

Former Leeward YMCA executive director Manuel Ayala referred to the iconic smokestack as “the Eiffel Tower of Waipahu” more than a decade ago.

Sweet Memories

A symbol of a bygone era in Waipahu’s plantation history undergoes much-needed restoration.

BY JAYNA OMAVE



FOR 120 YEARS, THE LANDMARK smokestack at the shuttered O’ahu Sugar Co. plantation in Waipahu has symbolized a time when sugar was king—when you could catch a whiff of molasses from the mill and when former plantation manager Hans L’Orange (the namesake for nearby Hans L’Orange Park) handed out candy at Christmas to the neighborhood kids.

Several longtime residents, including Wayne Oshiro, 70, still reminisce about plantation life. Oshiro, who grew up in Waipahu and lived in Ota Camp before moving to Makakilo in 2001, remembers meeting L’Orange during the holidays and walking through the mill property with his elementary school friends to get to

then-named O’ahu Sugar Co. Field.

“When you see the smokestack, you know you’re in Waipahu,” he says. “It reminds people of what it was like before.”

Work completed in April should ensure that the smokestack stands tall for the future.

After O’ahu Sugar closed in 1995, the YMCA bought 2 acres of the mill property to build its Leeward branch in 1997. O’ahu Sugar donated 2 additional acres with the condition that the Leeward Y preserve and maintain the iconic 175-foot smokestack and generator building. (There were two smokestacks when the mill was up and running but one of them, along with most of the rest of the plantation, was razed after the company closed.)

Since taking over the historic property, the Leeward Y had done minor maintenance work to the smokestack. But due to safety and structural concerns, the nonprofit undertook a major restoration project that spanned nearly two years.

With some help from grant money, the work began in 2016 with a budget of about \$510,000, most of which came from the YMCA’s funds.

Finding a contractor with the expertise to repair a smokestack proved challenging, says executive director Jennifer Townsend. They searched Hawai’i and the Mainland before hiring ‘Aiea-based Central Pacific Specialty Contractors.

The project included repainting, concrete repairs (including to a large crack



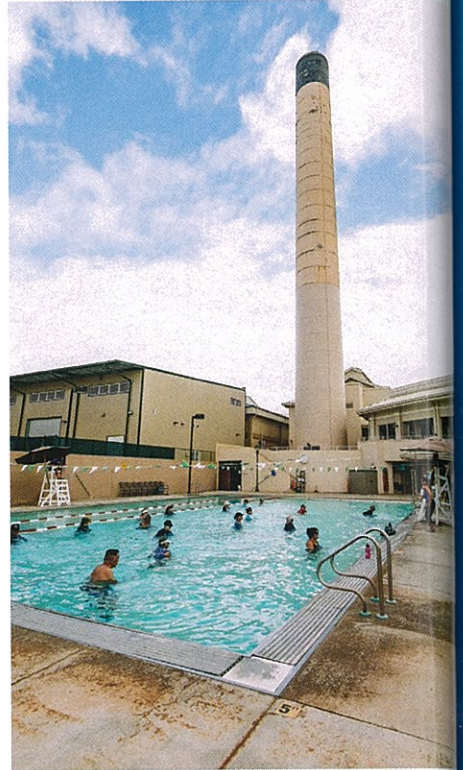
THE NEW WAVE of HONOLULU

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF HONOLULU'S CULINARY SCENE?

And out, simply head to Auahi. Brian Chan, owner and chef of the successful Scratch Kitchen in South Shore Market, is one of the innovators shaping the culinary scene in Honolulu. Praised by his peers as one of Hawai'i's top chefs, Chan, whose parents own a Chinatown restaurant Little Foodie House, has been part of the restaurant scene since birth. Chan proved himself as a restaurateur with the opening of Scratch. Focusing on scratch dishes to keep things made-from-scratch menu of

Southern comfort food and a casually cool vibe reminiscent of San Francisco eateries, Scratch represents the new wave of arts and culture blooming in Kaka'ako. At its center, Ward Village is attracting creatives and innovators who, like Chan, are quickly shaping the future of urban Honolulu.

In just a few years' time, Ward Village has come to life representing an innovative, sustainable tomorrow. Here, you'll find a vibrant urban landscape, buzzing with a dynamic energy that continues to attract Honolulu's best up-and-coming talent. These local entrepreneurs, young innovators and creative minds comprise a breed of trailblazers—Honolulu's next generation of wave makers.



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on the 'Ewa side of the smokestack), excavation and placement of carbon fiber wrap to secure the structure, debris removal, and installation of a doorway so officials could inspect the interior in the future.

"The smokestack is a reminder of the plantation days and the memories of the community members growing up in Waipahu," Townsend says. "Every week we hear a story or a memory of people growing up here and the smell of the molasses or seeing the smokestack. It was very clear from the community that this was a very, very important historical piece to them."

The 3,000-member Leeward Y plans to do minor maintenance in the future, such as repainting and concrete repairs as needed, but the timing depends on funding.

Townsend, 45, grew up in town but remembers when her family would pile into the car and take a "field trip" to Arakawa's store. Her grandma would always say, "As long as you can see the smokestack, we're headed in the right direction."

