

BY JACY L. YOUN

A World of Difference

Former WorldPoint founder Olin Lagon brings high tech jobs to the homesteads

Like many other kids who grew up in low-income complexes, former Kuhio Park Terrace (KPT) and Palolo housing resident Olin Lagon wasn't very interested in education. The youngest of four kids in a single-parent household, he bounced from school to school, ultimately dropping out altogether. However, unlike many of his fellow public-housing dwellers, Lagon managed to get his life back on track following a short stint at a military technical school.

"Something just turned on and once I was out of my element, I realized that I was a product of my environment," says Lagon, who went on to graduate from the University of Hawaii with a 4.0 GPA and a double major in international entrepreneurship and accounting. "Growing up in public housing is tough, and so even though there's a ton of talent in places like KPT, the environment just causes all kinds of contractions."

The environment he's referring to is one of abuse, rampant drug use and higher-than-average unemployment rates. Lagon's latest effort, a local technology company with a highly social mission, is a bold-faced attack on the latter. Hawaiian Homestead Technology Inc. (HHT), of which Lagon is the CEO, is a subsidiary of the nonprofit Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA). Early last year, CNHA President Robin Danner shared with Lagon her vision for providing desperately needed jobs in Hawaiian Homestead communities by creating an IT company.


Lagon was perfectly suited for the task. Not only did he have the tech smarts, (Lagon created some of the technology behind what was once one of Hawaii's brightest tech stars, WorldPoint Interactive Inc.), he was also groomed for community development, having worked as a Peace Corps volunteer for two years in Russia.

Lagon signed on last January, decided the company would focus on paper-to-digital document conversion and, by June, HHT opened its first facility on Hawaiian Homestead land in

Anahola, Kauai. "We hired 12 people from the community, half of whom were unemployed, and most of whom did not have any computer knowledge whatsoever," says Lagon. "We sent them to community college for a month, then trained them for four months, and they went from having no computer experience to having the ability to create and edit SGML files."

HHT's work so far has been a pretty even mix of public- and private-sector contracts. Thanks to a unique strategic alliance, HHT currently has \$5 million in projects lined up, the bulk of which are federal contracts. "We created an alliance of American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian IT companies and, as a group, we were able to land a fairly large contract that was enough to get all 10 companies started and operational," says Lagon.

The increase in work means a call for expansion. Last December, HHT opened a second site with 12 employees in Waimanalo. At that site, employees will primarily do computer-aided drafting to support a \$2-million contract with the U.S. Marines. By the end of this year, Lagon hopes to have a third location and introduce data management to its list of services.

Lagon says: "We're really connecting an opportunity with a need, and putting beacons of light in these communities." 

OLIN LAGON

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, HAWAIIAN HOMESTEAD TECHNOLOGY INC.

AGE: 33

EDUCATION: BBA, international entrepreneurship and accounting, UH Manoa, '95; international management, Pacific Asian Management Institute, '93-94; Fellow, East West Center, '94-95

WORK EXPERIENCE: Director, technical assistance, Hawaii Community Loan Fund, '02-03; business volunteer, Peace Corps (Russia) '00-02; chief architect, WorldPoint, '95-00; various small business startups, '90-95

MILITARY: U.S. Naval Reserves, '89-94

HOBBIES: Surfing, yoga, slack key guitar, hiking

FAMILY: Wife, Allison; son, Noah; pet, Venus

HELP WANTED: Olin Lagon at Hawaiian Homestead Technology's second facility in Waimanalo (the first is in Anahola, Kauai). Lagon hopes to have a third location by the end of the year.

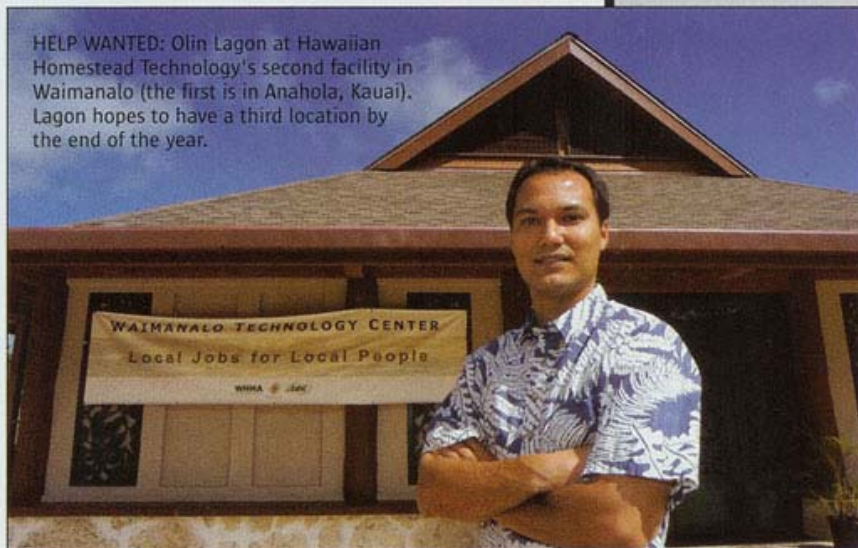


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