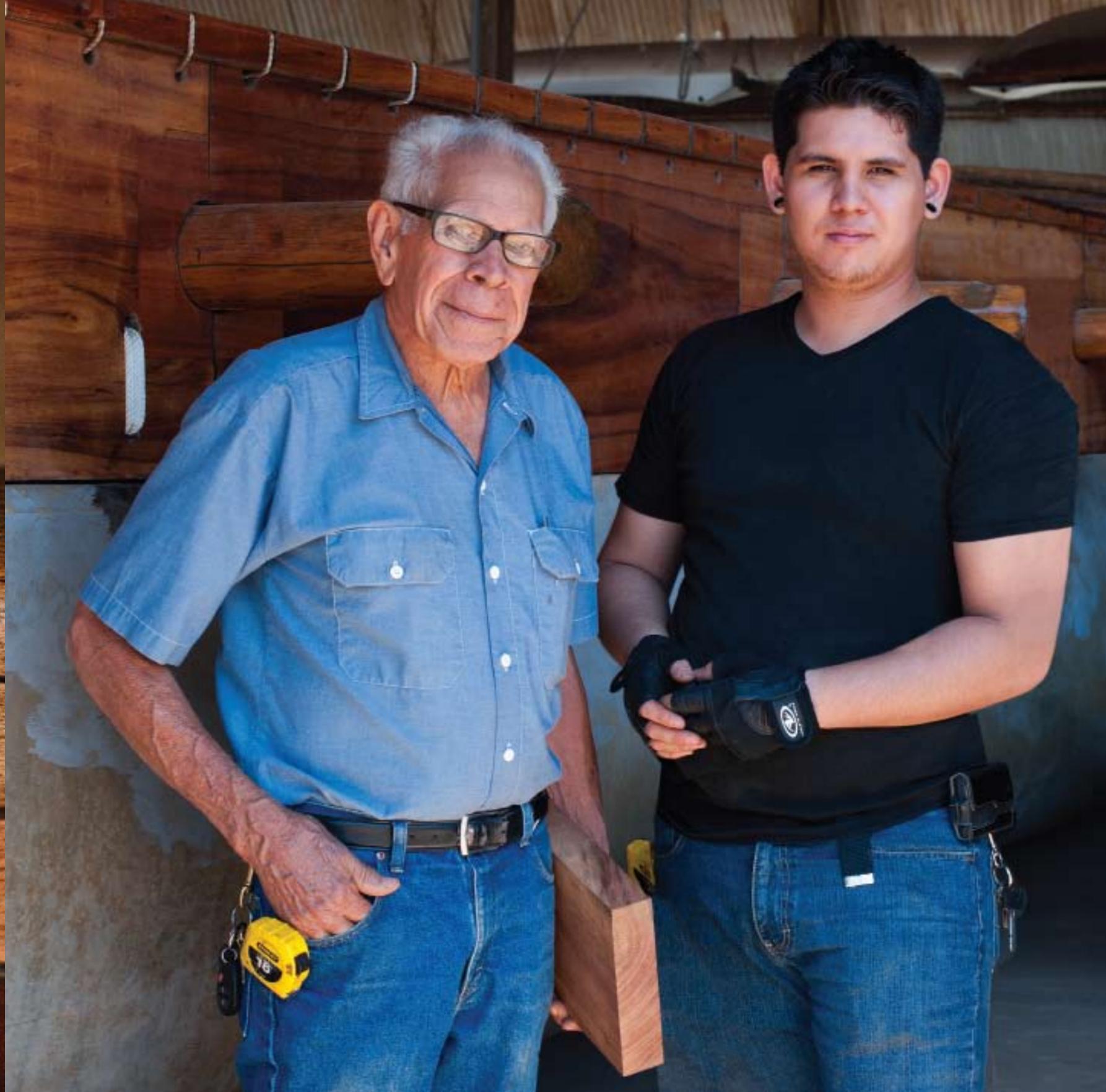


HAWAI'ILOA

SAILS AGAIN

THE RESTORATION AND REVIVAL OF HAWAI'ILOA,
A GREAT HAWAIIAN VOYAGING CANOE

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“In 1976, Hōkūle‘a voyaged from Hawai‘i to Tahiti without the aid of western instruments.”

Jerry Ongies likes to get things just right. “How tall is this?” he asks as he unclips the handy tape measure attached to the waistband of his jeans. “About 18 inches?” He uncoils a length and stretches it across a box at his feet. It measures exactly 17 inches. “That’s too low,” he says. “Imagine you’ve got your stove in here, and you’re cooking. The whole thing is way too low.”

The new galley box that Jerry is building for the double-hull sailing canoe Hawai‘iloa will measure 24 inches tall and come with wood supports in the corners instead of the fiberglass putty found in the old one, a design that Jerry considers insubstantial. The new galley box will not only be stronger but ergonomic, something sailors might not think important when they disembark but will come to appreciate weeks and especially months into a sailing voyage.

Any boat owner can attest to the painstaking upkeep required; those made of wood require even more. Hawai‘iloa, made almost entirely of wood in the tradition of Polynesian voyaging canoes, launched in 1993 and sailed to and from Tahiti,

French Polynesia, and the Marquesas. She sailed throughout the Hawaiian Islands and was even shipped to Seattle, Washington, and as far north as Juneau, Alaska, to pay homage to the place and people who provided the logs to make her hulls. Eventually, after tens of thousands of miles, the 57-foot Hawai‘iloa was showing her age, the wood checking and cracking, and it was decided to put her in storage — in parts and pieces. Some parts and pieces were numbered, some not.

You could say boat building is Jerry’s third career — he’s put in enough hours and years — but really, it’s his passion. Even before he retired from his first profession — at 39, from the Army — he was building boats. “The first was an eight-foot sailing dinghy,” he recalls with a grin. There were others, including a 21-foot sloop that he built in his driveway and, then, a 48-foot ketch that he sailed throughout the South Pacific for five-and-a-half months. Jerry was retired from his second career as a plant manager with Dole when, in 1992, he approached Nainoa Thompson, master navigator and executive director of Polynesian Voyaging Society, and offered to help in the building of Hawai‘iloa.

Twenty years later, on behalf of Friends of Hōkūle‘a and Hawai‘iloa, a non-profit organization dedicated to the perpetuation of Hawaiian canoe building, Jerry is again readying Hawai‘iloa for the sea, spearheading her restoration, spending nearly every day at a boat yard in an industrial area mere miles from Honolulu International Airport. As he works, the sounds of jet engines mix with the nearer drone of table saws and sanders. When those go silent, a radio fills the air with Hawaiian music (on this day, strains of Israel “Braddah Iz” Kamakawiwo‘ole’s Maui Hawaiian Sup’pa Man) echo around the three-sided, metal building.

Hawai‘iloa will fill a void in Hawai‘i when her sister canoes, Hōkūle‘a and Hikianalia, set sail in the summer of 2013 for a precedent-setting, multi-year world tour that will last approximately 36 months; tally more than 45,000 nautical miles; and include visits to at least 26 countries. The mission of the worldwide voyage is to spread the message to *mālama* (care for) “Island Earth”

— our environment, children and all humankind. Among many, one goal of the voyage is to promote the concept of sustainability and ocean health.

At home in Hawai‘i, Hawai‘iloa will take that same message around the Hawaiian archipelago, serving as an ambassador, floating classroom and training vessel for the many people who will be needed to crew the worldwide voyage.

After a couple decades of retirement, Jerry can still rattle off the precise numbers of nut and tuna cans that his plant produced for Dole — 100,000,000 a year; two to two-and-a-half million a day; an average of 350 cans per minute over 12 lines. Only his hands betray his age. They’re getting a little knotty after 85 years of action, but they can manage a tape measure, table saw, lathe, sander and just about any other woodworking tool necessary to re-build Hawai‘iloa. But he’s not doing it alone. Jerry has help from community volunteers, including the management team of Outrigger Reef on the Beach, other master canoe builders like Tay Perry and Jay Dowsett and, in particular, one youngster named Timmy Makuakane.

“Hawai‘iloa will fill a void in Hawai‘i when her sister canoes set sail on a 36-month voyage.”



They are an unlikely pair, Jerry and Timmy. Sixty-five years separate the two. One wears a short-sleeved chambray shirt, blue jeans and athletic shoes. The other wears surf trunks, t-shirt and slippers. Blood may have thrown them together, but passion has bonded the grandfather-grandson team. Timmy was only seven or eight years of age when Jerry first put a sander in his hands. Now, at 20, he represents something else that the worldwide voyage hopes to accomplish.

Back in 1976, sparking a Hawaiian cultural renaissance, Hōkūle‘a voyaged from Hawai‘i to Tahiti without the aid of western instruments — no GPS, no sextant, not even a compass. In doing so, the Polynesian Voyaging Society illustrated that ancient Polynesians could have purposely settled the Polynesian Triangle, silencing critics who purported a theory based on drift and luck. But those original sailors are getting on in age, as is Jerry.

In the boatyard, Jerry points to a substantial-sized post made out of indigenous koa wood topped with an oversized, teardrop-shaped and polished knob. “See that Sampson post?” he asks. In nautical use, a Sampson post is used as a tie-off point for lines carrying heavy loads, be it a mast or an anchor. As such, it plays an important role in sailing. The grandfather’s eyes dance with pride. “Timmy turned those,” he says.

If the worldwide voyage will graduate a new generation of sailors and navigators who will carry on the tradition of voyaging using stars, planets, wind, clouds and other wayfinding techniques, then the restoration of Hawai‘iloa will perpetuate the practice of canoe building. And Jerry’s legacy will live on, not only in the boat itself — Hawai‘iloa, a vessel both literally and figuratively — but in the ancient art and craft and exacting standards passed on through the generations.

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