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Below: Hawaii Planing Mill Ltd. in Hilo, 1921. Right, from left: Edwin Fujimoto, Takeyo Fujimoto (Bobby Fujimoto's mother), S.K. Oda, Hiroaki Kono, Bobby Fujimoto and Glenn Oda break ground on HPM's current Hilo store after the 1960 tsunami destroyed its store on Kamehameha Avenue. PHOTOS COURTESY HPM BUILDING SUPPLY



Starting from Zero

Five family-run Hawaii building companies tell their stories

BY BRETT ALEXANDER-ESTES

Bending over a hacksaw in 1921, Kametaro Fujimoto may have doubted his new company would last beyond his lifetime.

He made it happen anyway. For Hawaii Planing Mill and other

family-run companies, making it in Hawaii's building industry takes everything they've got. But some of those that have survived are prospering and pushing a new generation of builders forward.

Five family-run companies—HPM

Building Supply, Shioi Construction, S&M Sakamoto, Cornair and Constructors Hawaii—reveal how they started, what they've learned and where they're headed.

Think Like Leaders

HPM Building Supply was founded in 1921 as Hawaii Planing Mill Ltd., says President and CEO Jason Fujimoto.

“My great-great-grandfather, Kametaro Fujimoto, a local contractor, started the business with another local contractor, Sanzo Kawasaki,” he says. In the 98 years since, HPM has survived two tsunamis and expanded from



Jason Fujimoto

Hawaii Island to seven other locations that include Oahu and Kauai.

“My father, Michael Fujimoto, likes to say we're in the shelter business,”



Bobby and Alice Fujimoto



Kametaro Fujimoto, circa 1920

PHOTOS COURTESY HPM BUILDING SUPPLY



HPM employees at the Shipman Business Park location. PHOTO COURTESY HPM BUILDING SUPPLY

Fujimoto says. “From lumber and hardware to paint and concrete, we carry a wide range of quality products and materials to help our customers build better.”

That includes developing innovative product lines, like metal roofing, which HPM pioneered in 1963, Fujimoto says. “Today, we’re one of the largest providers in the state.”

“My grandfather had a vision to share in the benefits of ownership.”
—Jason Fujimoto

HPM has manufactured trusses since the 1960s, and is “now one of the largest and most technologically sophisticated providers in Hawaii,” he says. “We were the first manufacturer of factory-built wood wall panels in Hawaii when we began in 2008.”

The firm also developed HPM Homes, a line of 16 affordable home plans, some pre-approved by the County of Hawaii.

“Our latest innovation is



On the HPM floor: Jason Fujimoto (left), Michael Fujimoto, his father (right)
PHOTO COURTESY HPM BUILDING SUPPLY

HalePlus,” Fujimoto says, “a new line of locally manufactured modular housing that offers a fast, flexible and affordable option for homeownership. HalePlus will be available in 2020.”

HPM in 1959 was one of Hawaii’s first companies to establish an employee profit-sharing plan, says Fujimoto. In 1977, when ESOPs (Employee Stock Ownership Plans) were introduced, HPM was one of the first adopters in the U.S. and in Hawaii.

“In 2006, we became 100 percent employee-owned,” Fujimoto says.

“My grandfather, Bobby Fujimoto, had a vision to share in the benefits of ownership with all of the employees.

He believed that being vested as an owner instills pride, empowers employees to think like leaders, and inspires them to take care of customers and our community.”

Fujimoto’s vision is proving its worth on the grounds of the Sacred Heart Church in Puna, where HPM owner-employees, the County of Hawaii and Hope Services, a nonprofit organization, are constructing micro-shelters for lava evacuees.

In doing so, HPM is moving beyond material supplies “to being an innovator and solution provider,” Fujimoto says.

“It’s about transforming lives and improving communities so that our



Shioi Construction's Conrad Murashige at the 2008 Pacific Resource Partnership reception
PHOTO COURTESY SHIOI CONSTRUCTION INC.

community can build better and live better.”

Self-Performance

Next year, Shioi Construction Inc. is building multimillion-dollar townhomes and a hotel on Kauai. Its



Roy Shioi
by a laborer.

“My grandpa started as a carpenter helper for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,” says Roy Shioi, the company’s president.

“He liked the work, and took up

drywall subdivision is subbing for Hawaiian Dredging Construction Co. Inc. on Maui, and for Swinerton Builders on a \$100 million renovation. Not bad for a company founded



Grand opening of Shioi Construction's new building in Pearl City, 1975. Founder Kenneth Shioi (right) and son Randall.
PHOTO COURTESY SHIOI CONSTRUCTION INC.

trade school and night class in blueprint drafting and reading,” Shioi says. “He worked for several contractors and was eventually promoted to foreman at the Kaneohe Marine Corps base.

“Then Pearl Harbor was attacked. All ‘Orientals’ were banned. He wanted to enlist in the war, but the base commander found him too valuable and wouldn’t let him join.”

After the war, Honolulu was booming, and Kenneth Shioi founded Shioi Construction Inc. on Emily Street in 1948.

His next big move came in the late ‘60s when he was tapped for a major



Koa'e Workforce Housing, a current Shioi project, will provide 134 units, 23 buildings and a community center.
PHOTO COURTESY SHIOI CONSTRUCTION INC.

remodeling job on Kauai. “He thought it would be a great opportunity for my dad (Randall) to train and learn the business there,” says Shioi.

Shioi Construction and its staff are a 100 percent ESOP.
PHOTO COURTESY SHIOI CONSTRUCTION INC.





S&M Sakamoto is GC on the high-performance World Languages building at Niu Valley Middle School.

RENDERING COURTESY HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION/DEAN SAKAMOTO ARCHITECTS LLC



A planned mural at Honowai Elementary School, one of S&M Sakamoto's current DOE projects

RENDERING COURTESY HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION/LIONAKIS

“He planned to do about \$300,000 a year. But it led to condos, resorts and shopping centers. He never did less than \$1 million per year. Now, Kauai does about 70 percent of our work.”

In addition to general construction, says Shioi, “we’re one of the last dinosaurs that still self-perform concrete, block work, rough and finish carpentry, drywall, metal framing, plastering, acoustical ceiling and insulation.”

Conrad Murashige, Shioi’s uncle, purchased the company in 1985 when Kenneth retired, and in 1993 demonstrated an equally keen business sense.

“Now CPS is one of the largest drywall contractors in the state.”

—Roy Shioi

“Conrad was tired of drywall companies folding on our jobs,” says Shioi. “So he started Creative Partition Systems. Now CPS is one of the largest drywall contractors in the state.

“I would say our business model has changed to focusing our general contracting on Kauai and doing more drywall work on Oahu and the outer islands for other general contractors.”

Shioi Construction became a 100 percent ESOP in 2005.

“We have a great staff, and great potential in our up-and-coming staff members,” Shioi says. “I strongly believe in promoting from within as

much as possible.”

Lifelong Partnerships

Like Shioi, S&M Sakamoto started on Oahu in the World War II era.

“Our company was established in 1940 as K&M Sakamoto,” says Dale Sakamoto Yoneda, the company’s president. “My two great-grand-uncles started the company as homebuilders. In January, 1965, we incorporated as

S&M Sakamoto Inc.” Yoneda’s grandfather, Shuichi, was represented by the “S,” and “M” stood for Minoru, his brother. In addition to Yoneda, five Sakamoto family members currently staff the company.



Dale Sakamoto Yoneda

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“We focus on commercial and state and city projects, mainly on Oahu,” Yoneda says. In the company’s early years, “we were fortunate to have partnered with the Higa family to help them build many of their iconic Zippy’s restaurants here in Hawaii. Another one of our cherished partners is the Tanaka Family—owners of the Tanaka of Tokyo restaurants.

“This partnership remains strong today.”

Yoneda says the company has “a strong base of subcontractors that we work with—without high-quality subs, a general contractor cannot be successful.

“A few of the most exciting projects on tap this year are the new Goodwill Honolulu Career Learning Center, a new classroom building at Honowai Elementary School and a new World Language classroom building at Niu Valley Middle School.

“We are always looking for new opportunities to expand our market share.”

Precise Focus

Cornair Inc., a general contractor based in Kaneohe, specializes in commercial renovation work, concentrating in tenant improvement work in Class A and medical office markets.



Crazy Shirts at Lau Hala Shops. Cornair performs all carpentry at its tenant improvement projects. PHOTO COURTESY LEWIS HARRINGTON

“Most of our work is performed by our carefully selected team of subcontractors, with Cornair Inc. performing all carpentry and carpentry-related trades,” says Cornair Vice President Justin Cornair.



Justin Cornair

“Additionally, we provide services specifically geared towards the commercial renovation market—such as assistance with leasing agreements, value engineering, comprehensive budgeting and/or scheduling and custom casework.”

Cornair Inc. was founded in 1991 by its president and CEO Rex Cornair, says Cornair, Rex’s son.

“Rex began the company after occupying various construction positions, from his apprenticeship in 1981 to vice president of Harmon Constructors in 1984,” Cornair says.

“We’ve focused on treating others with respect.”
—Justin Cornair

After receiving his C license in 1985 and his B license three years later, Rex founded Cornair Building Enterprises in 1991, which eventually became Cornair Inc.

The firm shifted from part-residential/part-commercial to full-time commercial 17 years ago, performing “over 650,000 square feet of tenant improvement projects, mostly in the area of Class A office space” during that period, Cornair says.

“Making the shift allowed us to define our focus and develop our



Cornair Inc. was contractor for Crazy Shirts at Kailua’s Lau Hala Shops. PHOTO COURTESY LEWIS HARRINGTON



The "Old Gang," Constructors Hawaii, 2004
PHOTO COURTESY CONSTRUCTORS HAWAII INC.

toolbox of skills," he says. "We developed excellent relationships with some top-tier subcontractors, and carried them with us wherever we went.

"We've focused on treating others with respect, delivering upon promises, and providing our services at a price point that is both fair and representative of the effort we put into all of our projects," Cornair says. "These beliefs, coupled with years of experience in the commercial renovation market, have been the lifeblood of our business, and will continue to push us forward for years to come."

Old School

Originally from Hawaii Island, Albert Yoshiyama "showed up, went to the university here with, really, no money in his pocket," says his



Colin Yoshiyama

son, Constructors Hawaii President Colin Yoshiyama.

Albert Yoshiyama graduated from the University of Hawaii at Manoa with a civil engineering degree. "He

did work in several construction companies to gain experience," says his son. "The first was site work. That's really where he got his start.

He founded Constructors Hawaii Inc. in 1972, concentrating on site work and commercial construction. "We opened up two offices, one in

Hilo and one on Oahu," Yoshiyama says. "Luckily, he had a very supportive wife."

Fast-forward to 2019 and to Constructors' \$11.7 million Waimanalo Health Center project, which wrapped in April.

"We do ... a lot of healthcare, a lot of work with Hawaii Pacific Health—at Straub, or Kapiolani, Pali Momi. We're just starting to do some bidding with Queen's. That's something we've definitely been successful with."

Healthcare wasn't on Yoshiyama's

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Constructors Hawaii's \$13.3 million Pacific Fleet Submarine Museum project is targeting a June 2020 wrap.

PHOTO COURTESY CONSTRUCTORS HAWAII INC.

radar when he joined the family business in the early '90s. "We started bidding smaller hospital work, and they developed into larger projects. Soon our foremen were very familiar with how to work in a hospital, with all the rules and regulations.

"This year, we're also finishing up the Kapiolani Medical Center second floor, dining. Those are nice big projects for us."

So is the \$13.3 million Pacific Fleet Submarine Museum, a historical renovation project flanking the Arizona Memorial that Constructors is doing with Mason Architects.

Constructors' other renovations with Mason include Bishop Museum, Shangri-La and Our Lady of Peace Cathedral.

"What we've learned is just that added amount of care that's needed," Yoshiyama says. "Our crew has learned to do that well."

Motivated crews have supported Constructors from the start.

Albert Yoshiyama "had very good people ... a good staff, really good superintendents," says his son. "As well as the foremen. It's the foremen who make or break a job. He had a really good one."



Albert and Colin Yoshiyama, 2019
PHOTO COURTESY CONSTRUCTORS HAWAII INC.

He also "had that very old-school work ethic. Which is just work like hell." 🏠

...Heavy Equipment, continued from page 30

manufacturers, "our large 12,000-pound Dieci Reach Forklift unit comes with a load sensor that reads the load capacity on the forklift, and will inform the operator what the forklift is currently carrying," he says. "The forklift will stop lifting if the load is too heavy."

Besides new equipment in 2020, Ouye adds, "as always, we try to provide the best service to our customers."

Big Rigs Mean Business

Heavy construction contractors, like Enright, know that when it comes to opportunities, new equipment is



Service Rentals' Dieci Reach Forklift unit comes with a load sensor.

PHOTO COURTESY SERVICE RENTALS/DIECI S.R.L.

everything.

When Enright thought about purchasing his first Bauer drill rig nearly five years ago, he says, "I talked to everybody I could about (the Hawaii drilling) market, about the risks, about the rewards, what's needed, what's expected, what can go wrong, what can go right. Only after teaming up with the right people, and asking and getting advice from as many resources as I could, we made the decision to get into that sort of drilling."

Was it worth it?

"It opened us up to a \$10 million to \$20 million market in Hawaii." 🏠