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Ideas and Inspiration

A family store that started on Maui and grew into Ben Franklin Crafts and Ace Hardware celebrates its 60th anniversary. (from left) Paul Mizoguchi, Jay Jacinth on ladder, Kami Murashige, Kelly Ann Nakamoto, Lynn Ushijima, Lu Gabriel and Karen Ontai on ladder



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At table (seated) co-owners Paul Mizoguchi and Lynn Ushijima; Karen Ontai, office manager; (standing, from left) Kami Murashige, accounting; Kelly Ann Nakamoto, advertising manager; Jay Jacinth, advertising coordinator; Lu Gabriel, store associate. Nathalie Walker photo. nwalker@midweek.com

A family store that began on Maui and grew into Ben Franklin Crafts and Ace Hardware celebrates its 60th anniversary of providing ‘ideas and inspiration’

Gail and her 9-yearold daughter wait anxiously in front of Ben Franklin Crafts in Mapunapuna. They are the first customers through the door when the store opens. As they enter, the youngster gasps in amazement at the cheerful holiday décor.

“Wow!” she says, pointing to the twinkling tree lights, decorative wreaths, and aisles of red-and-green décor. “Is Santa Claus here?”

Indeed, the festive scene looks like Santa’s workshop. Meanwhile Nancy and her husband are on a quest.

“Where’s the nylon netting?” Nancy asks a sales associate.

Nancy needs materials to create dishwashing scrubbies, a popular gift item requested by family and friends. Getting one of Nancy’s handmade scrubbies is an expression of love.

Moving through the aisles of Ben Franklin Craft’s “ideas and inspiration,” we encounter Alicia, who wants to know how many rolls of decorative ribbon she needs to make a glittery Christmas wreath she sees on display.



Second generation Tadami Kamitaki (left) shows merchandise

And so it goes on a typical day at Ben Franklin Crafts. It’s a journey of discovery, like stepping into Willy Wonka’s “wondrous world of pure imagination” made of chocolate.

But unlike fictional character Wonka who professes “what you see will defy explanation,” we do have an explanation of how one of Hawaii’s established retail wonderlands came about.

In fact, the local family enterprise is celebrating its 60th anniversary as Hawaii’s neighborhood home improvement and craft leader.

Maui Varieties Limited is parent company to the popular Ace Hardware and Ben Franklin Craft stores.



The original Ben Franklin Store in Kahului, Maui Photos courtesy of Ben Franklin /

Ace


The family-owned and operated business is run by siblings Wayne Kamitaki, Guy Kamitaki, Lynn Ushijima and cousin Paul Mizoguchi.

“We are now going through the third generation of our family in our business,” says MVL chief executive officer and co-owner Wayne Kamitaki. “We are transitioning intergenerationally, and to have reached the third generation of our family business is special.”

Special indeed.

Intergenerational succession is one of the biggest challenges of corporate America. Any company experiencing six decades of profitability and sustainability deserves applause. In the case of Ben Franklin Crafts, voted the Best Craft Supply Store in a *Honolulu StarAdvertiser* poll, it is a saga of how a retail enterprise evolved with changing times to reinvent itself as a niche specialty shop.

Some call it strategic. Others

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