



Popular chef adds Hawaiian tapas

Chai Chaowasaree reconceptualizes his Waikīkī eatery with “smaller” plates

# HOAHU Inside • 1 Out

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## INTO THE Blue

Researchers float the idea of  
aquaculture in open water

### JUST BREATHE

Yogi enthusiasts return  
to participate in the  
Wanderlust Festival

### FAMILY TIES

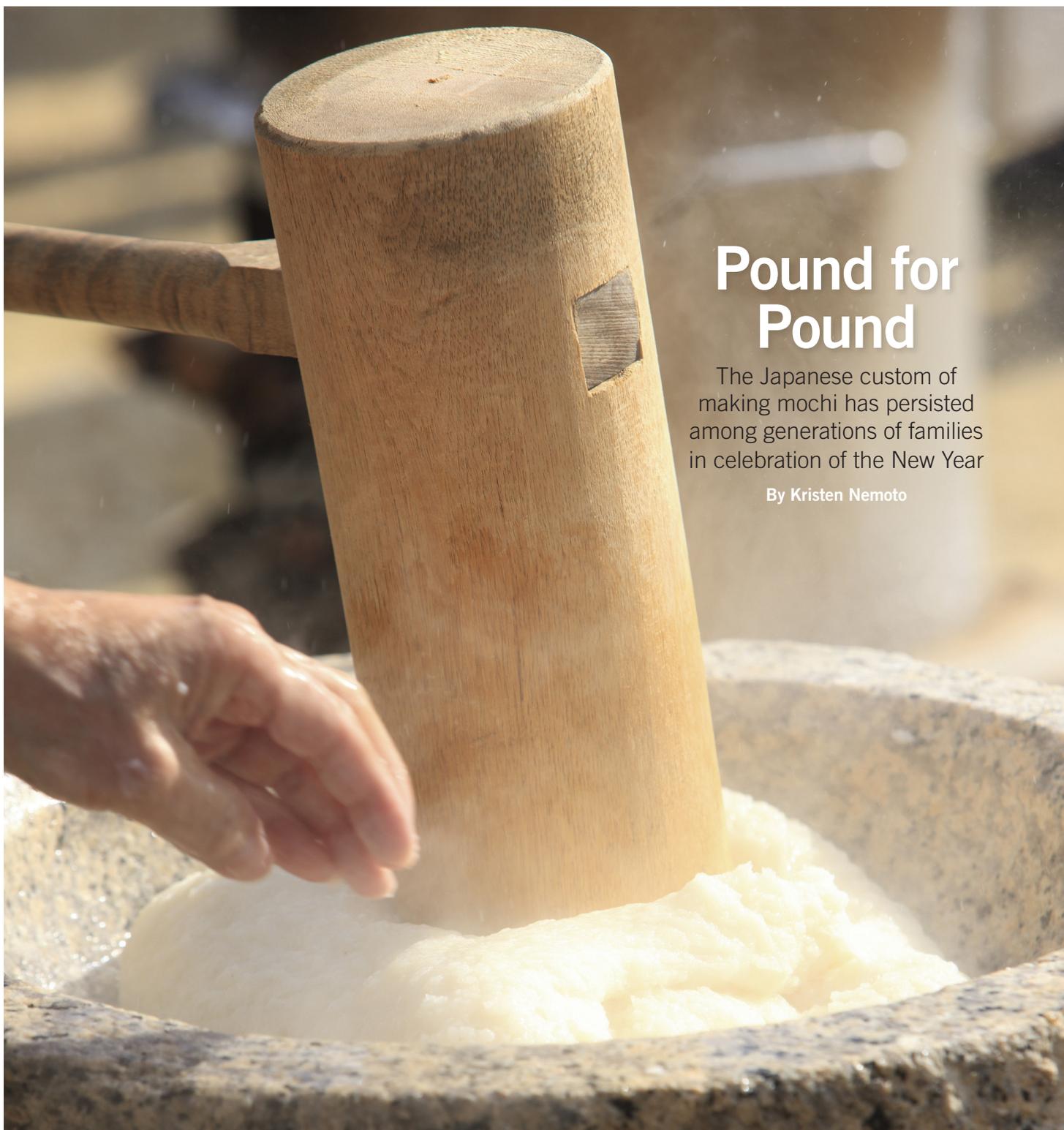
The Maebos continue  
to produce One-Ton  
Chips and Cookies

### POUND FOR POUND

Generations of local  
families perpetuate the  
mochi-pounding tradition

# mauka 2 makai

From the mountain to the ocean and everywhere in between



## Pound for Pound

The Japanese custom of making mochi has persisted among generations of families in celebration of the New Year

By Kristen Nemoto



**ACCORDING TO** the mother of Edna Yano, the associate reverend of Konko Mission of Wahiawā, it's women and children who pound the best mochi. "Because they don't kill it," laughs Yano heartily, as she recollects what she and her mother have seen when Konko Mission of Wahiawā has held its annual New Year's mochi pounding ritual known as *mochitsuki*.

While others — especially newcomers to the yearly tradition — assume they must hit the white clump of sweet glutinous rice with similar force that one would use to wallop a carnival's high striker, Yano and her family have concluded otherwise.

"My dad always says you don't have to use so much strength," Yano says. "All you have to do is lift it up and let it drop in the center. If you use too much strength, it'll cut through and it's not going to knead as well."

The result, when done properly, yields melt-in-your-mouth smooth rice bulbs, proportioned neatly into round shapes, symbolizing a mirror in Shinto religious practices and the Sun Goddess of Japan: Amaterasu. Like many Japanese families and communities who've perpetuated *mochitsuki*, Konko Mission of Wahiawā has welcomed members and non-members alike to help with the ritual of pounding rice since Dec. 30, 1992.

"That's my favorite part — seeing so many people," Yano says. "And everyone is happy, smiling, kind of tired too but it's all about the fun."

George Tanabe, a professor emeritus of Japanese religion at the University of Hawai'i at

Mānoa, condemns the "machine" way of making mochi as it takes away *mochitsuki*'s "pure practice."

"Oh just terrible, terrible," Tanabe chuckles. "I prefer my mochi fresh, and you can't get it any more fresh than after *mochitsuki*."

Along with his many relatives and friends, Tanabe has been practicing *mochitsuki* since he was a child visiting his grandparent's house in Laie. Today, the tradition continues at his house in Waiialua where he and guests steam the rice over a wood fire, which, when finished, is placed in a stone pot known as an "usu." Large mallets known as "kine" are then used to rhythmically pound the rice until it's soft and smooth, using water to prevent it from sticking.

"[*Mochitsuki*] has always been a communal event," Tanabe says. "In Shinto religion, [this practice] deals with the blessings of life. Since rice is the staple food in Japan, making mochi is using food to celebrate life and, currently, the New Year. For [our family], it's a way to continue the tradition, which hasn't changed much. We're still doing it the same way."

As the New Year begins throughout the world, many hope to use this time for renewal and celebration. The Japanese custom of *mochitsuki* has similarly adhered to that aspiration, especially when it comes to reuniting with old friends and making new ones.

"Some people, I just see them once a year," Yano says. "They just enjoy this Japanese tradition. I love it when many people from the community come and gather. It makes it that much more enjoyable."



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