

## SHOP PROFILE

By **Doug Kaufman**, Editorial Director



# SHARING THE ROAD, SHARING THE ALOHA

## LEX BRODIE'S TIRE CENTERS, OAHU, HAWAII



**PICTURED FROM LEFT: VP SCOTT WILLIAMS, VP JUNE OTA, PRESIDENT MIKE RIZZO, KEITH KOBAYASHI, CEO DAVE SANDS, VP JOHN KELLY.**

**T**he Aloha State of Hawaii – and the island of Oahu in particular – has a number of incredible historic landmarks. Tourists and locals alike are in awe of Pearl Harbor and the USS Arizona Memorial; Diamondhead and its stunning views of Waikiki Beach; Iolani Palace, the former home of Queen Lili'uokalani; the Lex Brodie's Caveman sign at 701 Queen Street...

Yes, Little Joe the Caveman is a Hawaiian icon, a symbol of an institution that, for more than 60 years, has fulfilled the automotive needs of Oahu drivers with professionalism and skill.

Lex Brodie's Tire, Brake and Service Company has four locations on Oahu; in Aiea, Honolulu, Waipahu and Kaneohe; and has been 100 percent employee-owned since January 2021. The company's core values of honoring customers, valuing its employees and giving back to the community have been in place since its founding on

July 31, 1961 by Alexander "Lex" Brodie. Brodie, who had managed the Dole Pineapple Cannery on Oahu, opened a Chevron fuel franchise in Kaneohe after he retired from the fruit game. Recognizing an opportunity, he soon added tires to his gasoline sales.

"Lex was a pretty strong-willed individual," explains Scott Williams, vice president of Marketing and Brand Management. "As it turns out, he didn't really like being told how to do business, so he decided to open his own two-bay shop on Queen Street."

That two-bay flagship location

has grown to become a bustling 24-bay shop with 20 lifts; in addition, Lex Brodie's serves the nearby communities of Aiea (a 13-bay location), Waipahu (16 bays) and Kaneohe (11 bays) with 99 total employees servicing 195-230 vehicles per day.

"For the first 30 years, Lex was strictly just tires and wheel alignments," Williams says. "He was very old school; very procedural. He could be very demanding as an employer, but customers knew that they would get very good, consistent,

dependable customer service. Today, we still maintain that culture of taking care of the customer."

The founder's favorite slogan, "Thank You...Very Much," has become a mantra within the company and the community. In 2021, an ESOP put the business's future in the hands of its employees, overseen by a Management Advisory Committee (MAC), made up of CEO David Sands, President Michael Rizzo, and four vice



presidents, including Williams, John Kelly (Operations), Keith Kobayashi (Mechanical), June Ota (Human Resources and Administration) and Company Controller Ryan Matsuyama.

### VALUING EMPLOYEES, COMMITMENT TO TRAINING

The ESOP has been a great perk for the shops' employees, many of whom have worked for Lex Brodie's for many years.

"The career path at Lex Brodie's is fantastic," explains Williams. "Most, if not all, of our store managers started off at entry level or near entry level positions and worked their way up. The cool thing with this company is that the opportunity to move up is there. The team members just need to grab it

and run with it."

And grab it they have.

"Almost a quarter of our employees have been here 20 years or more. We have a handful who have been here 30 or more, one that's over 40 and a huge amount have been with us 10 years or more," Williams says. "Like all businesses, it's finding entry level people who can handle our volume that is difficult. Our stores are so busy and even the seemingly simple process of changing tires now takes more of a technician – it's not just a 'labor' job anymore. It's not like 30 years ago, when you could just throw a jack under the subframe and not have to worry too much about hurting anything. With today's cars, you have to be very careful how you jack them up, you have to worry about custom wheels, runflat

## LEX BRODIE'S TIRE CENTERS

### Oahu, Hawaii

**Locations:** 4 locations in Aiea, Honolulu, Waipahu & Kaneohe, HI  
**Hours of Operation:** Mon. – Fri.: 7:00 a.m – 6:00 p.m.; Sat.: 7:00 a.m – 5:00 p.m.; Sun.: 9:00 a.m – 4:00 p.m.

**History:** Founded July 31, 1961 by Alexander "Lex" Brodie; in 2021 became an ESOP overseen by a Management Advisory Committee (MAC), made up of CEO David Sands, President Michael Rizzo, & four vice presidents, including Williams, John Kelly (Operations), Keith Kobayashi (Mechanical), June Ota (Human Resources & Administration) & Company Controller Ryan Matsuyama.

**Total number of employees (across all locations): 99**

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tires and TPMS sensors.”

Keith Kobayashi and John Kelly say they work with automotive industry partners like the Pronto Network to keep Lex Brodie’s owner-employees up to date. With any team and to maximize company growth, they say internal training is key, though there is no “one-size-fits-all solution.”

Kobayashi explains that the evolution in training has been dramatic during his tenure. Their [Pronto’s] training is available to team members who are interested in learning. “I’ve been with Lex Brodie’s for almost 29 years now. And, when I came here, what I brought was the ability to go a little more beyond just brakes and front end service. I did start as a technician and I’ve been doing that for as long as my body could hold out. And, now, John and I work together to develop our procedures, policies and services.”

Mechanical services include undercar inspections and repair, as well as electrical, cooling and air conditioning procedures, Kobayashi says, for typical domestic and Asian nameplates, as well as some mainstream European brands that have been recognized as offering the best opportunities for success.

“We market ourselves as ‘Your family doctor for your car;’ we assist our customers with most of the common services and repair. For in-depth engine, electrical, diagnostic or specialized services on exotic vehicles, we will refer a customer to a specialist or the dealer,” explains Williams.

“Each person in each department requires training,” says Kelly. “We do it in person, we do it groups, we do it virtually, and we do send people off to seminars on the mainland when possible. A lot of our local vendors, like Pacific Jobbers, offer training programs. They invite us to attend them and we send our guys whenever possible. For technicians specifically, we worked with our vendors to develop our Build-A-Tech program. In this, we targeted those key service areas, and we send multiple people from each store to spend three or four days getting classroom training and hands-on experience with professionals.”

Currently, the team includes 19 technicians with at least one ASE certification and five ASE Master technicians.

Because of the complexity of the industry today, training opportunities aren’t exclusive to technicians,

however. The Lex Brodie’s sales team and cashiers also participate in online training with specific tire manufacturers as well as the Tire Industry Association (TIA) for certification.

“Training is a big part of what we do,” Kelly says, “and, again, there’s a lot of different ways we approach training.”

This is intended to improve job satisfaction, which is a key to the Lex Brodie’s culture. “We’ve developed a winning environment where our employees believe their presence and contribution make a difference,” Kelly says. “Engaged employees work harder and treat customers better knowing what they do has value.”

Employees have a gentle but firm sounding board when they do need to talk about work or personal issues, says June Ota, who says she occasionally needs to be a combination of psychologist, counselor and Mom. “When they need to talk about something that’s bothering them, they come in, start talking and then get back to work. Compassionate, yet professional, I like to say.”

Williams admits that while the company’s founder’s approach to employee relations may be viewed

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as more contentious, his aggressive approach was focused on one thing – satisfied customers.

“It’s the culture of our company. We may not be as iron-fisted as managers as Lex was, but the fact remains if a customer is unhappy, we’ve failed to do our job – period,” Williams says. “Anytime a customer is upset, we look at every circumstance to learn from it. We ask questions and dig deep, to see if there is a procedure we can improve or a service we can add to do better.”

Luckily, customers have recognized Lex Brodie’s passion since the company’s founding. Brodie was a pioneer in marketing techniques, creating and appearing in television commercials in the early 1960s that still resonate today. His honest messaging and hands-on approach cemented his reputation for great customer care and approachability.

“He would always close his commercials, by saying ‘You can find me at 701 Queen St.’,” says Williams, “and customers knew they could come in and talk, share any questions



or concerns, and he’d address them. Even today, there’s a desk in the office known as the ‘Lex Desk,’ because it’s where he would sit all day.”

This commitment to meeting customer needs has gotten even more advanced over the past 30 years. The management team says the feedback from clients has streamlined their marketing approach to valuing customers’ time and offering maximum value.

### HONORING CUSTOMERS

“Our marketing includes both traditional marketing (primarily TV and radio) and trackable digital marketing opportunities,” Williams says. “While we recognize and see clear benefits of branding marketing, we utilize digital marketing to reach new customers. Our digital store pages, such as our Google business pages, all have unique tracking numbers so we can track actual converted leads from

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our digital profiles which helps us see which digital initiatives are showing trackable, converted new leads.”

Williams points to Google AdWords keywords and zip code targeted campaigns, the LexBrodies.com website and SEO initiatives, Google Business Pages, Yelp Business Pages with Yelp Ads, targeted streaming TV campaigns and social media campaigns as key components in the strategy.

“To help retain customers, along with providing 5-star customer services, we also utilize emails and texts to help share special promotions with our customers,” he says. “We also partnered Carfax’s Loyalty Program with our Lex Rewards Program to send monthly updates to our customers on upcoming service dates for their vehicles, with easy links to our appointment system.”

“The Lex Rewards program offers multiple currencies to our customers (including HawaiianMiles airfare points and Caveman Currency points),” he says. “We have more than 15,000 Lex Rewards Members in our monthly email newsletter and just under 10,000 Lex Rewards members in our Lex Rewards Text Club.”

In addition, Lex Brodies also offers a “Fixed Forever Repair Warranty,” that covers both parts and labor for the covered repair. The shop also offers a four-year unlimited tire warranty and a lifetime tire service package.

“We also have our Digital Vehicle Inspection (DVI) program that helps educate customers on their vehicle’s condition and reinforces the trust we have with them,” Kelly says.

“One of the most important things we offer is our Customer Bill of Rights, that shares what our customers can expect from their visits with us,” explains CEO Dave Sands. “It’s our promise to our customers, but it’s equally important for our employees to understand what our expectation is. And they do step up to the plate and do everything they can to meet those standards, as well.”



Sands says this has been invaluable to maintaining the legacy of service. “When you do things a certain way for so long, it’s very easy to think that, ‘Hey, we’ve got this figured out. We do everything perfectly,’ but our Bill of Rights lets our customers hold us accountable. We post it in the stores, we have it on the website. We want people to see what our commitment is to them. And, when we don’t hit that mark, we want to know about it because we want to get better.”

### SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Lex Brodie’s was the first service center in Hawaii to become a AAA Approved Auto Repair Shop and remains the largest company that’s

approved here, says Williams, and is also a member of the Better Business Bureau. Those are outside entities that are well respected and help hold us accountable, as well.

Relationships between customer and shop are vital to increasing profits – the relationship between shop and supplier is no less critical, says Rizzo.

“Being in a position to meet the needs of our customers requires solid partnerships with our vendors, a fact that’s even more apparent because we’re on an island. We’ve been doing business with Pacific Jobbers, a member of the Pronto Network, since before I joined the company,” Rizzo says. “This is a very interdependent type of industry and we count on our

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vendors to be able to provide us with what we need to serve our customers.”

In addition to being a four-time finalist in our sister publication TIRE REVIEW's Top Shop competition and winning the competition in 2016, Lex Brodie's has been recognized three years in a row with the Good Neighbor Award from the City & County of Honolulu for its company-wide program of recycling and proper containment and handling of automotive oil and fluids.

“We also only offer full synthetic oil changes which helps provide extended intervals for oil changes, helping to reduce oil consumption and the need for recycling of the old oil,” Williams says, “We promote that ‘All Vehicles are Greener Through Proper Maintenance’ and offer our GreenFleet Hawaii Super Check Up to help customers maintain whatever vehicle they drive properly with one convenient package. This keeps them safer on the roadways, helps save them money with preventative car care which also helps reduce their vehicle's impact on our environment.”

“It's a relatively small island,” explains Rizzo. “We may seem limited because of space but we continue to grow because of our commitment to excellence, our commitment to the customer and not just to the bottom line.”

Part of this commitment can be seen in Lex Brodie's support of the community.

Established in 2004 in honor of the shop's founder, the Lex Brodie's Tire Company Foundation continues Brodie's legacy of supporting the community that he serviced. Over the years, the foundation has supported many organizations, including Brown Bags to Stardom, Lemon Aid Alley, B.R.A.V.E. Hawaii, Driver's Education, BBB Students of Integrity Regional Scholarship, and Elevating & Celebrating Effective Teaching & Teachers.

“Our foundation handles a lot of our community outreach and charitable contributions,” says Rizzo. “We



work closely with the homeless; we work with the military and with the schools; and we make sure that we are spending the time where we can do the most good. It's important that we give back to our community who allows us to serve them.”

We need to grow together. And that's what we work very hard to do.”

Lex Brodie's “Love Hawaii — Share the Aloha” program was designed as an opportunity for Lex Brodie's customers to help contribute funds to charities of their choice. Customers who are a part of the Lex Rewards Program can choose a local non-profit to receive a donation of up to 2% of their invoice.

Among its most well-known initiatives is the “Thank You...Very Much” Award program, which invites students in grades 4-12 to write a letter of appreciation to someone who has impacted their lives. Teachers submit students' letters each year, then a student's letter is selected and recognized with up to six winners a year.

The award has recognized more than 120 letters with participation from over 200 public and private schools. More than \$200,000 in prizes has been awarded through class donations and non-profit donations (chosen by the winning students).

“Lex Brodie's embraces a business sustainability model which balances good business practices with giving back to the community,” Williams says. “There is the PR motivation, but once you start doing it and you see how you're impacting and touching others' lives, the PR side disappears because you just become passionate about it. You see how you're making a difference.”

Rizzo says these programs are key to Lex Brodie's success.

“We spend a lot of time cultivating our employees and products and services and warranties that are beneficial to people, and not just to us as the business,” he says. “People know that the name Lex Brodie is synonymous with being available to help them in whatever way we possibly can.” ■