

Thousands come together for anime fun at Kawaii-Kon



Attendees at the annual Kawaii-Kon came dressed for the occasion. Many anime fans enjoy dressing up as their favorite animated character, whether from a movie or a television series. Kawaii-Kon, held at the Hawaii Convention Center, showcases anime merchandise, art and special guests. This year, voice actor Johnny Yong Bosch, who portrayed the black ranger on the TV series "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers," came to the convention with his band, Eyeshine.

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From March 16 through 18, thousands of anime fans were in attendance at the Hawaii Convention Center for Kawaii-Kon, the premier and only anime convention in Hawaii. The convention provided an environment for fans of all ages, sizes, and interests to gather and celebrate as well as broaden awareness of the anime they love so much.

Kawaii-Kon's conception began as a joke between Stan Dahlin, who now acts as the Chairman and founder and a friend, which evolved into what it is today. Because of Dahlin's love for anime he has been organizing conventions for many years.

"One of my friends who works in the anime industry knows that I'm from Hawaii and my parents were in the military so we moved around a lot," Dahlin said. "He basically said 'you should throw a convention in Hawaii' because I do other conventions on the mainland such as Anime Weekend Atlanta. He was just joking saying that we should have it in my hometown. I told him he was crazy. Three months after that I called

him back and told him that I thought I could do it."

Being from a military family, Dahlin showed his appreciation for the service members' support of both their country and Kawaii-Kon.

"I know for a fact that the overseas bases are carrying manga and anime and I'm very grateful for that. It's another outlet for soldiers, sailors, and Marines to break up the routine and give them some kind of escape, and we appreciate their service," said Dahlin. "I think they can benefit here at Kawaii-Kon by interacting with other people who like anime and manga. That's a major thing, regardless of your stature in life or your situation, coming to these shows you can connect with other people of similar interests and have an outlet to talk about."

Fans were able to immerse themselves in anime culture and connect with others from all over Hawaii and the mainland. The convention offered a wide range of events such as karaoke, panels, art auctions, cosplay contests, tea ceremonies, a rave, and even a bon dance. Several musical guests were also in attendance. Voice actor Johnny Yong Bosch and his band Eyeshine were among the musical guests in attendance.

Bosch's career started as the Black Ranger, Adam Park, in the television show Mighty Morphin Power Rangers from 1994 to 1997 and flourished into a successful music career as well as becoming one of the most renowned voice actors in the industry. His voice credits include many leading roles in anime such as, Shotaro Kaneda of "Akira," Ichigo Kurosaki of "Bleach," Vash of "Trigun," and Kiba of "Wolf's Rain." Bosch expressed how important conventions like Kawaii-Kon are for fans and the industry itself.

"I think it's always important to have something for the fans, some kind of outlet" Bosch said. "Obviously it's good for the economy because you have all of these people trying to sell their merchandise. A lot of people meet each other and they form friendships."

Many deployed service members have used television shows as well as anime to stay motivated, build morale among troops and to escape from their daily routine. The anime Bleach has been a favorite among many deployed troops.

"After a full day of making multiple important decisions over there you really want to just sit down, relax, escape

from everything going on," said Air Force Master Sgt. Preston Moody, a fuel specialist with 7th Logistics Readiness Squadron, 7th Bomber Wing at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas. Moody has gone to several conventions and is an avid anime fan. "We usually got together and popped in a series like 'Bleach' to bring us back to that normality. That's what people need over there, a little taste of home, something to say I'm not here in this war."

Bosch added his gratitude for the support of service members as well as his support of them.

"It's happened a couple of times where they would come up and tell me how much what I do means to them," Bosch added. "The first time I heard it I was a little surprised, I was like, 'Really you guys are watching anime while deployed?' They're telling me that it's nice to have something to escape from what's going on. Obviously I appreciate everything they're doing for us. It's kind of cool that what little thing I do actually helps them. It's kind of like a full circle, we help each other out."

For more information about Kawaii-Kon check out the event's website at <http://www.kawaii-kon.org/>.