

Carrying On A Mother's Legacy

Many may follow the age-old warning against doing business with family, but not the Infante 'ohana.

In fact, you could say they thrive on working together — a trait they learned from the family matriarch, Caroline M. Infante.

Each Black Friday weekend, family members have joined forces to successfully run the Islandwide Christmas Crafts & Food Expo — an event started by Caroline — while supporting hundreds of local crafters and artisans.

A self-taught seamstress, Caroline led the expo for the first 35 years until her unexpected passing in 2022. Since then, her four children have shouldered the responsibility. Despite having full-time careers and families of their own, the siblings were committed to keeping the annual event going.

"It wasn't just a business for my mother ... her vendors were family and she cared about them very, very much," says Esme M. Infante, Caroline's eldest child. "We had a giant kuleana (re-

sponsibility) ... of making sure that our vendors were cared for, that we provided good opportunities for them to have a profitable, enjoyable, engaging, connected experience when they do our event and that we embrace our vendors in the same way that my mother did."

This year, the islands' longest-running family-operated expo is scheduled for Nov. 28-30 at the Neal S. Blaisdell Center Exhibition Hall. (See box below for additional info.)

Launched in 1987, the

event has run every year except for a brief period from 2020 to 2022 because of the pandemic and Caroline's death. It returned in full force in 2023.

"The fact that the expo exists today and is thriving and growing today is really kind of a small miracle," says Esme, who was a student at University of Hawai'i at Mānoa when her mom initially



(Left) The late Caroline M. Infante, a concert-level pianist, would play songs on her portable piano for shoppers and vendors at the expo. (Above) Caroline's children (from left) Sonia Infante, Serena Cook, Esme M. Infante and Brandon Infante took over running the Islandwide Crafts & Food Expo after Caroline passed away in 2022.

PHOTOS COURTESY ESME M. INFANTE

IT'S TIME FOR THE EXPO

The times and dates for this year's Islandwide Christmas Crafts & Food Expo at the Neal S. Blaisdell Center's Exhibition Hall are as follows: 4-8 p.m. on Nov. 28; 9 a.m.-7 p.m. on Nov. 29; and 9 a.m.-5 p.m. on Nov. 30.

General admission is \$7; \$5 for kūpuna age 65 and up and military; and free for keiki age 12 and younger. Admission is also free for the public from 5 to 7 p.m. on Nov. 29 and from 3 to 5 p.m. on Nov. 30. For more information, visit islandwideexpos.com.

dubbed the event Islandwide Handcrafters Christmas Fair before ultimately changing the expo to its current name. Aside from featuring more than 250 crafters and artisans, the upcoming expo will provide live entertainment, thousands of dollars in prize giveaways and kei-

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ki activities for guests, too. And when it's over, it will graciously donate a portion of its proceeds, as well as any nonperishable food and additional monetary donations, to Hawai'i Foodbank.

Of course, all of this is made possible because of the Infante children's strong belief in family and teamwork.

"The interesting thing about going into business with family is that you have to find a lot of grace for each other," Esme explains. "After struggling through that first year, we made a pact. We said, 'No matter what, we're going to do this and we're going to come back to the table, even if we have to walk away for a little while.'"

For those considering going into business with fam-



The Infante 'ohana with Caroline (center with hat) celebrating the 30th anniversary of the expo at Neal S. Blaisdell Exhibition Hall.

PHOTOS COURTESY ESME M. INFANTE

ily, she advises they create a "family/corporate culture, where you have key practices and key phrases that keep

everybody at the table."

The key, though, is unity.

"Yes, this is extra difficult ... to do business as a

family. But we also have these incredible strengths and bonds," Esme explains. "We are strongest together."

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