



Honoring Larry “Juice” Isemoto

Larry Isemoto has had to work for everything he has. The fifth of nine children, Larry was still in the 8th grade when World War II broke out. He remembers that the war was still being waged during his sophomore and junior years at Hilo High School. “There was no Viking football games, only basketball,” he said. “On Fridays, the school kids used to work on the plantation because there was a shortage of labor. I used to help my father’s business.”

Larry’s father, Hisato, established Isemoto Contracting Co. in 1926. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, however, as a leader in the local Japanese community, his father was interned in Santa Fe, New Mexico, until war’s end in 1945. The company, meanwhile, had to downsize and operate on a smaller scale. Larry did his best to help the carpenters, masons and laborers, and learned to operate equipment. With his typical modesty, Larry said, “I would go pick up lumber, stuff like that.”

The war had ended by the time Larry’s senior year rolled around. Nevertheless, the very day after graduation, he and two friends went to the recruitment office to enlist in the U.S. Army. Larry was stationed in Japan until he was discharged in 1947.

Larry later attended Chicago Technical College, where he earned a degree in Civil Engineering and took over the reins to the company in 1967, leading the company until he retired in 1993. Larry remains as the company’s Chairman of the Board today.

When Larry took over the business in 1967, the company had about 36 employees and was doing about \$2 million in business annually. By the time he retired from active management in 1993, the company had grown to about 190 employees and did about \$45 million in business annually. In 2007, the company employed about 400 employees and did \$130 million in gross business.

Larry is widely respected in his profession and has served as president of the Hawaii Island Contractors Association, General Contractors Association of Hawaii, and Construction Industry Legislative Organization. Larry’s community involvement also includes serving on the Hawaii County Traffic Commission, the Hawaii Redevelopment Agency, and the State Contractors Licensing Board.

Never one to forget his roots, Larry is active with the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Hawaii, Japanese Community Association of Hawaii, and East Hawaii Hiroshima Kenjin Kai. He is also a member Urasenke Hilo Association, the Honpa Hongwanji Hilo Betsuin, Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii, and the Hawaii Japanese Center in Hilo. Larry’s impact on the Japanese community did not go unnoticed. He was awarded the prestigious “Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays” by the government of Japan for his significant contributions to perpetuate Japanese culture and promote goodwill with Japan.

“I really don’t know why the Hilo High School Foundation board picked me for this recognition,” Larry adds. He agreed to it, however, because, “If it helps the school, I try to do whatever I can.”

Larry and his wife, Beatrice, have two children, Janice and David.
