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Innovative Company of the Year Winner

Hawaii Self Storage combines innovation with service

Pacific Business News (Honolulu) - by [Chad Blair](#) Pacific Business News

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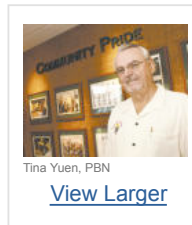
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Not many self-storage buildings in Hawaii let you park your ambulance in their garage.

Several ambulances, actually -- vintage vehicles with long chassis, tail fins and a bulbous red light on top, the kind you see on old episodes of "Hawaii Five-O."



If you're a **Hawaii Self Storage** Kaimuki member, you can see the ambulances yourself. They're parked not far from an outboard boat and a cage full of kayaks, also in storage.

But don't even think about vandalizing them. Hawaii Self Storage has an extensive camera surveillance system, manned 24/7, at each of its locations -- Salt Lake and Pearl City are the others -- with sites in Mililani and Kapolei set to open by summer 2008.

Hawaii Self Storage is the recipient of PBN's 2007 Business Leadership Hawaii Innovative Company of the Year award.

Sophisticated security

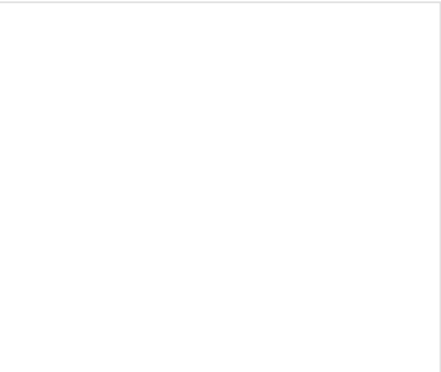
Its security measures go beyond surveillance. They include an alarm system that can be deactivated only with a unique user access code. Each storage unit is secured by a metal roll-up door with a padlock that only the renter has keys or combination for.

The most popular unit at the Kaimuki facility is an "oversized closet," a 5-by-5-by-8-foot space that leases for \$140 a month.

Because the facilities are open at all hours, a sensor system automatically triggers the lights when someone enters the maze-like hallways of the 171,000-square-foot, four-story building (there's also a basement).

Don't worry about getting lost. Wall maps guide visitors, with each hallway named after actual Honolulu streets (e.g., Kapahulu Avenue).

The building also is air-conditioned at all times, to better preserve the stored goods. A state museum stores exhibit items at one of Hawaii Self Storage's locations to take advantage of the temperature and humidity controls.



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Since opening in January, the Kaimuki building already is more than half full. Driving from East Honolulu into town at night, you can't miss the building's illuminated clock glowing red.

Despite the high-tech approach, the company's logo is old-fashioned and definitely local: an anthropomorphic safe (the combination dial is the nose) wearing a straw hat and sandals and giving the "shaka" sign.

No doubt the competition has noticed the new guy on the block -- literally, in the case of Public Storage's Kaimuki location, directly across from Hawaii Self Storage on Waialae Avenue. Kaimuki Self-Storage is at nearby Market City.

Mike Wood, chairman of MW Group, the diversified commercial real estate developer that owns Hawaii Self Storage, said the idea to start a self-storage chain came from Public Storage.

"When I saw their Kaimuki facility -- secure, clean, appealing to a broad market -- I said to myself, 'That's the wave of the future, and that's the kind of business I want to be in,'" Wood said.

Wood's research into self-storage included attending a Mainland convention and visiting West Coast facilities. He opened the Salt Lake store in 2001.

customer service is key

Key to the company's success is customer service, according to Wood. Perhaps its greatest innovation is establishing business centers -- computers, printers, phones, conference room -- at its storage facilities.

"Today you will see many self-storage facilities that boast a business center, but they all have taken this lead from Hawaii Self Storage," said Clint Arnoldus, president and CEO of Central Pacific Bank, which helped MW Group with financing. "They have spent countless hours studying the industry and competition. Because of this they are able to develop forward-thinking ideas and services."

"Now we have a lot of copy cats," Wood said of the business center innovation. "That's very flattering."

Competitors might follow another Hawaii Self Storage idea. The Mililani facility will feature business incubator buildings to provide drive-up mini-warehouse space for tenants with small companies.

"Again, the idea came from our customers," Wood said.

He said Hawaii Self Storage has a 45 percent return-customer and referral rate, compared to the industry standard of 20 percent. The key to that, he said, is customer service. All 27 employees receive monthly sales, marketing and service classes, while managers undergo training and take a certified self-storage manager exam.

Hawaii Self Storage also gives back to the community. That includes an essay contest at schools to earn scholarships, sponsoring sports teams, and Christmas gifts for the needy.

"We are constantly looking for new ways to give back, and we spend many hours and many dollars doing that," Wood said.

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