



Buy Local, For Locals

The 23rd Annual Made in Hawai'i Festival returns with the spirit of entrepreneurial support and community

By Kristen Nemoto Jay | Photos By Tina Mahina



It's as if the history of consumerism has come full circle these days. As Farmers' Markets and online craft websites, such as Etsy, have taken off in popularity, customers are taking a closer look at the products they're purchasing and reaching more toward items that will support their local neighbor. This has been the very reason for the success of the annual Made in Hawai'i Festival, which will again open its doors at the Neal Blaisdell Exhibition Hall and Arena from August 18 through 20. The festival's executive director Amy Hammond is excited to see new and old vendors lined up throughout the arena as it's a reminder that there's still a sense of community among local businesses.

"It's a great way for everyone to network and get to know each other," Hammond says. "After three days of selling next to each other, the local exhibitors get to know one another and swap ways to help each other ... You could have a business that's in need of jars for their products and another who has stickers for you to place on the jars, or someone who has access to lots of lilikoi for your jam. It's amazing to see everyone come together and help one another succeed."

Along with local businesses cooperating with each other comes a "trickle down effect," Hammond says, of customers wanting to buy what's familiar and personable to them.

HOMEMADE GOODIES

Chef Kai Cowell of Kaiulani Spices demonstrates how to cook with her product. (Above) A variety of the festival's locally made products.



BUY LOCAL

Open from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 18 and Saturday, Aug. 19. On Sunday, Aug. 20, the festival will be held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. General admission costs \$6, and free for children aged 6 years and younger.

“The customers like to put a face to a name,” Hammond points out. “They want to know where it comes from, and they especially want to help our local economy. That has been the success formula for a lot of our exhibitors here at the festival.”

First established as a small business marketing tool, as well as to give local businesses a chance to showcase their products, the Made in Hawai‘i Festival has grown into a 45,000-attendee and 400-exhibitor event that showcases everything from food products to jewelry and artwork. Adding on to the theme of local talents will be live stage performances by Jerry Santos, Maunaloa, Raiatea Helm and Led Ka‘apana. There will also be special cooking demonstrations by chefs Ray German from

the Four Seasons Resort O‘ahu at Ko Olina’s Fish House and Lee Anne Wong from Koko Head Café.

Returning again as an exhibitor is Jimmy Chan — Hawaiian Chip Company’s general manager — who is especially excited to see his theory of “supply and demand” come to life for local businesses that would have otherwise been left in the dust for success.

“Customers are willing to spend the money on a product if it has value to it,” Chan says. “Once I started to concentrate on our local market [rather than on the Mainland] ... it helped us grow tremendously.”

However, Hawaiian Chip Company’s success is not without its share of hard work and determination. Chan laughs about it now but he still remembers the heat he felt from the fryer when he and his friends would make 50 pounds worth of taro chips a day to sell at the Aloha Stadium’s swap meet or a local Farmers’ Market. Today, their storefront makes up to 500 pounds of chips a day and collaborates with companies such as Longs Drugs, Wal-Mart and Costco. Although the exposure factor for Hawaiian Chip Company is not necessarily needed at the Made in Hawai‘i Festival, Chan still looks forward to return as it keeps his company well versed in their customers’ wants.

“The customers that we meet at the Made in Hawai‘i Festival have been a tremendous help for my company because they’re certainly going to give you their opinions whether you ask for it or not,” Chan laughs. “But most importantly, it helps us to stay engaged with our customers and [learn] what they like and what will sell. It’s getting to know our supply and demand, and I’m very grateful for the opportunity.”*

