



CLICK TO SUPPORT OUR SPONSORS



Tuesday, March 12, 2002



GEORGE F. LEE / [GLEE@STARBULLETIN.COM](mailto:GLEE@STARBULLETIN.COM)

Thanh Quoc Lam, founder of Ba-Le, is this year's Small Business Administration Entrepreneur of the Year. Ba-Le is the Vietnamese word for Paris.

## No small success

**Lam, Kimura honored  
by Small Business Administration**

By Lyn Danninger  
[ldanninger@starbulletin.com](mailto:ldanninger@starbulletin.com)

Darren Kimura, already acknowledged as the U.S. Small Business Administration's regional Young Entrepreneur of the Year, has a path laid before him. It is set by Thanh Quoc Lam -- this year's regional Entrepreneur of the Year -- who in 1989 won the same award as Kimura.

Kimura and Lam are two of the 28 small business owners and advocates will be honored by the SBA on April 23.

Kimura, president of Energy Conservation Hawaii LLC, not only placed first in his category in Hawaii, but has now been named Young Entrepreneur of the Year for the SBA's region that includes California, Oregon and Washington.

The SBA accolades hold particular significance for Hawaii's small business community, said Jane Sawyer, the administration's assistant district director for business and entrepreneurial development.

"In Hawaii we don't have the friendliest small business environment so this is a major testament to their leadership and business skills," she said.



GEORGE F. LEE / [GLEE@STARBULLETIN.COM](mailto:GLEE@STARBULLETIN.COM)

Lam also wholesales baked goods to many businesses.

---

Lam began the now-familiar chain of Ba-Le Sandwich and Bakery stores in 1984. As an immigrant from Vietnam, Lam's rise to success came about as a result of hard work, perseverance and the ability to take on new challenges. Even throughout economically stagnant 1990s, Lam continued to expand his business.

He admits to still working 14-hour days but says it's a big improvement from when he first started the business and worked 20-hour days.

Lam is modest about his many successes. He has no particular words of wisdom for other would-be entrepreneurs.

"I try to not advise anyone. Just try your best, work hard, be honest and keep your word," he said. "I guess the best thing is to do what you love to do."

Lam will be receiving this year's SBA award for the second time. Like Kimura, he was previously named Young Entrepreneur of the Year. Now, some 13 years later, Lam's multi-million dollar operation in Hawaii will soon branch out to Japan when two Ba-Le outlets open in Nagoya.

Lam said he dreams one day of taking the Ba-Le concept to China. In the meantime, there are 21 Ba-Le sandwich outlet franchises on Oahu, Maui and the Big Island, and one he retains. With Lam's help, a number of former Ba-Le employees have now become franchise owners.

The company's bakery prepares and wholesales pizza dough, deli sandwiches and baked goods to a variety of clients including airlines, caterers, hotels, markets and restaurants. At the company's Honolulu headquarters and bakery plant, Lam employs 71 people.

More immediately, Lam has plans for further Hawaii growth. He will open a new Ba-Le franchise at Daiei on Kaheka Street next month and plans another store and a bakery for Kapolei in August.

SBA's Young Entrepreneur of the Year, Kimura, says one of his biggest challenges has been overcoming misperceptions about his age.

"When you are young, you really have to sell yourself and then your service," he said.

But Gwen Yamamoto, the business banking manager with City Bank who nominated Kimura for the SBA award, said she knew as soon as she met him that Kimura he would be successful in his business.

"He has all the qualities everyone wants. He's very focused, goal oriented, articulate and mature," Yamamoto said. "As soon as I got to talk to him I knew immediately he was the right candidate."

Kimura, who started Energy Conservation Hawaii in 1998 found the right niche at the right time.

The power crisis in California got a lot of people thinking about rising energy costs and ways to conserve, he said.

"After California I think people became more conscious, especially when electric rates hit the ceiling," he said.

The company specializes in energy efficiency systems and retrofits lighting, air

conditioning, hot water and motor systems in commercial and industrial buildings.

Kimura, the president and owner who also serves as one of the firm's engineers, employs 15 people.

Kimura is looking ahead to working on large energy project developments such as giant cooling systems that would cool three or four buildings in a city block all at once. He is already thinking about the new generation of energy technologies.

"Any business needs to use energy no matter what," he said. "Control is what it comes down to in energy."

[E-mail to Business Editor](#)

[BACK TO TOP](#)

---

Text Site Directory:

[\[News\]](#) [\[Business\]](#) [\[Features\]](#) [\[Sports\]](#) [\[Editorial\]](#) [\[Do It Electric!\]](#)  
[\[Classified Ads\]](#) [\[Search\]](#) [\[Subscribe\]](#) [\[Info\]](#) [\[Letter to Editor\]](#)  
[\[Feedback\]](#)

---

© 2002 Honolulu Star-Bulletin

<http://starbulletin.com>