



Kapolei: Sugarcane Land to Second City

The R.M. Towill Corporation was there in the late 1980s—in the very beginning when sugarcane grew on the land and the Hawai'i Housing Authority was selecting the site for the future Villages of Kapolei. RMTC Vice President Roy Tsutsui, PE, notes that the company's involvement was initially limited to civil design at first, but its responsibility grew gradually to managing the planning and design of the entire Villages of Kapolei project—a massive project that provided the residential components to the “Second Urban Center,” with eight residential “villages.” Kapolei grew into one of RMTC's largest and most comprehensive works, with nearly 100 individual projects, both big and small, and utilized nearly all its major fields of expertise, and then some.

Kapolei derived its name from Pu'u o Kapolei, an ancient cinder cone that lies west of the Villages. In Hawaiian, *pu'u* means “hill,” and *kapo lei* is “beloved Kapo,” a sister of Pele. As a result of the big boom in the housing market in the late '80s, there was a shortage of housing and the City and State got involved in market housing for the first time with projects such as West Loch and Kapolei. They wanted to build Kapolei with 60% affordable housing units and 40% market units. Normally, the requirement would be only 10% affordable, but the market was red hot and the plan was to use the market units to subsidize decently built, affordable units. To attract developers, the City invested money up front to put in the infrastructure and the State made all the zoning changes and took care of entitlements. These benefits were folded into the cost of the land—all developers had to do was to purchase the land and build. Request for Proposals (RFPs) were issued and developers responded with quality homes and communities.

The story of Kapolei is that the plan was not just to provide housing, but to create the residential living component to support a second urban core. The State built an elementary, middle and high school, along with a library, parks and a golf course. Public sector office space was built to move jobs to the area. The Villages of Kapolei and the City of Kapolei developed and grew together. RMTC performed some complementary work on the City of Kapolei, but their large scale work concentrated mostly on the Villages and supporting backbone infrastructure. As the State Housing Finance and Development Corporation's (HFDC) (currently HHFDC) faith in the company grew, RMTC management extended not only to specialties like engineering, planning, design and construction management, but also to coordinate various components of the project, such as market studies, finance issues and advising HHFDC on submitted RFPs. Kapolei became the largest project of its kind the firm had taken on, and the first time it played such a major role in the development of an entire community.

The HHFDC's first venture in the development of a large scale, affordable housing project required a planned, residential community that would serve as a model for other such projects. RMTC was contracted for the Master Plan covering 5,000 homes. The work included preparation of Development and Utility Master Plan documents, build-out development schedules, engineering analyses and budgetary cost estimates for Kapolei. It also included major infrastructure and roadways, an 18-hole golf course, the three aforementioned schools, parks, greenbelts, a town center and civic, community and commercial facilities. RMTC functioned as the prime consultant

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1. Site of the future Kapolei in 1968. 2. Kapolei in 1991. 3. A more recent aerial of Kapolei.

RMTC PROFILES

Way back when, while looking for a possible career, Roy Tsutsui, PE, RMTC Vice President, didn't really know what engineering was all about, but read in the newspaper that there was a shortage of engineers. He thought he would just try it. A Pahoa High School graduate, he left the Big Island to attend the University of Hawai'i and discovered a career that has taken him to remote and fascinating places working with interesting people on a variety of projects while satisfying his passion for the outdoors. "Back then, I enjoyed SCUBA diving, surfing, swimming and other outdoor activities."

While still in school, Tsutsui worked as a student engineer at RMTC. In addition to his duties, he became a certified lab director and technician, performing laboratory testing of wastewater back when RMTC had a lab. RMTC performed a fair amount of oceanography work, such as environmental studies and monitoring. Becoming OSHA-certified for light diving, Tsutsui performed a lot of this work for the firm, and continued to do it after becoming full time. He was sent to remote areas like Kwajalein Atoll, Saipan and Guam and around the Hawaiian Islands.

Fresh after earning his Bachelor's in Civil Engineering and Master's in Civil specializing in Environmental Engineering, Tsutsui continued with RMTC. "I was fortunate to be able to do a lot of wastewater treatment plant and pump station work," he reflected. "One of the benefits of working at RMTC is that there's a large variety of projects." After several years, Tsutsui heard that his friend Leighton Lum was about to earn his Doctorate in Environmental Engineering and knowing what a bright individual he was, called him to work at RMTC. Now Chief Environmental Engineer and Vice President at RMTC, Dr. Lum began to take on more environmental engineering work and freed Tsutsui up to try his hand at other projects.

When the housing market was booming in 1994, Tsutsui got involved in West Loch, then West Loch Phase II. At one time, he was working on three developments—West Loch, Ewa Villages and Kapolei. He says of the work: "There were so many people with different areas of expertise involved, including marketing consultant, planning and engineering professionals, architects, developers, contractors, financial consultants, State, City and Federal agencies, attorneys, etc.

He found the work challenging and fascinating.

RMTC asked Tsutsui to manage the Engineering Department in the mid 90s and he was promoted to Vice President. The firm later consolidated some of its departments; Planning, Environmental, Project Management, Construction Management and Marketing were added to his oversight. Today, Tsutsui oversees the Construction Management and Project Management Departments and is involved with marketing and the review of contracts and proposals. He remains active, although says he's "limited" to surfing just once or twice a week, plays basketball in several leagues, golfs and spends time with his two sons, Evin, 18, and Blake, 15. Looking back over his 32 years at RMTC, Tsutsui retains the enthusiasm he first felt about the firm. "It's a really great company that puts employees first," he says. "RMTC has always been results oriented and empowers people to do their jobs and it has been a privilege to work with so many brilliant co-workers."

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for preparation and coordination of planning, civil, architectural, landscaping and electrical work. It provided planning, engineering, surveying and construction management services, and prepared the environmental impact statement and design guidelines.

Today, Kapolei is beginning to fulfill its vision of a second urban core with a variety of businesses and jobs. Over 600 businesses are in the region today, and there are about 15,000 jobs. Many notable businesses have moved their operations to the area. The University of Hawai'i West Oahu begins classes in rented classrooms in the fall of this year with a brand new campus slated for 2009, and Hawai'i may see its first Target in Kapolei.

Largely because of development in Kapolei, homes in Makakilo, which were built first, have dramatically risen in value. Other neighboring areas have also developed both commercially and residentially, including Ko'olina and Ewa Beach. Today, Kapolei is the fastest growing city in Hawai'i. Some project the region will generate 40,000 jobs in the next 20 years.

Through it all, Tsutsui, along with fellow engineers, James Yamamoto and Greg Hiyakumoto, seem not to dwell too much on the enormity of the role RMTC played, but on the personal relationships developed over the years. Said Tsutsui, "It was a very interesting and exciting time that formed many new and lasting friendships."



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