

DEC 22 1990

Outrigger weighs citizenship restriction

Club rule would ban foreign membership

By Stu Glauberman
Advertiser Staff Writer

The Outrigger Canoe Club is contemplating a by-law change that would restrict membership to U.S. citizens, a move seen by some as an effort to bar applicants from Japan.

The Americans-only restriction is one of several changes that have come up for discussion during an annual review of the club's by-laws.

Ray Ludwig, Outrigger general manager, said directors have not indicated whether they will discuss the membership ban at their meeting next week.

"It has not been decided by our board of directors whether to present the by-law change," Ludwig said.

Some active members of the club said they were unaware that the proposal was being discussed. Others, who had heard about the proposed requirement, expressed concern.

Under current rules, membership is open to men and women who have been residents of Hawaii for at least one year. Prospective members must be sponsored by two members in good standing.

By-laws committee chairman Jim Peterson acknowledged the citizenship restriction had come up, but refused to discuss it with a reporter.

"I don't know that anybody has acted on any change," Peterson said.

Another board member, Walter Guild, said he was reluctant to comment about a proposal that was at the discussion stage.

"At this point, and being that it's a private club, it's not something the public should be involved in," Guild said.

Dr. Sharon Bintliff, the first woman elected to the club's board, is no longer on the board, but as a regular at the club she's heard rumblings about the citizenship restriction.

Bintliff suggested a rationale for the ban — it would put severely limited facilities to the best use for local people.

"There are only so many parking spaces, so many dining room tables and so many lockers available," said Bintliff. "Those are real limitations.

"Rather than open it up to people who have money but don't use the club too often, people who would see it as a status symbol rather than use it as intended, we should concentrate on bringing local people who love the ocean into that club.

"We should make every effort to serve the needs of our own right here," she said.

Robert Moore, a former club president, said he's also gotten wind of the debate but doesn't think the ban would pass muster at the annual membership meeting in February.

"I sense that it's going to die a horrible death," Moore said.

A recent guest at the club said he was shocked to discover members were thinking of excluding Japanese and Asian nationals.

"It irks me to learn that this sort of thinking still goes on in the club," said Robert Simonton of Burbank, Calif.

In a letter to The Advertiser, Simonton wrote, "I hope that a community which prides itself on being a melting pot for the races will not continue to tolerate this kind of behavior."

The idea of restricting membership to American citizens may have come

from the neighboring Elks Lodge 616, often called the Elks Club.

In order to become a member of the Elks Lodge, a fraternal organization, an applicant must be 21, an American citizen and believe in God, Lodge Secretary Dick Owen said.

Owen said the Americans-only idea might well have come from the Elks. "We have many members who are also members of the Outrigger," he said.

The Outrigger, a sports club that rules the waves in canoe paddling and competes for national volleyball titles, was founded in 1908 by Alexander Hume Ford, who leased 1½ acres at Waikiki for \$10 a year.

The ocean-minded club embraced Olympic gold medalist Duke Kahanamoku and his Hawaiian beach boy friends.

But in 1945, it refused to allow Island-born national swimming champion Keo Nakama to enter the premises because he was a Japanese American.

In 1968, the Outrigger was still described as "restricted" even though president Howard Goss said there were "at least 28 Oriental members" on its 1,100-member rolls.

A 1979 feature article on Honolulu clubs called the Outrigger "the least

racially integrated."

To become a member of the downtown Pacific Club, one must be sponsored by a member of five or more years and have references from five other members. But citizenship is not taken into account, according to general manager Gordon Boeder.

Boeder said directors have never considered such a restriction.

In 1957, the Pacific Club rejected Hawaii Supreme Court Justice Masaji Marumoto's membership application on the basis of race.

It broke its restriction on members of Asian ancestry in August 1968 when it admitted banker Philip Ching and lawyer Asa Akinaka.

Citizens of other countries are typically allowed to join Hawaii country clubs.

Douglas Holtz, president of the Hawaii chapter of the Club Managers Association of America, said most clubs have several categories of memberships, including one or more for non-residents.

Kevin Meecham, commodore of the Waikiki Yacht Club, said the yacht club accepts members from other countries.

6A—West Hawaii Today, Sunday, December 23, 1990

OCC wants to exclude foreigners

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Critics say it is a plan to keep Japanese from joining the successful club.

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Current rules allow men and women who have lived in Hawaii for a year to apply for membership, but only if they are sponsored by two people already in the club.

Outrigger member Dr. Sharon Bintliff says the rule changes are designed to allow local people continued access to the limited space and facilities at the club.

Bintliff says the club should be for local people who "love the ocean" and not for people "who would see it as a status symbol, rather than use it as intended."

"We should make every effort to serve the needs of our own right here," she said.

Former club president Robert Moore says such a change banning foreigners will be defeated if put to a vote. Moore says he thinks the rule change "will die a horrible death."

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