



Susanna Cheung FOUNDER, PRESIDENT & CEO - ORI

Business Leader of the Year Finalist

PHOTOS BY CHRISTINA FAILMA PBN

5 questions

My employees would say I'm the kind of boss who ...

"Is full of energy and driven. I'm hands-on at all levels — I'm right there working with them whether it's on the farm, in the kitchen, in the office."

Do you have any pets?

"Tara, my 13-year-old Pomeranian, she's very peppy and demanding."

What's the most important thing to remember about doing business in Hawaii?

"To get profitable. You need to build up your finances, especially in the nonprofit sector, because you can't sit around and wait for a handout. When you have to beg for money, it restricts your abilities."

Describe your dream vacation.

"I'd want to fly first class to a place where I can shop and eat really good food. I've been to Europe and all over Asia, so as long as there's good food and good shopping, it would be a good destination. I like shopping for clothing because when you look good, you feel good. My husband, Ho-ming, he's the one enjoying traveling — everywhere

from India to Tibet, South Africa to the latest, Mongolia."

My favorite time-wasting pleasure is ...

"I love opera, reading books, watching 'Upstairs, Downstairs' DVDs. I feel guilty about it, though. I like to have a little private time to relax."

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Vision for helping others becomes vibrant enterprise

BY NANEA KALANI
PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS

Susanna Cheung is always looking for ways she can generate money to support ORI, the nonprofit organization she founded 30 years ago to provide work opportunities for mentally challenged individuals.

She has found success in launching side ventures—she calls them “money-making machines”—to support ORI’s operations in Wahiawa, which include housing, training and activities for clients.

Cheung started ORI (formerly called Opportunities for the Retarded Inc.) 30 years ago with a \$6,000 loan from her husband, Ho-ming, and opened a thrift store in Honolulu that provided employment for people with disabilities.

But she had a far more elaborate vision for her business. She wanted to help people become self-sufficient and dreamed of building a community where clients could live, work, learn and interact together.

“I wanted a more holistic approach and to be able to have housing and help



CHRISTINA FAILMA PHN

Starting with a \$6,000 loan from her husband, Susanna Cheung has built a vast business enterprise that helps mentally challenged people become self-sufficient by doing “real jobs.”

clients be self-sufficient,” said Cheung, who declined to give her age, but jokes that she’ll be 38 for the rest of her life.

Cheung, who moved to Hawaii from Hong Kong in 1961, said that when she first met mentally handicapped people here, she wanted to “open her heart” to them.

Under her leadership, ORI has expanded from that thrift shop concept into a complex that sprawls across 40 acres amid pineapple fields off Kamehameha Highway in Wahiawa.

Separate from ORI, Cheung launched Helemano Plantation, Helemano Village, Anuenue Hale, Kukana Hale and Camp 808 — all to help support ORI’s programs. ORI itself has an annual operating budget of \$1 million.

ORI’s services include day programs that provide education, training and employment opportunities; 24-hour treatment programs; and residential programs for approximately 100 clients. The organization, with 100 employees, charges membership and service fees.

Cheung saw her master plan take shape in the early 1980s. After stopping for juice

at the Dole Plantation in Wahiawa, she had her heart set on a nearby five-acre lot to build out her planned community.

She bought the property in 1984 and started farm operations, including growing produce and raising pigs and chickens, to generate money to fund ORI’s plans for community housing.

The company expanded the farm business into what is now Helemano Plantation, a complex that includes a full-service restaurant and catering operation, bakery and gift shops. The businesses within the plantation provide work opportunities for ORI’s clients and revenues go back into the parent organization.

“I didn’t want to have clients doing ‘pretend’ work,” Cheung said. “I wanted them to have real jobs because work is meaningful and creates pride and dignity.”

Cheung’s latest venture is Camp 808, a campground and set of 16 cabins completed this year. The company plans to market the site for corporate retreats and family trips.

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