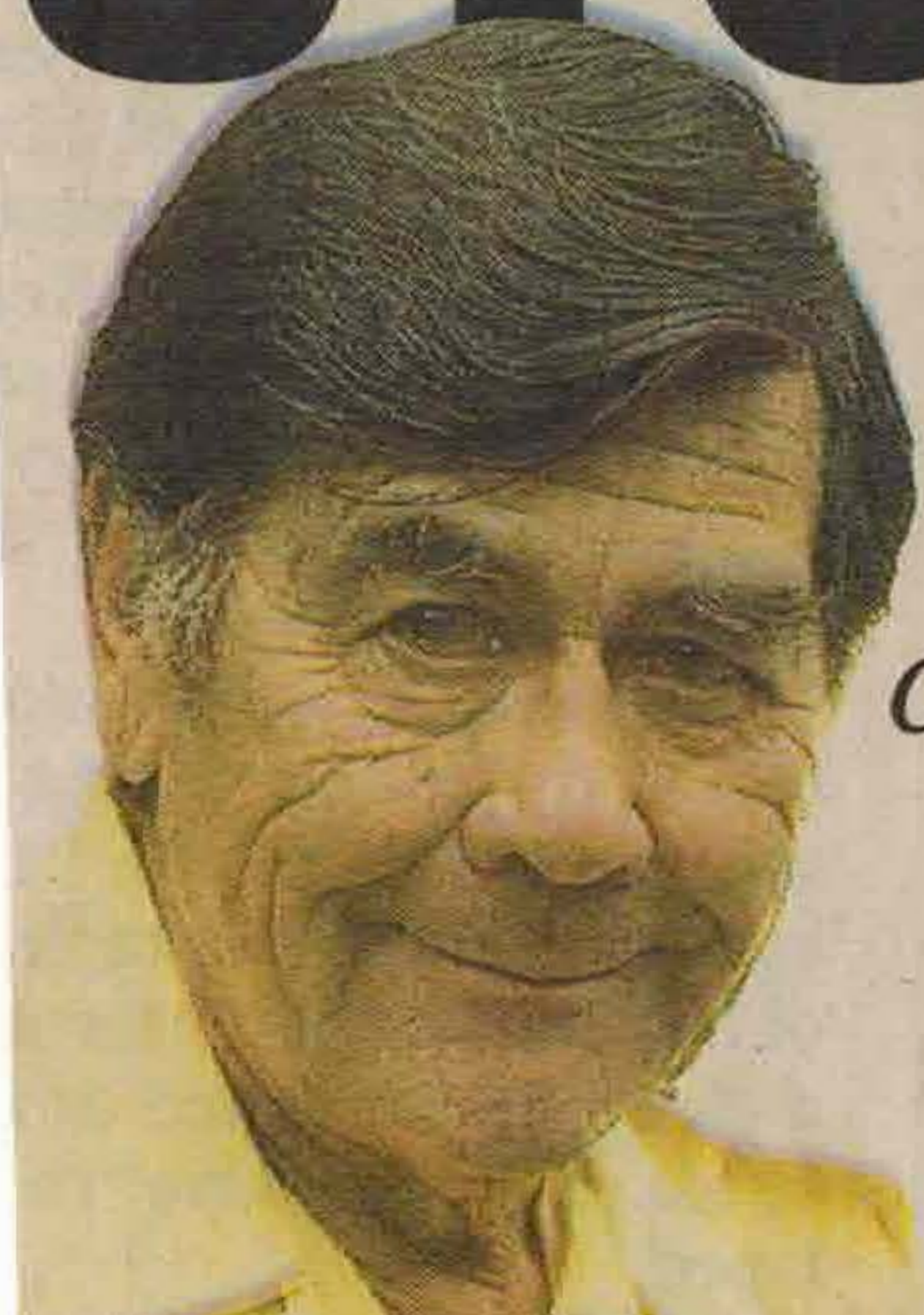


COURTESY OF HERB KANE

This 1973 mural, showing life at Punaluu black sand beach on the Big Island 200 or more years ago, was stolen from an unused building at Punaluu last week. The 20-foot-long mural by artist Herb Kane was painted on a specially designed, semicircular wall that partially surrounded the viewer.

July 20, 2005 A3 HSB

# Isle masterpiece STOLEN



*Thieves carve up  
and haul away  
a Herb Kane mural  
depicting life  
in early Hawaii*

Artist Herb Kane, at left

By Rod Thompson  
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**P**UNALUU, Hawaii >> Using power tools, thieves have cut up and carried away a 20-foot-long mural created in 1973 by noted artist Herb Kawainui Kane showing early Hawaiian life at Punaluu black sand beach, 50 miles southwest of Hilo.

The mural shows alii, warriors and commoners on the black sandbar, which separates Punaluu Bay from a pond where springs provide fresh water immediately behind the beach.

It was painted in 1973 when C. Brewer & Co. was in the early stages of creating a resort at Punaluu.

A \$5,000 reward for the return of the painting and arrest of the thieves was announced yesterday by Roy Pfund, spokesman for SM Investment Partners, which owns the property now called Sea Mountain Golf Resort. Pfund is also a vice president of tour bus operator Roberts Hawaii, which is one of the partners in SM.

"We are very concerned and distressed

that individuals would completely dismantle an entire wall and steal a significant Herb Kane mural from the people of Punaluu," Pfund said.

Anyone with information should call police at 935-3311.

Kane said he has never heard of such a large painting being stolen before.

"I cannot believe that those who took the painting will keep it hidden from all eyes for all time," he said. "They cannot sell it. Thousands of people have seen it over the last 32 years and someone, some day, must catch sight of it."

To create the work today would cost at least \$150,000, Kane said.

Kane painted the mural inside the Kau History Center on a specially designed, semicircular wall that partially surrounded the viewer. A ceiling of thatch gave the feeling of being inside an old Hawaiian shelter and the thatch hid lighting, which gave a natural, daylight look to the mural.

Pebbles and sand at the base of the painting met real pebbles and sand on the floor of the history center.

Developers confirmed the freshwater na-

ture of the pond behind the beach when they used a 7,000-gallon-per-minute pump to empty the pond, then discovered fresh water shooting through pahoehoe rock at a half dozen sites, Kane said.

In recent years, the buildings had been left unoccupied and dilapidated, but the painting remained in good condition until a security guard making a check a week ago discovered that it was stolen.

Authorities believe thieves used a circular saw to cut it up. That would have required a portable generator, since power to the buildings is turned off, Kane said. More than one person must have been involved since the mural, believed cut into five pieces, would have remained too big for a single person to handle.

If a person wanted to install it in his home, he would have to have a special room built for it and have people install it, all of which could lead to finding the artwork, Kane said.

"It's a very unusual situation. I can't think of any time in the art world where this has happened," he said. "It's quite unique."