

Oakland troupe set to entertain troops abroad

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

For an aspiring singer-dancer from Troy, the road to Hollywood may wind through Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Caribbean.

Leisa Pulido is one of six entertainers who recently left Oakland County to spend the holidays with U.S. troops stationed abroad.

Just as Bob Hope and hundreds of entertainers have brought cheer and happiness to GIs during World War II, the Korean conflict and Vietnam, Pulido's troupe intends to bring a touch of home to service personnel stationed in the jungles of Honduras or aboard ship in Guantanamo Bay or the Gulf of Panama.

The eyes of the nation may be focused on the Middle East, but Pulido's troupe hopes to remind other U.S. personnel they are not forgotten.

"I'm really excited about this trip," she said Monday at the troupe's last dress rehearsal in Auburn Hills. "It's a chance to meet new people and do different things."

One might expect new experiences to be old hat for Pulido, whose quest for a career has taken her to Los Angeles and New York. She's done bits in television shows and commercials as well as in theater productions and touring stage troupes — including "Godspell" in the Upper Peninsula.

SHE WAS ENROLLED at the Circle in the Square Conservatory for Acting Studies at New York Univer-

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— Navy Lt. Ernie C. Gonzales
Armed Forces Professional Entertainment Office

sity before returning to Troy.

She has also studied French and American sign language. "Even if I make it big," she said, "I'd like to teach theater" to handicapped youngsters.

Pulido auditioned for the trip with Moloney Productions Inc. of Auburn Hills, a company that provides entertainment for cruise ship lines, theme parks and corporate clients like IBM.

Moloney put the troupe together on relatively short notice at the request of the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), according to William M. Limban, a 1988 graduate of Oakland University who is an account executive for the company.

"They (DOD) just called and said they needed some wholesome entertainers," Limban said.

Neither the company nor the entertainers are paid for their efforts, according to Navy Lt. Ernie C. Gon-



STEPHEN CARTRELL/Staff photographer

Much in the tradition of Bob Hope bringing entertainment to GIs over seas, this troupe of young professionals will spend their holidays in the Caribbean visiting military personnel at posts in places like Cuba, Panama, Puerto Rico and Honduras. The

zales, spokesperson for the Armed Forces Professional Entertainment Office which has helped coordinated over seas programs since 1951.

"The government provides an allowance to cover expenses," said Gonzales. "But it's basically volunteer work."

THE TOUR includes stops at places like the Roosevelt Roads Naval Station in Puerto Rico and Bermuda as well as the Soto Cano Air Base in the mountains of Honduras.

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entertainment."

With Pulido on the trip are Kenny McManus of Charlotte, N.C.; Paul Ritchie of Mt. Clemens (also a 1985 graduate of OU); Robin Carline of Strongsville, Ohio; JoAnna Murphy of Mishawaka, Indiana; and Kristen Smith of Taylor.

They put about 115 hours of rehearsals into a 75-minute show called "City Lights."

The show is nonstop dancing and music featuring a little jazz, country-and-western, nostalgia from the 50s and Motown as well as more contemporary numbers borrowed from

the Miami Sound Machine, Stevie Wonder or Aretha Franklin.

The repertoire includes toe-tappers like "On the Road Again" as well as inspirational gospel numbers and a medley of Christmas music.

"They will be performing aboard ship, in mess halls and on flat-bed trailers," said Gonzales. "They won't have much in the way of accommodations, but they'll get lots of appreciation."

PULIDO, A 1983 graduate of Warren High School, and Kristen Smith, a 1985 graduate of Truman High School in Taylor, said they were hap-

py to volunteer their holidays.

"It's a way of serving our country and I'm glad to do it," said Smith. "My uncle was in Vietnam and I know what a show from home meant to him."

Pulido agreed the tour does something for the troops. But it can also boost the performers' professional careers.

"The tour looks good on a resume," she said, mindful that big names like the Andrews Sisters, Randy Travis and Loretta Lynn have traveled similar routes as part of their stardom.

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