

**ROTARY CLUB OF HONOLULU  
ZOOM MEETING MINUTES  
28 SEPTEMBER 2021  
PRESIDING: PRESIDENT GWEN YAMAMOTO-LAU**

**President Gwen Yamamoto-Lau** called to order the Rotary Club of Honolulu meeting at 12:00 pm. She welcomed everyone and expressed her honor at being our Club President.

**Brian Dunkel** served as the *Virtual Meeting Maestro*. **Robyn McCreary** was Zoom photographer.

*Inspiration* given by **Sam Haas**

“Thinking outside the box,” and to go along with today’s guest speaker topic, she brought to our attention the top six industries here in Hawaii. Her goal was to give us a glimpse of the past and show where we are today. Her list was:

1. Tourism – the largest economic sector in Hawaii. It accounts for approximately 21% of the state’s economy and generates over \$16 billion in revenue.
2. Defense – a critical part of the Hawaiian economy, the island is one of the few states to have all five branches. The branches create jobs and contracts for local businesses.
3. Agriculture – from the 70’s to the early 90’s, Hawaii was a powerhouse supplying the country with pineapples, macadamia nuts, sugar, coffee, and milk. Today, Hawaii spends about \$3 billion annually to import 90% of the food it produced in the 70’s.
4. Fishing – Our coral reefs are of great value and attract snorkelers, divers, and the fishing industry. However, overfishing has depleted over 75% of the small-scale fisheries in our state. We now import over 63% of commercially sold seafood.
5. Manufacturing – **Meli James**, speaker of the day sharing local product information, so read what she shared! In addition to that, decades prior Hawaii was much stronger in manufacturing, and today the industry is dominated by oil refining and manufacture of steel products, cement, and chemicals. Still, these are dependent on imported raw materials.
6. Power – Electricity! Few power companies operate diesel generators now. Private and military generate their own electricity. Small dams produce very little hydroelectric power here. A Geothermal power plant constructed in the mid 80’s produces only a fifth of the electricity on the island. A wind farm was built in 2006 on Maui.

**President Gwen** thanked **Sam** and agreed we need to work on food security here in Hawaii.

**Carolann Biederman** led us in the *Pledge of Allegiance*. **Lyla Berg** led us in *Hawaii Pono*.

Visitors welcomed by **President Gwen** were Kandi George (Prospective Member), Kevin (from the UK), Wayne Parsons, and Mr. Hideo Yamanaka (Kyoto).

Announcements:

- **Peg Jackson:** Thanked everyone who volunteered with weeding and cleaning of *Centennial Park* on Friday and Saturday. She asks that if you didn't get an email from her, then she may not have understood what was written, and asks that you contact her to confirm and/or correct your email.
- **PP Rich Proctor:** As Club Trainer he is always seeking ways "to increase our Rotary IQ." Rich listed several of the 91 Fellowship activities that Rotary members may engage in. Saturday, September 25<sup>th</sup>, many participated in the 24-hour Beerfest Fellowship, hosted by B.R.E.W. that began in New Zealand and ended in Hawaii. Our own Past District Governor organized this event on our end. Fellowships give us opportunity to expand our contact and interactions. Join a Rotary Fellowship! Find this information at [rotaryfellowships@rotary.org](mailto:rotaryfellowships@rotary.org) or go to <https://www.rotary.org/en/our-programs/more-fellowships> Have fun in Rotary! Soon to come he will share information on "How to Get More Out of Club Runner."
- **Gwen** reminds everyone to update our RCOH profiles on Club Runner.

Breakout Rooms Topic: What kind of business did you want to start, what would it have been, and what stopped you?

Guest Speaker Introduction by **Sam Haas**

**Sam** introduced **Meli James**, cofounder of *Mana Up*. Here is her bio:

Meli James is cofounder of *Mana Up*. She is also president of the Hawaii Venture Capital Association. Previously, Meli brought her Silicon Valley startup experience to Hawaii venture accelerators Blue Startups and the University of Hawaii's XLR8UH. James founded her first company, Nirvino, a #1 ranked wine app, an Apple Platform Top 100 App, and Top Ten Lifestyles App in 2007. In 2016, she was recognized by Entrepreneur Magazine as one of five Women to Watch. In 2017, she was recognized again by Entrepreneur Magazine as one of eight Women Leaders Who Are Disrupting Entrepreneurship. Meli is a graduate of The School of Hotel Administration at Cornell University.

*Mana Up* is a statewide initiative to build up and support our ecosystem of entrepreneurs in Hawai'i, providing them with resources and tools to scale globally. Many of the makers and artisans who participate in our program have been recognized internationally for their products and find their success in connection to home—from locally sourced ingredients to native culture, or an elevated sense of place and community. As these entrepreneurs continue to grow, they also help to sustain our local community through economic diversification, high-quality jobs, givebacks, investment, and a regenerative culture of entrepreneurship.

Guest Speaker **Meli James**, cofounder of *Mana Up*

Meli was born and raised on Oahu. After graduating from college, she felt frustrated with the lack of opportunities here, so she ventured to Silicon Valley. She found herself working in the Hospitality field, which is what her degree was in. She shares that she had a “quarter-life crisis” where she “needed to do a reset.” From this she saw a life coach and a career coach to figure out what her strengths were and what she really wanted to do in life. This confidence booster led her to begin her first industry.

In 2007, she began her first company in the Wine Industry. She discovered trying to find good wine for a good price was not only difficult for her, but for many. She helped turn a website into a mobile app that people began to feel comfortable using for their payments and this blossomed. They became a #1 ranked Wine App, which became an Apple Platform Top 100 App, and Top Ten Lifestyles App. They quickly realized this could also be translated into other industries, like jewelry. She and her business partner had a “difference of opinion”, so she left.

After a couple other jobs, and remembering her frustration after college, she wondered why she couldn’t do this at home, so moved back to Hawaii. She began working with small startup companies that tested her degree and skills in investment and mentoring. After a few years home, she wondered “how can we bring in innovation? What can work for Hawaii, and How can we leverage technology and tourism?” This eventually led to *Mana Up* – branding Hawaii and building a global economy.

**Meli** shared the following:

CPG Market Potential in Hawai’i

- Hawaii is a globally loved brand!
  - Bai > acquired for \$1.7B
  - Maui Style chips > owned by Frito Lay
  - 78% of Americans want to learn more about Native peoples’ histories, cultures, and contemporary stories.
  - Microbrands are thriving nationally. Since 2010, 4,000+ brands received \$9.8B in investment, with \$7.2B in the last 4 years.

Accelerator Criteria

- All the companies participating in the program have the following characteristics:
  - Hawai’i-based founder + company
  - Retail, beauty, or value-added food products that are good for export
  - Elevates Hawai’i brand through sense of place connection / narrative
  - Quality of product, founder story & traction considered during application
  - Minimum of \$100,000 in annual revenue
  - Plans to scale beyond Hawai’i

They get over 100 applicants each time they call for applications! Those who meet the above criteria can put in an application. If accepted into *Mana Up's* accelerator and rigorous six-month intensive program, here is an overview of what they offer:

- Centralized resource hub for retail, home, beauty, and value-added food products
- E-commerce partnerships, guidance, and support
- Curated mentor network
- Free and discounted tools and resources
- Coaching around narrative and storytelling
- Access to House of *Mana Up* retail channel
- Introductions to new sales channels
- Product showcase with a reach of 100,000+
- Robust alumni program upon completion of program

From their own website here is what they say is the “Nuts & Bolts” for this program:

“The six-month program includes workshops, weekly one-on-one check-in meetings, mentor matching with industry experts based on company need and stage, support on branding & narrative, access to discounted services and resources, access to sales channels, access to capital, and an invitation to sell products through our retail brand, House of Mana Up (both at our brick-and-mortar store in Royal Hawaiian Center and through our e-commerce store).”

#### *Mana Up* at a Glance

*Mana Up* is an initiative to grow local products to markets around the world that capture the authentic people, culture, and resources of Hawai'i.

Through their accelerator, robust alumni program, community workshops, and retail platforms, they work with dozens of entrepreneurs per year; providing the know-how and connections companies need to grow.

- 100% Headquartered in Hawai'i
- 88% Manufacture in Hawai'i
- 60% Source raw ingredients locally
- 48% Native Hawaiian owned businesses
- 63% Female founded & led businesses

There are **63 local Hawai'i companies**: 29 in Food, 13 in Fashion, 12 in Home, and 9 in Health & Beauty. This scribes mind was blown! Amazing! And so many source local ingredients!

Mentorship – they have a mentorship program where Free + Discounted Resources include Innovate Hawaii, Kahuna Marketing, Vertaccount U.S. Commercial Service, Hawai'i Small Business Development Center, HiSTEP – Hawaii State Trade Expansion Program, Spire, Dentons, CLEARBANC, and UPS.

Featured Partnership: *Shopify* for startups – “they fuel other people’s commerce platforms. They don’t have their own marketplace, but if you are buying on someone’s e-commerce, most likely *shopify* is fueling it from the back.”

Featured Speakers: Local Trailblazers & Global Leaders help guide and share information; most are local, some are mainland. **Kitty Yannone**, one of our very own RCOH members is on the list!

Sales Channels include: *shopify*, The Kahala Hotel & Resort, Dole Plantation, DFS, Foodland, Hawaiian Airlines, and podfoods.

Building on Japan Partnerships – Mana Up went to Japan in early 2020 before everything shut down. Paul Yonamine from Central Pacific Bank had great contact for them to make this possible. Japan Partnerships include Lawson Station, Natural Lawson, Japan Airlines, JTB, Prince Hotels & Resorts, Central Pacific Bank, and JATCO Incorporated.

**Meli** shared highlight photos from their *Mana Up* showcases from 2020 along with the stats: The Inaugural Showcase at *SALT* located in Kaka’ako made \$7,500 in sales with 600 people; Showcases II, III & IIV held at *T Galleria by DFS* made \$35,000 in sales with 750 people and \$45,000 in sales with 900 people, \$60,000 in sales with 1,000+ people, and Showcase V held Livestream made \$80,000 in sales with over 198,000 viewers!

SAVE THE DATE: November 4, 2021 at 4:00pm – will be the graduation of Cohort 6, showcasing new companies who have gone through the program!

*House of Mana Up Hawaii* opened in December 2019 as a pilot program. It connects consumers – both tourists and locals – to high-quality, authentic Hawai’i brands. They are in Waikiki at 2201 Kalakaua Ave, Honolulu, HI 96815.

If you would like to know more about *Mana Up* or want to purchase products, check out the website <https://manauphawaii.com/> and cruise around their menu. It is amazing!!!! So much information with amazing local people and products!

The Economic Impact Report for 2020:

“Based on Cohorts 1-5, of the 47 companies reflected in the report, they represented \$43.5 Million in revenues for the State of Hawaii. They had a mean growth rate of 65% year over year. Over 50% of them grew in 2020, regardless of the pandemic. Of those 50%, all of them saw their highest revenues ever including pre-pandemic numbers. This is very exciting from a diversification standpoint for Hawai’i. This isn’t a ‘we hope this works’. It is working. It is not a silver bullet. It is a piece that is working and we are excited to be continuing to double down on this concept of a high quality product that is elevating our brand; taking back the narrative of the way the world learned about Hawai’i. It is helping to creating high level jobs, executive jobs, as all the companies are headquartered here.”

After some Q&A time with **Meli**, we discovered that Cohort 7 will be from January-March 2022. Meli encourages anyone interested to get their applications in. She assures that part of what they do is review the applications, speak to/interview the applicants, give suggestions and ideas for improvement (which is always up to the person/company to utilize the information or not), and if an application isn't accepted the first time around, to not give up – update the application and keep trying! They want to help our local people and companies succeed!

One question about small companies becoming large enough to be acquisitioned by larger companies was answered. While that is a natural path for the companies, they want companies to stay as long as they can here, to elevate and leverage the brand, as people want to know where the product is from, for companies to stay here in Hawaii makes sense. Some companies follow the money and leave for that reason, while companies who stay want to grow here and create more jobs.

Prior to our closing events, **Robyn McCreary** asked us all give our best smiles to capture our glowing countenances – then she shot us, I mean, she took our pictures!

Closing: **Gwen** thanked our speaker, **Meli**, cofounder of *Mana Up* for her time and wonderful presentation for of great information. Next week's guest speaker will be Aiko Yamashiro, Executive Director of Hawaii Council for the Humanities.

**Brian** played our closing video *Hawaii Aloha*.

Meeting adjourned at 1:02 pm.

Humbly submitted,  
**Lee LaBrash**, Scribe

PS: Fun Fact – **Sally Mist** has known **Meli** since she was born!