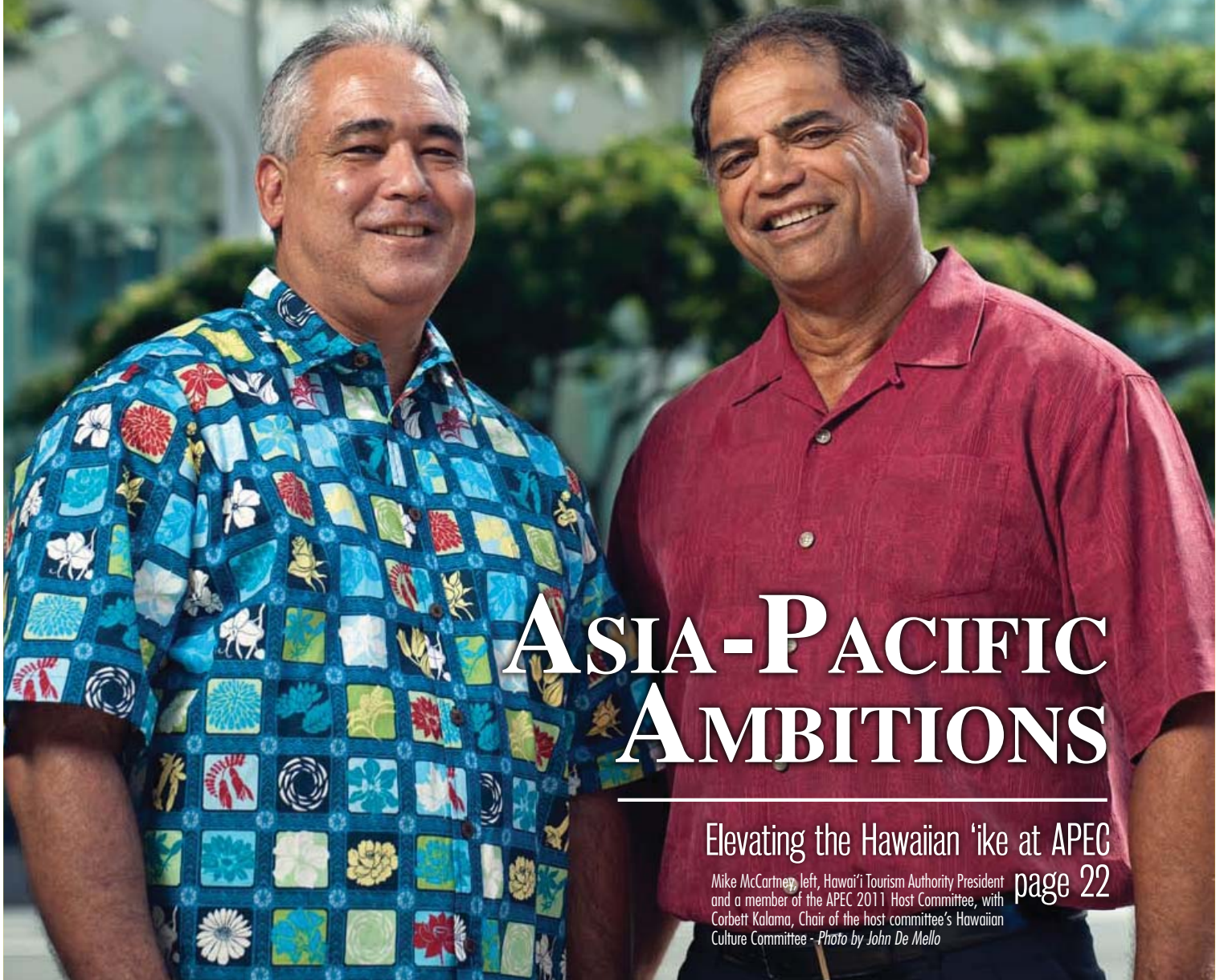




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ASIA-PACIFIC AMBITIONS

Elevating the Hawaiian 'ike at APEC
page 22

Mike McCartney, left, Hawai'i Tourism Authority President and a member of the APEC 2011 Host Committee, with Corbett Kalama, Chair of the host committee's Hawaiian Culture Committee - Photo by John De Mello



Kitchen of dreams Papakōlea cooking up 'ono opportunities

By Naomi Sodehani

Cecilia “Aunt Cissy” Silva, 79, lifted the lid off one of five huge heavy-gauge steel pots on the stove and plunged a giant spoon into the steaming beef lū'au for a final stir. “I feel so honored they let me be the first one to use this kitchen,” Silva beamed. Helped by two young women, the spry kupuna heaved another vat off the burner and poured an avalanche of chicken long rice into a buffet-size serving tray.

Nearby, a young man in a crisp white coat lowered a fryer basket of panko-dusted discs into the sizzling oil. Moments later, Davit Soo, 21, artfully drizzled hoisin-lime aioli over the sweet potato-kālua pork cakes, nodding to his crew of fellow Kapi'olani Community Center culinary arts students to whisk the appetizers away.

Chefs old and young offered their talents and hopes for a brighter future at a community pā'ina held Oct. 8 to dedicate and celebrate the newly completed certified commercial kitchen located at the Papakōlea Community Center and Park. One hundred fifty community members and supporters gathered at midday to welcome this resource conceived to springboard new economic development opportunities in this tight-knit community – and to enjoy the first mea'ai created within its walls.

“It's such a blessing for the whole community,

it brings us closer and stronger together,” said Puni Kekauoha, Executive Director of the Papakōlea Community Development Corp., or PCDC.

The gleaming, airy kitchen is a chef's dream come true: fully loaded with state-of-the-art commercial appliances, stainless-steel work surfaces, new electrical wiring and plumbing, ventilation and safety features. Rivaling the best restaurants in town, the kitchen is an extreme makeover of its tiny, dingy orange-formica'd former self.

Silva and other residents had expressed their desire for a commercial kitchen during a communitywide visioning project that resulted in the 1997 report *Papakōlea: A Vision for the Future*. But the dream of a fully functioning kitchen began decades before. Back in the day when the original building's icebox was cooled with ice blocks, Silva recalls the old-timers saying, “‘One day we going have a kitchen in that hall we can come and cook from, that going feed everybody.’ I feel blessed to see their vision come to pass.”

Silva got her start by helping the late community leader Joseph Kahoaka Sr. “cook kālua pig in his big imu in his back yard,” just a stone's throw away from the center. Since 1961, she has cooked for countless occasions – “fundraisers, baby lū'au, weddings, parties, you name it” – from her humble Papakōlea kitchen,

Puni Kekauoha, above, beams in the sparkling new commercial kitchen, where she says “the phones have not stopped ringing.” At left, Aunt Cissy Silva said she felt honored to be the first to use the new commercial kitchen. Since 1961, she has cooked for countless baby lū'au, weddings and parties from her humble Papakōlea kitchen. *Photos: Naomi Sodehani*

renting a certified kitchen as needed to cater large gigs. Her biggest, a two-school graduation banquet, fed 1,500.

“We got some real cooks here,” Kekauoha said. “All these years the kūpuna fed all of us, and they did this from their homes. When I told Aunt Cecilia, ‘We're finally going to have a new kitchen,’ she was crying. She said, ‘Oh baby, we going cook up!’”

It took many years and many hands coming together to make the vision a reality. Joe Ferraro, Principal of the Ferraro Choi and Associates Ltd. architectural firm and past President of the Honolulu Sunrise Rotary Club, which provided funds to build the Papakōlea entrance marker in the early 1990s, drew up the architectural plans for the kitchen pro bono. Contractor Chad Johnston of the [Hunt Building Co.](#) – and a son of Papakōlea – also brought heart to managing the project.

At the kitchen's doorway, a plaque honors Alexander Kaleipapanuionamoku Wong. Wong's daughter Allene founded the Kahiau Foundation. Administered by the Hawai'i Community Foundation, the Kahiau Foundation provided \$298,000 to fund the entire renovation and outfit the kitchen with major appliances and equipment. Allene said her father “had great memories growing up here, so I'm glad we could do this in his memory and honor his love for the Papakōlea 'ohana. I think he would be very happy.”

Kekauoha said the Wong 'ohana “remembered the kūpuna, and it's their gift to the future

SEE KITCHEN ON PAGE 10

ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY

HO'OKA HUA WAIWAI

To have choices and a sustainable future, Native Hawaiians will progress toward greater economic self-sufficiency.

KITCHEN

Continued from page 5

generations. They gave us the money to enable Papakōlea to become prosperous business people. They want to see Papakōlea thrive.”

Given the great demand for commercial kitchens in Honolulu, “the phones have not stopped ringing,” Kekauoha noted. When not used by residents, nonresident bookings will generate income to help support PCDC programs and the group’s own long-term sustainability.

When the kitchen publicly opens its doors in January, it will serve as an incubator for food service and food-manufacturing businesses headed by entrepreneurs from Papakōlea. Along with myriad service-learning opportunities, the kitchen will enable homestead youth to operate an afterschool concession stand for center and park users.

Papakōlea’s “garden to plate” initiative has mobilized local ‘ōpio to restore a nearby community garden located between Lincoln Elementary, which provides water for the garden, and Stevenson Middle School, which provides the land. Fresh produce from the garden will be used in meals prepared by the youth-run business operating during afternoon and evening hours.

“One day I’ll open my own restaurant, but it would be great to start my own catering business and get my name out there,” mused Soo, of KCC, as he wiped down the counters. “Cooking with Aunty was really cool. I was watching her ways, because I know I can learn a lot from her.” Delegating tasks in preparing the appetizers also helped the Kalāwahine resident to hone himself as a future executive chef.

“That’s exactly what this



kitchen is supposed to do,” Kekauoha said, “support ideas, dreams just like that, to make them possible.” ■


Naomi Sodehani is a freelance writer, documentary producer and former Publications Editor of Ka Wai Ola o OHA.



Inset, culinary delights look as good as they taste. Above, the community gathers at the kitchen to celebrate its first run. Below, Kapi‘olani Community College culinary arts students put their skills to work. Davit Soo, left, says he dreams of one day opening his own restaurant. Photos: Naomi Sodehani

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