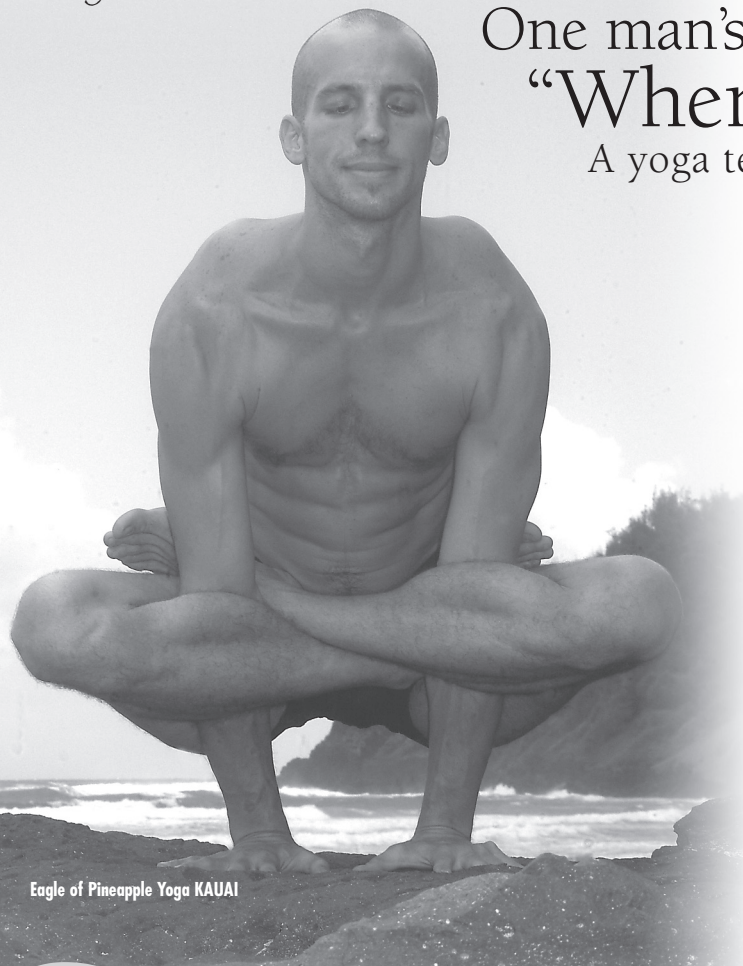


One man's vision ... "Where Prana meets Mana"

A yoga temple on Kauai's North Shore By Michael Levine



Eagle of Pineapple Yoga KAUAI

Sitting in a hospital bed following 12 hours of surgery, Eagle could not feel his legs and could not move his feet.

His burgeoning career as a world-class racquetball player derailed by a head-on car crash a year earlier, he had been unable to walk without excruciating pain when he opted to undergo a 360-degree laminectomy, a procedure that used shaved portions of his hipbones, as well as bone fragments from a cadaver, to pack the area between his tailbone and lowest vertebrae tight and keep his spine stable.

It would be a long, challenging road back to the top.

Eight years later, during an instructional tour of Japan – during which he defeated all of the country's challengers in one-on-one play – Eagle realized that his Japanese racquetball students were unable to advance past a certain level not because they weren't heeding his advice or because they didn't want it badly enough, but because their rigid bodies were restricting their movement and rendering them physically unable to execute the shots.

It was then that Eagle – who peaked as the No. 10 ranked player in the world on the International Racquetball Tour and reached the finals of both the United States National singles and doubles championships, earning him two separate terms on the U.S National Racquetball Team – decided to retire from the pro tour and put the sport he'd loved since he was a child in a secondary position.

"I had a significant feeling of seeing I could contribute to sports by sharing the art of yoga as a healing, rebalancing and training modality," Eagle says while pacing in his Kilauea home. "Did I want to spend years going from 10 to eight to five to two to one, or what can I do to contribute the most?"

Declining to renew his contract with Head Sports and other endorsers and "dismantling" a pair of Western-medicine style physical and occupational therapy rehabilitation clinics he owned and operated near his home in Texas, the Long Island, New York

native packed his bags for Hawaii with the ultimate goal of providing yoga instruction for the masses.

After one year in Maui, a weeklong Kauai seminar under the late Sri K. Pattabhi Jois inspired Eagle to visit India and study with Jois and many of the other tradition-holders. At the end of his first tour of the subcontinent, Eagle decided that the ashtanga yoga practiced at Jois' institute in Mysore, southern India, was the longest-rooted practice and the one he would share with the West.

"Through this ancient system of observing breath through postures, we are not trying to bring an agenda to make something happen but more so wanting to observe what tensions, stresses and distractions in the mind are there preventing us from witnessing and maintaining the observation of the present breath," Eagle says slowly as quiet classical music and reggae fill in the gaps.

Eagle took up residence on Kauai's North Shore, and for the better part of a decade has been teaching the traditional mysore style – students who arrive at the studio sporadically during the two-hour practice each goes through his or her sequence of asanas (postures) at their own pace, with Eagle weaving his way through the class offering soft-spoken one-on-one instruction. Nobody stands at the front of the room yelling, "OK, now everybody get in downward dog!"

Eagle, who turns 38 in October but looks half that age, says his goal is to live to his 140th birthday in 2112 and attributes his health not only to his practice of yoga but also a strict vegetarian lifestyle that he's maintained for more than a decade.

"If you've never experienced extreme vitality, you don't know what you're missing!" Eagle says with a smile. "We have not come close to our human potential."

He has offered private yoga instruction, worked with home school students, and held his class six mornings each week at the Parish House in Kilauea, but is looking to expand and offer a permanent home for yoga practice. A sanctuary serving householders, professionals and executives, farmers and, of course, surfers.

A TEMPLE.

The Pineapple Yoga Temple project has taken the name "Where Prana Meets Mana" – pointing to the Sanskrit term "Prana" and the Hawaiian term "Mana," both of which translate roughly to life force energy, as a kind of "East-meets-West."

With the "authorization" blessing of Jois and R. Sharath, his teachers in Southern India – Eagle maintains his status as a yoga student by returning to the institute each summer for between three and six months – Eagle has commissioned Master of Architecture Michael Patton to provide a plan for a temple featuring sacred geometry to replicate the teaching environment in Mysore and give Kauaians a place of peace.

"The structure itself is built on a grid of the flower of life," Patton said in a recent phone interview, describing the plans he "downloaded" one Christmas Day.

Patton said the blueprints, viewable on Eagle's Web site, include eight-sided rooms on each of the four corners and a double pyramid with windows and open space that serves as the center teaching area. Squares drawn around all the elements would fit inside each other like fractals in a Fibonacci sequence, creating a spinning vortex of energy.

“Our DNA is in the flower of life,” he said, adding that the space was “designed with elements of our DNA so that it’s part of ourselves.”

“You feel empowered or uplifted because it feels inspiring because it’s you in a different form. That’s why it’s so beautiful to us: Because it’s us!” he exclaimed. “The implications of this place can really be powerful. Eagle is a very special guy and I wouldn’t give him these plans for this temple unless I thought he was the person to do it.”

When open, the temple will be a home space for Mysore Style Ashtanga Yoga and supportive activities of all kinds.

In addition to a daily schedule of yoga classes and quiet areas for personal meditation, the temple will provide programs for students and provide health benefits for all, especially Kauai keiki, Eagle said.

“It’s not esoteric or out there so they can’t identify with him, they connect with him,” said Felicia Alongi Cowden, school director for Akamai Learning, a Kilauea-based home-school program that focuses on “learning by doing” and features five to eight adult teachers each week, including Eagle, to instruct between six and 12 middle-school-age students.

Felicia said the program’s interest in yoga started a few years ago when the class touched on different features of India as part of a cultural study.

“When we learned yoga, it seemed to have so much quality to it that it’s something we carried out through the whole year,” she said in a recent phone interview. “It seemed like a worthwhile piece, so we ended up doing some yoga every morning as a way to start the day.”

Felicia said yoga helps her students’ concentration because “it’s a cleanser for what is on their minds when they come to school” and also touted its ability to “tune the body.”

“It was overall a healthy thing. It brings in cultural acceptance, it brings it better health, and it brings composure,” she said.

Eagle has enriched a partnership with the Inter-Nation Cultural Foundation, a North Shore-based nonprofit organization founded in 1998 that has as its vision “to promote responsible and effective philanthropy with a focus on science, art, culture, indigenous peoples, education, and personal and global sustainability.”

“Our intention is service to the community and I’ve seen so many people in the community that want to see this because they understand how important yoga can be if done correctly,” INCF Executive Director Ken Hunt said in a recent phone interview.

“For me, I’ve been studying yoga for a number of years, if I don’t do it, I don’t feel well, but if I do it, I feel terrific,” Hunt said. “I’m loose, I’m free, I’m stretched out. I’m 64, but I feel young and vital and vibrant. I watch guys that are my age that haven’t done any kind of exercising, and I’m just watching people get older and I know this is a very powerful healing mechanism.

“Eagle, as a former pro athlete, is on it, and he’s completely dedicated to it. He, in my mind, he’s kind of a hero to me because he’s given up all the comforts of life and dedicated himself to this form so he can teach others,” he said.

The nonprofit is trying to do its part to serve as a mechanism to bring attention to Eagle’s vision, Hunt said. INCF is currently scouting potential locations and Hunt hopes the community can contribute land and funding. With INCF, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization with rare global donor-direct status, all donations are tax-deductible.

INCF’s central principle of “stewardship not ownership” is a concept that aligns with Eagle’s vision for the space.

“The yoga temple is to be stewarded, not owned by an individual. It is for the community and the generations that continue to follow,” Eagle said.

“It just became this huge potential of having a world-class, one-of-a-kind place on the North Shore,” Hunt said, “and what better place to have a yoga temple?”

Kauai’s North Shore Yoga Temple Vision...

www.WherePranaMeetsMana.com

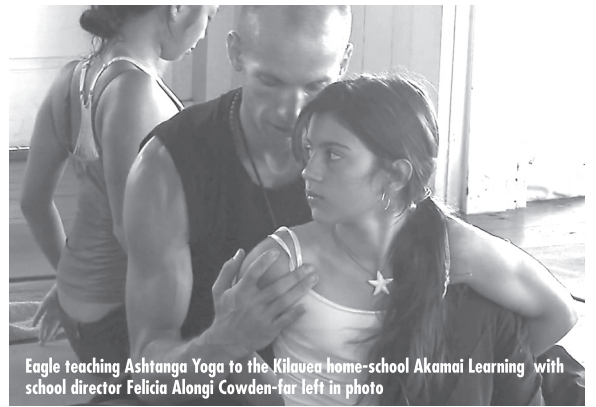
Please save the date Saturday June 26th FULL MOON as Pineapple Yoga celebrates its 10th year of service with vegan food, music and community! (Location TBA North Shore)

On the Web:

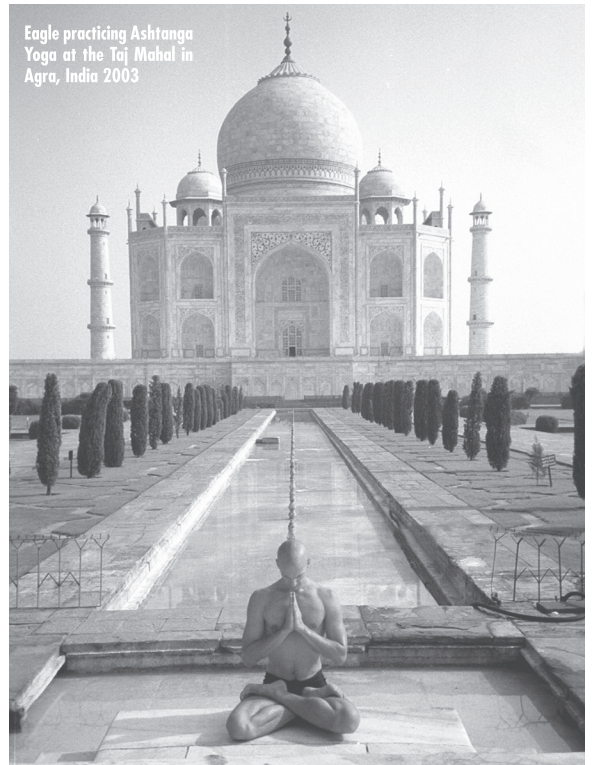
www.pineapple yoga.com

www.incfworld.org

Michael Levine is Assistant News Editor for The Garden Island newspaper and a former student of Eagle’s. He currently resides in the Wailua Houselets.



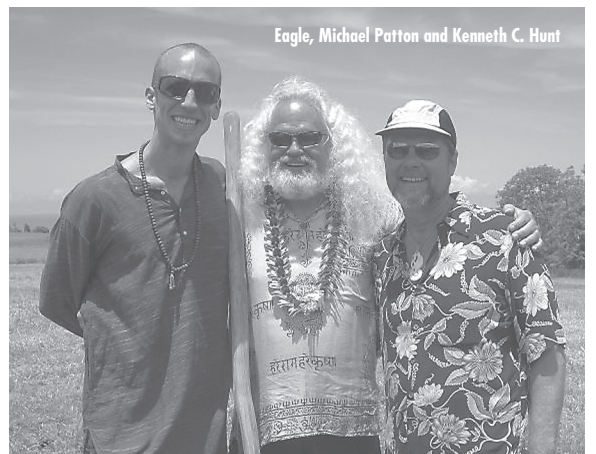
Eagle teaching Ashtanga Yoga to the Kilauea home-school Akamai Learning with school director Felicia Alongi Cowden-far left in photo



Eagle practicing Ashtanga Yoga at the Taj Mahal in Agra, India 2003



Michael Patton’s Pineapple Yoga Temple design



Eagle, Michael Patton and Kenneth C. Hunt