

# Lex Brodie's bidding aloha to Alan Inaba

*Local 'legend' sold more than a million tires in 70 years*

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It's safe to say that Alan Inaba has helped more people pick out tires for their cars and trucks than anyone else in Hawaii. And after 70 years in the tire business, he's ready to retire his pressure gauge.

The spry 81-year-old is a legend among kama'aina car owners and it all started when Inaba went to work at the Tire Recap Service on South Beretania Street (now the site of a Burger King Restaurant).

"My father put me to work washing whitewall tires in our family-owned recap shop at the age of 12 and tires have been a part of my life ever since," recalls Inaba, who grew up nearby on Bingham Tract in Moiliili.



Alan Inaba in 1994

Back then, he says, our family specialized in recapped tires with a deeper tread that could outlast many newer tires coming straight from the factory.

Inaba remembers working with old-time cars that required extra care, including a few Model-T Fords that traveled on oversized 34-inch tires with inner tubes pumped up with air. Tires were also a lot skinnier — sometimes just over 4 inches wide.

"It was real old-school," he laughs. "And during the war years in the 1940s, rubber tires were difficult to come by — everything was being shipped off to the troops. If customers wanted to buy tires, they had to have us fill out a permit that needed approval from the city. Rationing was a part of life back then."

Because Inaba is fluent in both English and Japanese, he became a favorite with many first and second generation families of Japanese ancestry. When it was

time for customers to pick out tires for their cars, Inaba was the man they came to see. In fact, many of the friendships he developed back then have endured for decades and include kama'aina of every ethnic background imaginable.

With the advent of steel-belted radial tires in the mid-1980s, however, the tire business changed and recapping tires became obsolete.

As a result, Inaba closed the family-run business in 1994, but he didn't remain idle for very long. Within a few weeks, he joined Lex Brodie's Tire Company as a senior salesman.

Within a short span of time, Inaba became a permanent fixture at Lex Brodie's location on Queen Street in Kakaako. Personalized service became his stock in trade and Inaba always seemed to find time to advise customers and help new employees learn the ins-and-outs of the tire business.

Along with tires and tie rods, Inaba harbors two other deeply rooted passions. He's an avid UH sports fan and serves as the vice president of the Iwakuni Bon Dance Club in Palolo Valley, where he enjoys talking story with old friends and making new ones.

This Friday, however, Inaba will hang up his clipboard at Lex Brodie's for the last time. And once he retires, he hopes to spend a little more time with Gladys, his wife of 58 years.

The Inabas have two children: Dr. Alson S. Inaba, who practices pediatric emergency medicine at Kapiolani Medical Center for Women & Children, and Alana Hirano, who teaches 4th grade at Maemae Elementary School in Honolulu.

To recap the milestones of his life, Inaba will be honored on Tue., Aug. 26, during the Creation Dinner Show at the Sheraton Princess Kaiulani Hotel by Fred Orr, the hotel's general manager and Inaba's long-time friend. Dozens of Lex Brodie employees will be in attendance to wish Hawaii's "tire legend" a fond farewell and a warm aloha.



*During the past 70 years, Alan Inaba (wearing the orange aloha shirt) has become a legend in the local tire business by selling more than a million tires. Among the staff members to bid him aloha at Lex Brodie's Tire Company on Queen Street are, from left, Jack Belford, Carl Bush Jr., Maile Otis and general manager Scott Williams.*

*Lex Brodie president David Sands, right, will help recap the milestones of Inaba's life and career during a retirement dinner show on Aug. 26, at the Princess Kaiulani Hotel.*

