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ACE HARDWARE AND BEN FRANKLIN CRAFTS ARE NOW UNDER THE UMBRELLA NAME HOUSEMART, BUT THE FAMILY-OWNED CHAIN REMAINS TRUE TO ITS ISLAND ROOTS. AND THE THREE STORES ON KAUA'I ARE THE FIRST IN HAWAII TO SEE THE NEW SIGNAGE. PICTURED HERE (FROM LEFT) ARE FOURTH-GENERATION OWNERS PAUL MIZOGUCHI, LYNN USHIJIMA, WAYNE KAMITAKI AND GUY KAMITAKI

NEW NAME FOR A LOCAL CHAIN

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ACE HARDWARE AND BEN FRANKLIN ARE NOW UNDER THE UMBRELLA NAME HOUSEMART, BUT THE 60-YEAR-OLD COMPANY RETAINS ITS ISLAND ROOTS

Guy Kamitaki and Paul Mizoguchi at cake-cutting event at former Lihue 'Ace'. Amanda C. Gregg photos

NEW NAME FOR A LOCAL CHAIN

BY AMANDA C. GREGG

This is the season for nesting, decorating and getting into the holiday spirit. For years Kaua'i residents have been doing so with shopping carts chock-full of tree-trimming goodies at Ben Franklin Crafts and Ace Hardware. The family-run, Hawaii-owned business has been the go-to spot for creating a welcoming space in Kaua'i homes for more than 60 years and will continue to be, with one small change — its new name, HouseMart, which promises to make a more cohesive shopping experience for its customers.

Owners Paul Mizoguchi, Lynn Ushijima, Wayne Kamitaki and Guy Kamitaki recently launched a rebrand for the island chain, which will serve as the parent brand to the two popular franchises.

HouseMart will continue to be a small-kine, locally owned operation, Guy Kamitaki says, something that he thinks sets the business apart from big box stores.

"I think we are in a 'buy-local' kind of movement," Kamitaki says. "People want to support local business more so than the Mainland chains."



Guy Kamitaki, Paul Mizoguchi and Tony Keale

The rebrand will happen throughout the state, but Kaua'i is the first island to see the new name on signs, Kamitaki says. One of four

third-generation owners of Ace Hardware, Kamitaki points out how few locally owned family retail chains there are in Hawaii, and says

he's proud of his family's legacy.

"There's Foodland, but not much more nowadays. We're still going strong, thanks to our customers. We are really happy for customers to support us. We really appreciate that."

Nonprofits such as Kaua'i United Way are appreciative of what HouseMart has done for them, too, including a cookbook that HouseMart employees created and sold last year as a fundraiser.

"It was a very successful fundraiser for Kaua'i United Way," KUW executive director Scott Giarman says. "It was

Guy Kamitaki, Paul Mizoguchi and Tony Keale



very creative, and we were most grateful.”

Whether it's sponsoring local vendors at its holiday craft fair or donating thousands of volunteer hours to non-profits, HouseMart has been — and will continue to be — happily busy.

“Obviously the holiday season is huge for us,” says lead store manager Tony Keale, a Kaua'i native.

Ace Hardware locations at Lihu'e, Kapa'a and 'Ele'ele all belong to the family-owned and operated company

originating on Maui. The chain started from a small variety store, K. Kamitaki Store in Kahului, which specialized in aloha shirts and merchandise specifically for its community.

“Our grandmother started the business,” Paul Mizoguchi says.

In 1951, the second generation of the family business grew the company and opened its first Ben Franklin store. The company has expanded and now owns six Ben Franklin Crafts stores and

25 Ace Hardware stores in four states.

The takeaway that Keale, Kamitaki and Mizoguchi hope people will have from the rebrand is that HouseMart will continue to be a locally owned one-stop shop for household needs, with the kind of customer service that has come from treating customers like family.

It's the kind of company that treats its staff like family, too.

Keale, who spends much of his time running the Kapa'a

store and running in general — as in marathons, as he's run in every one that has happened on Kaua'i — started as a sales associate 15 years ago. Not only has he gotten healthier over the years during his tenure at HouseMart — he used to weigh 300 pounds — he's worked his way up to lead store manager.

“My relief is actually physical fitness,” he says.

A veteran, Keale's fitness level waned when got out of the service. “My dad died. I woke up one morning and decided I wanted to be healthy,” he says. “I'm glad I

as much as we can. We will continue to be appreciative and thankful for all the support we've had over all the years.”

Customers also can expect some fun changes, including new programs that should appeal to keiki while also being educational, such as “hardware science.” Mizoguchi says the program will incorporate an interactive, live-feed video that conducts experiments and science lessons at the store, similar to those found in *The Wizard's Book of Science Secrets: Science Projects From the Hardware Store* by Wizard



Kamitaki, Keale and Mizoguchi at the Lihu'e store

am in a place with that flexibility. I can go run for my lunch period.”

Mizoguchi says he “tips his hat” to Keale as a role model. “He has maintained his condition not only working store level but showing what can be done physically if you put your mind to it,” he says.

Putting your mind toward accomplishing a goal seems to be a mantra for the family that has continued to grow its once-small business.

As for the future, “People can expect continued service and community involvement from us,” Mizoguchi says. “And we want to contribute and support the community

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“Kids can learn about science with everyday items,” Kamitaki says.

The idea came to his brother Wayne following a science fair. The program hasn't rolled out on Kaua'i yet, but promises to be one more fun way to spend the weekend shopping.

“It will help educate and entertain kids with different projects and hopefully build a future generation of shoppers,” Kamitaki says.

For information on HouseMart, Ben Franklin Crafts and Ace Hardware, its events and promotions, go to: www.hmstores.com.