the first time Hawai'i has entered the competition.

In 2005, the HTA approved the *Hawai'i Tourism Strategic Plan: 2005-2015*. Written primarily by Robbie Kane, an HTA staff member under Muriel's management, it includes a historic strategic initiative for festivals and events heavily based on the festivals strategy Muriel developed in the year 2000. Muriel pointed to the importance of visitor satisfaction in a destination with a high repeat visitor factor, and urged HTA to approve festivals and events unique to Hawai'i's multicultural heritage as an "Experiential Attraction" to enhance the Hawai'i visitor's experience. She then helped to acquire funding for this initiative. Today, HTA is able to support over 75 festivals and events throughout the State with over \$3.5 million. Annually, HTA targets 8 to 10 major festivals and events which attract significant attendance numbers, draw visitors to Hawai'i specifically to attend the festival, and conduct major marketing programs in and out of the State of Hawai'i. Muriel established a Native Hawaiian Festivals Program which currently supports four signature events for the Hawaiian community and which reflect its host history and culture. Also under her leadership, the HTA developed a strong partnership with Hawai'i's four major counties in support of a community-based effort that supports festivals, events, activities and programs in the niche areas of agriculture, culture, health and wellness, education, nature, and technology. These achievements not only help sustain Hawai'i's festivals and events industry but also set a precedent, as Hawai'i is an industry leader which other destinations follow.

Muriel has also made a difference in the industry by launching an aggressive professional development program that is intended to help events remain community-based so visitors can interact with residents in an authentic experience while at the same time raising the quality of the experience. To execute, Muriel formed a strategic partnership with IFEA through its first regional-based CFEE program which is being conducted in Hawai'i with HTA sponsorship; through an annual HTA Festivals and Events seminar now in its fourth year; and through a training workshop showing event planners how to conduct satisfaction surveys and how to use results to improve the event quality.

An enthusiastic supporter of the IFEA, Muriel has worked collaboratively with its leadership to forge unique strategic partnerships. Together, they have developed three new products which have helped IFEA pilot new sources of revenue while assisting the HTA achieve its objective of enhancing the post-arrival experience of visitors through high quality events.

In 2005, Muriel convinced the HTA, assisted by OmniTrak Group, to launch its first cooperative program with IFEA – a Hawai'i-based Festivals and Events Seminar. Hawai'i is a small state, hence, HTA's objective is to keep festivals community-based to help maintain authenticity. It was within these constraints that Muriel launched the annual seminar with two key objectives - to raise the level of professionalism among community festival and event planners and to facilitate outreach by HTA into all four major counties. The first year program was a resounding success with 420 attendees – 20% above goal.

In 2007, an IFEA Festivals Consulting Task Force was commissioned by Muriel for the purpose of taking an in-depth look at how an established but tired HTA-funded festival – critical for

attracting visitors during an otherwise low arrivals season – could be revitalized. The HTA felt that the Festival could benefit from an audit by objective, experienced professionals.

In 2008, the Regional CFEE Planner Program was launched under Muriel's direction to bring professional development and certification to smaller, more isolated communities that have cost barriers to traveling to the IFEA's annual convention. It is the first CFEE program outside of the existing conference-based system.

Another area where Muriel has made a difference both in Hawai'i and nationally is the Miss Hawai'i Scholarship Program. Muriel has served as its Associate Director for over 30 years, and is part of the team that has taken the pageant to new levels. She helped to build the live audience from a few hundred to thousands by moving the event to a public venue with almost five times the capacity. Muriel's role is especially critical in preparing the Miss Hawai'i winner for the national contest. She is adviser, shopper, trainer, coordinator and counselor – mainly responsible for preparing the winner for the national, high pressure interview competition. Despite the fact that half of the States had never won the title, Muriel helped prepare two Miss Hawai'i representatives to win the Miss America title!

Married for 41 years, Muriel and her husband Les have three children and nine grandchildren. In fact, one of her daughters is following in her mother's "tourism" footsteps and, after a stint at the Hilton Hawaiian Village, is presently the Academic Adviser for Students at the University of Hawai'i-School of Travel Industry Management.

An idealistic Muriel Anderson took a position with state government years ago in the hopes of "changing the world." She wanted to make a difference in her community and do what was "pono" or right for the residents of her state. While she stands firmly in her belief that festivals and events are crucial elements of Hawai'i's tourism product and play a key role in the State's overall tourism strategy, she also believes Hawai'i's success in events and festivals will benefit the community as a whole. Muriel does not take that responsibility lightly and hopes that her actions and role at the HTA can assist in bringing economic and social well-being to the citizens of the state.