Polynesian Voyaging Society (PVS)

Ellison S. Onizuka Memorial Award

For almost fifty years, Honolulu’s Polynesian Voyaging Society (PVS) has set a course for adventure on the high seas, boldly going where their seafaring forefathers and mothers went before them.

Founded in 1973 by University of Hawaii anthropologist Ben Finney, historian Herb Kane, and Tommy Holmes of the Hawaii Maritime Center, the PVS was a cultural experiment to preserve the history and tradition of Polynesian nautical expertise.

The prototypical canoe they built, named the Hokule’a (meaning “Star of Gladness”) made its maiden voyage to Tahiti in 1976, navigating without instruments or maps, but through traditions handed down by generations of South Pacific Islanders… literally charting a path via the stars.

Today’s Polynesian Voyaging Society serves as an educational non-profit, dedicated to creating a new voyaging tradition, passing down culturally significant oceanic knowledge and capability to future generations, with epic journeys throughout the Pacific Islander diaspora.

These travels have reached far beyond the act of setting sail, they’ve sparked a renewed interest in other cultural and artistic expression, such as traditional hula dance and chants, healing arts, and intensive language study, bringing a people’s culture from below deck to the bow of global acknowledgement.

PVS is instilling a sense of history and pride in a people’s accomplishments and most importantly, their work is inspiring us all to explore the limits of our imagination.

Like the heroic traveler for whom their award is named, astronaut and engineer Colonel Ellison S. Onizuka, the Polynesian Voyaging Society is on a mission to preserve the legacy of exploration… to infinity and beyond.