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## Ben Franklin Crafts: Finding a business niche

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Carrera Catugal

For more than 60 years, Ben Franklin Crafts has carved out its niche in Maui County's business landscape with a simple guiding principle – top flight customer service. "Everything we do is somehow linked to satisfying our customers externally as well as internally," said Carrera Catugal, Ben Franklin's Assistant Store Manager at the Queen Kaahumanu Center. "That includes everything from simply bringing in local products to creating an enjoyable work environment for our employees and an enjoyable shopping environment for our customers."

The first Ben Franklin store opened in 1951 in Kahului, but its roots go back further than that, Catugal said. It began as a modest dry goods store in Kahului, the K. Kamitaki store, owned by Shikano Kamitaki. The store transformed into the Kahului Dry Goods Store, run by Kamitaki's children, Tadami and Matsuko (Mizoguchi).

Today, Ben Franklin Crafts is committed to serving local crafters, Catugal said. The store organizes a semi-annual craft fair and provides local crafters the opportunity to sell hand-made craft products in the store. Catugal said it's a source of pride for Ben Franklin employees that "we not only have customers who visit our location, sometimes daily as part of their livelihood, but that we can in turn provide a venue that allows crafting to be a viable lifestyle."

She credits Ben Franklin's success to "the freedom that we have as a business to engage our community outside the walls of our store." She cited the store's craft fair and its participation in Maui Economic Development Board's STEM Conference. This year, the Ben Franklin team held sessions for approximately 150 students who learned about science through the use of everyday household items. "We are sending the message that we are not just another business with a bottom line, we are an active member of a growing community." Catugal said she's upbeat about the prospects for Maui's economy. "When organizations like MEDB partner with the businesses that service Maui County, I feel that Maui's economy will prosper and that even in times of hardship as a nation, we here on Maui will have stability," she said.



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