

PIONEERS IN JUDGING

**A series of portraits leading up to the National Symposium:
*New Frontiers: Steering Our Path Forward***



Pam Zak: The Judge in the Boat

When three hurricanes and one tropical storm made life on Hawaii rough and wet in August and September, longtime judge and native Hawaiian Pam Zak had no worries: she is a former outrigger canoe paddler and competitive open ocean swimmer. “The ocean is kind of like a friend,” she says, “You go out and get in it, and it’s all around you, but you’re free.”

Another sport caught her eye first, however. After attending a demonstration and clinic at the University of Hawaii by the West German gymnastics team in the late 60’s, Pam was inspired to learn enough skills to try out for a newly formed gymnastics club, Kokokahi, in AinaHaina near her Honolulu home. There was one catch – she was 24 and married! “I was the only one who could keep her feet off the floor in glides on the bar, so I made the team,” she laughs, “but fear chased me out after a few months.”

Pam soon joined in the movement to develop women’s gymnastics in Hawaii. When Connie Maloney flew over from California to give the judging test (all levels in one test), Pam passed with a State rating so she could judge meets, although there were only three clubs on Oahu and one in Hilo, on Hawaii. She judged current Hawaii SJD, Pattie Walkabout, at that club for many years.

In 1974, Pam joined NAWGJ at its inception and bought the uniform soon after. “I liked the royal blue color and the bell-bottomed pants,” says Pam, “and nothing wrinkled!” She also attended the second NAWGJ Symposium in Santa Barbara, California in 1978.

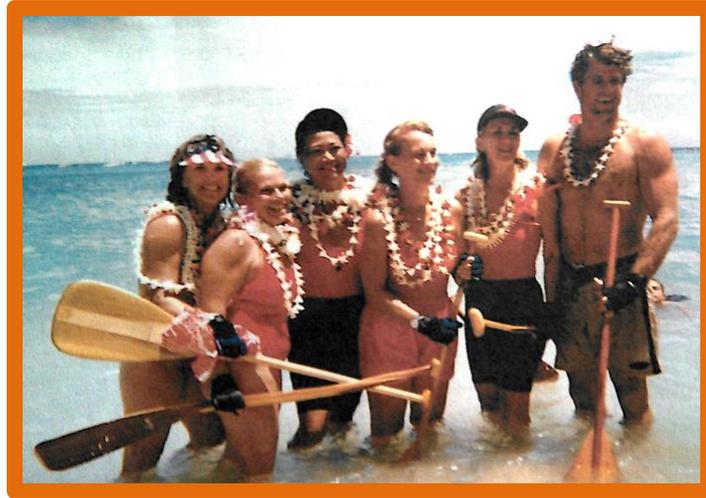
The State Judging Director job beckoned that same year, but instead Pam became the Hawaii USAG State Chair, a position she *still* holds. Pam recalls that early meets in Hawaii were small due to the limited number of gymnasts—and judges—but soon high schools added girls’ gymnastics competition, using modified USAG rules, and more clubs popped up on Maui and Kauai. Meanwhile, Pam used her growing judging and administrative skills to nurture the gymnastics scene on the islands and help prepare the athletes to compete in State and Regional meets. Hawaii was originally assigned to Region I but transferred to Region II in the early 80’s. “June Houghton, the Region II RJD, suggested to me that we switch,” Pam recalls, “She knew we would fit in better with States like Oregon and Alaska.”

Even with a limited budget, Pam has brought in top clinicians from the mainland, especially the west coast, to educate Hawaii’s coaches and judges. She also judged Region II Championships for many years, representing Hawaii, and has continued to judge club meets on the various islands (high school competition ended 12 years ago.)

Athlete that she was, Pam began competitive open ocean swimming in her 30’s and also outrigger canoe racing, paddling in both regatta and long-distance races as part of a six-woman team. She quit both activities a few years ago due to shoulder injuries. She and her husband moved to Hilo, Hawaii in 2011, where they

received a record 51 inches of rain in August. “You can’t get to the water as easily here,” she bemoans, “it’s not like Oahu’s beaches.”

Pam has no plans to retire from gymnastics. She renewed her Level 10 rating this year and hopes to attend the 2019 NAWGJ Symposium in Fort Worth. She reflects, “I don’t know what my life would be like without gymnastics.”



Pam Zak with her outrigger canoe paddling team – she’s second from the left.