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THEBUZZ

Erika Engle

New wave for paddling sponsorships

THE Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association has been paddling upstream since it lost a venerable race sponsor last year.

Bank of Hawaii sponsored the 52-year-old Molokai Hoe for more than 20 years and sponsored Na Wahine O Ke Kai for a dozen years before ending the relationship last year, according to bank spokesman Stafford Kiguchi.

"The bank was a great sponsor," said OHCRA President Hannie Anderson. "There's no hard feelings. We're grateful to them. When Bankoh came in it put us up to another level."

A mix of sponsors carried the 2002 events, including 2001 co-sponsor **Brewery of Tahiti**, parent company of Hinano Beer, for the men's race and **Hawaii Modular Space Inc.** for Na Wahine.

Hawaii Modular President Mike Fox heard media reports about the sponsorship need. A licensed general contractor, the company provides custom modular buildings, mobile offices and storage containers.

"It was quite a coincidence. We had been looking for an event to sponsor. One of our goals in our business plan for last year was to create or get involved with an event. This one sort of just dropped out of the sky."



Mike Fox: In addition to the money, OHCRA sponsorship is nearly a full-time job

A former paddler, Fox felt strongly about helping to keep the races going.

"People all over the world look at this as the Mecca (for outrigger canoe paddling) and Hawaii is the place where it all began, where the best paddlers are and where it all happens," he said. "If you're in California you stand in awe looking at the Hawaiians."

The sponsorship bite was not bigger than his company could chew, but it was big.

Bigger in size, dollars and time commitment, "because in addition to money, this is like a full-time job. It takes quite a bit of our resources to manage it and put it together," he said.

Fox reworked the sponsorship structure to facilitate business participation.

OHCRA organizes and produces the races along with its member clubs, but Fox is in charge of the sponsorship, marketing and media efforts.

The company spent \$50,000 and rounded up another \$25,000 from others last year, and increased its financial commitment this year.

Hawaii Modular Space is the title sponsor for both long distance races in September and October and the OHCRA Summer Regatta Series, including the July 20 Oahu championship regatta at Keehi Lagoon.

Associate sponsors include KINE-FM and Hinano Beer in partnership with Ocean Club, but three more associate sponsors are being sought.

"This year our budget is \$155,000," Fox said. "It's huge."

Associate sponsorships of \$12,000 include advertising,

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public relations, live radio coverage of the races on KINE and a piece of television specials on Molokai Hoe and Na Wahine, banner placement at all events and booth possibilities at most events through the end of the long distance season Oct. 12.

Sponsorship notwithstanding, clubs pay a \$450 entry fee for the long distance races to

cover numerous expenses including shipment of canoes to Molokai, escort boats, medical personnel and insurance, Anderson said. She expects at least 65 canoes for this year's 25th annual Na Wahine, and more than 100 for Molokai Hoe.

"There are many corporations that would directly benefit and it makes sense for them to be involved," Fox said. "Call me now."