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## Canoe races lose sponsor

By [Dayton Morinaga](#)  
Advertiser Staff Writer

Canoe paddlers keep turning out in record numbers.

Now if only some sponsors can do the same.

Both the men's Moloka'i Hoe and women's Na Wahine O Ke Kai outrigger canoe races are currently in search of corporate sponsorship after Bank of Hawaii decided recently to drop out as title sponsor of both events. Bank of Hawaii had served as the title sponsor of the Moloka'i-to-O'ahu races for more than a decade.

The men's race, scheduled for Oct. 13, will now be known as the Hinano Moloka'i Hoe, with the Tahitian beer company taking over as title sponsor. Jim Foti, a Hawai'i representative for Hinano, said: "We're stepping up to do as much as we can, but it's still not the same amount of funds that the bank was providing."

In other words, more sponsorship is needed to cover the loss of Bankoh.

The Na Wahine O Ke Kai, scheduled for Sept. 29, is in an even more dire situation. With a little more than two months until race day, the event is without any sponsorship.

"We have to run the race this year, but I'm still not sure how we're going to pull it off," said Hannie Anderson, director of the Na Wahine O Ke Kai. "Bank of Hawaii was very good to us all these years, but now we need help. It costs a lot of money to put on these races and right now we're scrambling."

According to Anderson, it costs approximately \$75,000 to \$80,000 per year to run the Na Wahine O Ke Kai. She was hoping to find a title sponsor willing to pay around \$30,000.

"But at this point, we'll take anything," she said. "We've grown considerably in the last few years and this is a race known around the world. It would be a shame to have to make cuts."

Anderson said the women's race "will definitely" run this year, although the future of the event might be in jeopardy without sponsorship.

Teams are already charged \$450 to enter the Moloka'i-to-O'ahu races, and Anderson said it would be "unfair to the paddlers" to increase it.

Most of the sponsorship money would cover costs for race-day safety and pre- and post-race publicity. No prize money is awarded, and the staffs work on a voluntary basis.

Last year's Na Wahine O Ke Kai drew a record 65 entries, while the Moloka'i Hoe featured more than 100. The races are considered the world championships of ocean outrigger-canoe paddling.

Hinano has served as a co-sponsor with Bank of Hawaii for the men's race since 1999. With the loss of Bankoh, Foti said Hinano now has "a greater investment" in the race, although he did not reveal figures.

He added that Hinano would not be able to afford to become a title sponsor for the women's race as well.

"We have limited funds and we had already established our system with the men's race," said Foti, who paddles for Lanikai Canoe Club.

Companies interested in providing sponsorship can contact Anderson at 259-7112.