

# Watercraft Designer Extraordinaire Joe Quigg Elected to OCC Life Membership

By Barbara Del Piano



Joe Quigg uses a chain saw to shape a 200-year-old koa log into the canoe *Kaoloa*.



Joe with the finished *Kaoloa* after the blessing.



One of Joe's proudest moments was in 1990 when the *Kaoloa* won the Molokai Hoe setting a record along the way. It was the last koa to do so. Front: Mark Sandvold, Chris Kincaid, Walter Guild, Mark Rigg. Standing: Coach Steve Scott, Tom Conner, Bruce Black, Geoff Graf, Courtney Seto, Keone Downing.

It's an honor well deserved for Joe Quigg who was elected to Life Membership at the Annual Meeting on February 28. Low key and humble, Joe avoids the lime-light, so many of us are not aware of his exceptional contributions to Outrigger water sports, which span more than fifty years.

Over the years, Joe's exceptional talents have done much to ensure that our watercraft, including surfboards, paddleboards and outrigger canoes are state of the art and up to the latest standards of the day. His efforts have resulted in many of the gold medals and trophies that adorn our display cases.

Although paddlers receive the accolades when they win a race, many don't realize that the canoe itself, its shape and design, are important factors in a race's outcome.

Joe was born and raised on the West Coast and from an early age was an avid surfer at California's Malibu Beach, building his first surfboard at the age of four. His interest in water sports and the design and construction of watercraft have remained the focus of his entire life.

Joe was the first person to envision the idea of making surfboards out of foam, but because of the scarcity of the newly invented product shortly after World War II, he was able to turn out only a few before switching to balsa. But Quigg conceived the idea of using foam 10 years before Hobart Alter manufactured his famous Hobie Boards in 1957.

By the time Joe made his first trip to Hawaii in 1947, lured by tales of the islands famed surfing spots, he had

already designed the first balsa board sealed with fiberglass and resin. Called "The Malibu Board," it was about half the weight of boards in use at the time and was an immediate hit on the West Coast.

The first person in Hawaii to own one was Outrigger's "surfer girl," Pat Honl. The fame and popularity of the Malibu Boards spread throughout the surfing world and they were a common sight along Waikiki as well as the California coast and Australia as well.

In the 1950s, world championship surfer and Club member Fred Hemmings owned one of Joe's Malibu Boards and has this to say: "Joe is the Leonardo de Vinci of surfboard art. His old balsa boards were art as well as cutting edge surfboard design."

During his first visit to the islands, a four-month stay on Oahu, Joe crewed on Woody Brown's catamaran, observed the arts of steering and paddling canoes, and purchased an 18 foot koa canoe which he took back to California.

After meeting and marrying Aggie, his wife of 61 years, the Quiggs returned to Hawaii in 1953 and at that time joined the Outrigger Canoe Club through the auspices of friend and Club steersman, Jackie Cross. Once settled in Hawaii, Joe went into the business of designing and building surfboards, while holding a job at the Moana Hotel.

Over the years, the Club has reaped innumerable benefits from Joe's talent for improving watercraft. His innate ability to analyze how shape affects speed in the water is a rare gift, although, with his typical modesty, Joe insists



ABOVE: OCC Paddlers near victory in the Molokai Hoe in the *Leilani* after Joe remodeled it in 1983. Sailing along with them is a 43-foot catamaran designed and built by Quigg and owned by Joey Cabell.



RIGHT: This is one of the first super light paddleboards Joe built. It was 20-foot long, 16 inches wide and weighed 16 pounds. While testing various racing paddleboards, he says he got into shape and beat George Downing, the fastest paddler at the time, in the 1956 Diamond Head race.



ABOVE: Joe Quigg in 1944 in Malibu with one of the thousands of surfboards he built during his 82-year career. He was the first to make foam boards.

on simply calling it "common sense."

In 1971, Outrigger member Cline Mann, in his efforts to revive paddleboard racing, asked Joe to design and build a paddleboard. The result was a lighter, 12-foot board with an improved shape, reduced in length from the previous 19-foot board then in use.

It spurred a rebirth in the popularity of the sport that had been in decline for many years. Joe's innovative design set many records and is still used for racing throughout the islands and internationally as well.

Outrigger eked out a narrow win in the Molokai to Oahu race in 1975 against a crew from Tahiti, but the following year nine crews from that South Pacific Island, with their long, swift canoes, entered the race, winning not only first place, but second, third and fourth as well. It was obvious that the design of Tahitian canoes possessed superior qualities that were a force to be reckoned with.

When HCRA changed its rules to accommodate some innovative changes, who but Joe Quigg would be chosen to redesign and rebuild the club's fiberglass racing canoe, *Mana Ula*. In 1977, the slender, sleek, remodeled 45-foot canoe took the lead from the start and retained it throughout the grueling Molokai Hoe race, bringing the championship trophy back to Hawaii's shores.

In 1980, when Joe designed the first one-man outrigger canoe, Outrigger members Dale Hope and Gaylord Wilcox were the first to snap them up. One-man canoes are now a very popular form of canoeing not only in Hawaii, but around the world.

In 1982, Joe was asked to remodel the Club's cherished koa canoe, *Leilani*, which had been damaged in the Molokai race that year. Quigg cut the canoe in half in order to increase its length, narrowed it, and completely rebuilt the back, the first time this had ever been accomplished.

The result was a faster, sleeker, lighter canoe that handily won the Molokai race in 1983. In 1984, the *Leilani* not only won, but did it in the fastest time ever recorded for a koa cane.

In the early 1980's the Club decided to add a new koa racing canoe to join the *Leilani* and *Kakina* and Joe Quigg was commissioned to build it. But because koa logs are rare and extremely difficult to find, the project was put on hold until one could be located.

In 1983 Laura Lucas Thompson of Hui Nalu Canoe Club offered a koa log as a prize for the club that amassed the most points during the Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association's regatta season. Fortuitously, Outrigger won the prize!

However, it turned out that the 45-foot log, estimated to be over 200 years old, was extremely hard, heavy, and seriously rotted at both ends and the center as well. Joe Quigg took on the difficult challenge and the ultimate result was a sleek, 44-foot 415 pound racing canoe named the *Kaoloa*, which means "long spear."

During the season, Outrigger crews, paddling the *Kaoloa*, won both the OH CRA and HCRA championships. The *Kaoloa* also won the 1990 Molokai Hoe, beating out a slew of fiberglass canoes that had been dominating the





FAR LEFT: Dale Hope sits atop the first one-man sit-on-top outrigger canoe. It was designed by Joe and was the beginning of a new class of outrigger canoes that became international best sellers.

LEFT: Walter Guild, right, welcomed Joe Quigg and Keanuene Rochlen into the Winged "O" in 2005.

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long-distance race for years.

Another of Joe's inventions was a fiberglass canoe called the Hawaiian Class Racer. Produced by Walter Guild's Fiberglass Shop in Campbell Industrial Park, it was a little shorter and wider than the standard of the day.

The new design proved superior to the model currently in use and soon prevailed as the number one fiberglass

canoe for distance racing. Guild's shop could hardly keep up as canoe clubs around the world began to order them.

Joe, with the able assistance of Outrigger's gifted craftsman, Domi Gose, took on the task of remodeling the *Kakina* in 2001, which brought that venerable canoe up to the latest racing standards.

One of Quigg's special talents is his ability to work with different materials; he is equally comfortable with koa, balsa, foam, or fiberglass. His designs for surfboards, paddleboards, catamarans, or outrigger canoes are cutting edge, and his uncanny comprehension of hydrodynamics, a science most of us have never heard of, plays a vital roll in achieving the speed which is so important in winning races.

Indeed, Joe Quigg has done much to keep our Club competitive in the ever-expanding realm of outrigger canoeing, which is its true mission, and one to which it has faithfully adhered for more than 100 years.

Outstanding Outrigger steersman Walter Guild calls Joe "the finest modern Hawaiian canoe designer of our time."

Congratulations to our newest Life Member Joe Quigg.

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