

MASTER CARVER

Having learned his art from craftsmen throughout the Pacific, master artist Kawika Eskaran '74 completes his latest project, BYU-Hawai'i's 57-foot double-hulled teaching canoe, the *Iosepa*.



Kawika Eskaran knew very early in life where destiny would lead him. As a young boy, he would go to his grandmother's house and look forward to visits with his uncle, August Schrader '66.

"He would bring home wooden carvings of women's faces and heads, and I would think they were just so amazing!" Eskaran said. "I'd sleep on my grandmother's lauhala mat floor, and I'd hold the carving in one hand and feel the surface of it with my other hand – I remember the lips would look so alive to me.

"Then, I'd get up real early and go into her kitchen. I'd open the drawers, take the cleaver and paring knives, put them in my tackle box and make like I was going to the beach to go fishing. But I would search the beach for driftwood, and then just start making things. And I thought, one day, I'm going to be able to do carvings like the ones my uncle brought home."

Today, Kawika Eskaran has done much, much more than create wooden sculptures of women's faces and heads.

As the Director of Special Projects for Ka Halau Nui A Hawai'i Loa – the Jonathan Napela Center for Hawaiian Language and Cultural Studies at BYU-Hawai'i, his latest undertaking may be his crowning achievement – serving as one of two master carvers, along with Tuione Pulotu of Tonga, during the design and construction of the school's 57-foot voyaging canoe, the *Iosepa*.

Launched in November 2001 before huge crowds in Lā'ie, the *Iosepa* will eventually sail the Hawaiian islands, teaching students navigation, wayfinding and Hawaiian cultural values.

After studying fine arts at BYU-Hawai'i, Eskaran garnered worldwide recognition during his 13-year career at the Polynesian Cultural Center, where he earned the title of master carver.

Eskaran's carvings are in the collections of every United States president since Ronald Reagan, and he's also presented pieces to the premier of China, the king of Tonga, the president of Finland, and American congressmen and senators, movie stars and corporate presidents. Even Adnan Kashoggi – at one time the richest man in the world – has an Eskaran piece in his art collection.

In addition, Eskaran was contracted through a gallery in Soho, New York, to create 12-foot carvings that adorn entryways to Florida mansions; he's carved story boards for a yacht owned by the Australian New Agency; and he's created 8-foot tikis for hotels in Japan owned by the Asahi Junken Corporation. He's even created props used in IMAX movies and for the



"I've trained nearly 30 years in carving, and to be in this position now where I'm actually doing what I love to do and to see the work have meaning for so many people, that's very special."



Master woodworkers Kawika Eskaran, Wright Bowman and Tuione Pulotu.

television series *BayWatch Hawai'i*.

Eskaran has a humble and laid-back personality, but at the same time is extremely passionate about his craft. In fact, he left a position as a community development coordinator for the Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center specifically for the opportunity to build the canoe.

"One day I was down at Hukilau Beach," Eskaran said, "when an assistant to **Bill Wallace '66** (Wallace is the director of BYU-Hawai'i's Hawaiian studies program) told me they were putting in for a grant to build a canoe for the program. He said if the grant materialized, would I want to help build the canoe?"

"I told him that if you get the funding for the canoe, I would quit any job I have – and I don't care what kind of money I'm making – I'll quit, just to come and help build the canoe. All my life, I've wanted to do that."

Eskaran joined the BYU-Hawai'i staff in April of 2001.

"The canoe is made of six *dakua* logs, which resemble *koa*, each about 4.5 to 5 feet in diameter," Eskaran said. "The logs were about 30 feet in length, because the barges in Fiji, where the logs came from, could only accommodate 35-foot lengths."

Eskaran said building the canoe was a unique educational experience for BYU-Hawai'i students. "Every day, they'd be passing through and we'd give them jobs to do. Some of them had no idea what adzing out a canoe was like. So we'd sharpen the metal adze, teach them some basic safety rules, and then let them go.

"I would have loved to have done it in the old style, with the *ko'i* and all that, but we had a deadline to meet. I think we took about a year and a half off the time it would have taken to complete it by using the chain saw."