Falaniko Penesa of Samoa Wins 2019 World Fireknife Championship

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LAIE, Hawaii (PRWEB) May 13, 2019 -- Falaniko Penesa proved he is the world’s best fireknife dancer this year, winning the 2019 World Fireknife Championship at the Polynesian Cultural Center with a flawless display of athleticism, acrobatic creativity, bravery and showmanship.

Penesa’s victory concluded the four-day We Are Samoa Festival, May 8-11. Hawaii’s largest annual Samoan cultural celebration, the festival featured fireknife competitions in four divisions, the High School Samoan Cultural Arts Festival, and daily exhibits of Samoan culture and artwork throughout the grounds of the Polynesian Cultural Center.

Penesa, 28, whose home is in Aele and Puipaa, Samoa, bested the other two finalists, Mikaele Oola of Waialua, Hawaii, and Joseph Cadousteau of Tahiti to win the elite Men’s Division of the World Fireknife Championship. Saturday's (May 11) championship round culminated three days of intense competition that began with 24 contestants in the opening round on Thursday (May 9), from which six semi-finalists performed Friday (May 10) night seeking to advance to the finals.

Alfred Grace, president and CEO of the Polynesian Cultural Center, said, “Falaniko Penesa is a gracious winner and fan favorite. He is a brilliant fireknife dancer and an excellent role model. We applaud his winning performance and how he got better with each round of competition.”

Dressed in a traditional lavalava and performing to the pulsating beat of eight Samoan drummers, Penesa’s championship performance featured an amazing routine that had him spinning the flaming blades at dizzying speeds with his arms extended from his side and in front of his body, behind his back, above his head, and under his legs while sitting and laying down.

Other highlights of Penesa’s performance included the juggling of two fireknives and tossing them 20 feet in the air without breaking the rhythm of his routine. He also did a one-handed cartwheel while twirling the fireknives and, spun in a circle while lying on his back, arching it and using his head used to pivot his movement.

Penesa, who dropped to one knee and got emotional upon learning of his victory, also won the World Fireknife Championship in 2017. He said of his second championship, “I am so happy and want to congratulate all of the contestants. Thank you to the Polynesian Cultural Center for keeping the Samoan culture alive and bringing people together for this festival.”

Penesa has been training and practicing for the past year to win back the title and encouraged all up-and-coming fireknife dancers with his message to “always practice and never give up.”

Now in its 27th year, the World Fireknife Championship was established by the Polynesian Cultural Center in 1993 to showcase this proud Samoan tradition and encourage future generations to perpetuate this amazing combination of artistry, skill and bravery. Fire-knife dancing is rooted in the Samoan ailao, a warrior knife
dance traditionally performed before battle utilizing the nifo oti, or “tooth of death.”

This year’s World Fireknife Championship featured competitions in four divisions. In addition to Penesa winning the Men’s Division, Jeralee Galeai, 18, of Laie, Hawaii, won the Women’s Division, Matagi Lilo, 13, of Ewa Beach, Hawaii, won the Intermediate Division (ages 12-17) and his younger brother, Mose Lilo, 11, won the Junior Division (ages 6-11).

For more information about the World Fireknife Championship, visit www.worldfireknife.com.

For information about the Polynesian Cultural Center or to make reservations, visit www.polynesia.com, or call (800) 367-7060. In Hawaii, call 293-3333.

ABOUT THE POLYNESIAN CULTURAL CENTER
Located on Oahu’s beautiful North Shore, the Polynesian Cultural Center is the only cultural tourist attraction of its kind in the world and a favorite of all visitors to Hawaii. An engaging, interactive celebration showcasing the people, culture, arts and crafts of Polynesia, the Polynesian Cultural Center has entertained millions of visitors from around the world since opening in 1963. A non-profit organization, 100 percent of its revenue goes to daily operations and to support the education of its student-employees from neighboring Brigham Young University-Hawaii. For more information, visit www.Polynesia.com.
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