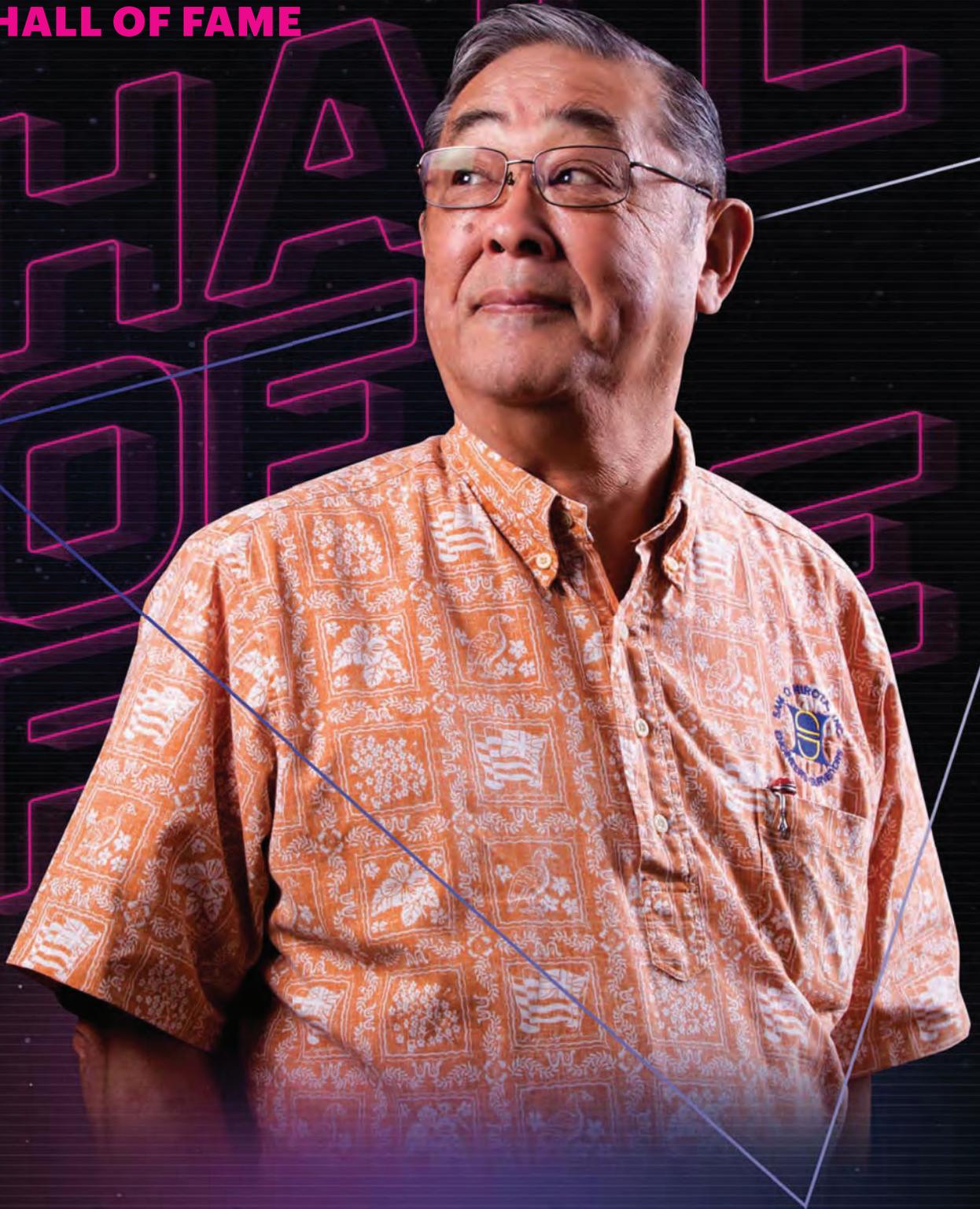


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TECHNOLOGY
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HALL OF FAME



HONOREE
DENNIS HIROTA

President, Sam O. Hirota, Inc.

Samhirota.com

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For our debut Titans of Tech recognition program, we looked for a Hall of Fame honoree who would set the tone for the years to come. Someone who not only advanced their own careers and business through technology, but who has been working consistently to lift Hawaii itself to new technological heights.

We found that person in Dennis Hirota, president of the civil engineering firm his father started, Sam O. Hirota, Inc.

That progress on both fronts has been Dennis Hirota's priority for nearly half a century. For example, in the late 1970s, the firm was doing a lot of calculation work, especially flood calculations for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Hirota said.

"To do it, we were spending \$10,000 or \$11,000 a month at the Bank of Hawaii computing center," he said. "I thought, why are we doing this when we can buy our own big machine? I priced it out and it was going to be \$5,600 a month."

Hirota talked the bank into losing the firm as a computer customer but gaining it as a loan customer, financing its purchase of the computer.

Immediately, the firm made it available to students at the University of Hawaii School of Architecture.

"We brought students into our office because we had the only machine like that in town," said Hirota, who was teaching classes at the School of Architecture at the time.

The firm continues to specialize in a high-tech niche, securing exclusive rights to surveying technology from Switzerland, Austria and Germany.

"For last 48 years, basically we have attempted to make the engineering, surveying and imaging business one where we're giving that exploratory and advanced development to our client base," Hirota said. "And we've been very fortunate over the last — this is the 56th year of my dad starting the company — giving clients our ability to help them produce engineering projects more efficiently."

The technology has been put to use for a wide range of public and private clients. The firm's portfolio includes intensive mapping of the Kona Village area following the 2011 tsunami, a pavement condition study for the City & County of Honolulu, erosion control for the Omidyar K-1 Neighborhood at Punahou School, and more. Sam O. Hirota Inc. has undertaken more than 1,000 civil engineering projects, with budgets ranging from \$20,000 to \$300 million.

The firm's very first project was the H-3 freeway. Sam Hirota had been deputy director of Transportation for the state under Gov. William Quinn but he felt he could not stay on after John Burns took office, since he had worked for Quinn's re-election. Burns persuaded him to stay for a six-month transition, and when Hirota then formed his own firm, Burns gave him his first job — design and engineering work for the free-

way connecting Marine Corp Base Hawaii in Kaneohe with Pearl Harbor.

Hirota recalls his father losing his state job as a lucky break for him, in that it pushed him as an engineering student at the University of Michigan to get a job to help the family make ends meet. That in turn led to a grant-paid masters degree and then a doctorate. It also led to a draft deferment for the Air Force ROTC member, who would, instead of shipping out to Vietnam, spend three years working at the Air Force Weapons lab developing the work that had been his Ph.D. focus: environmental waste.

Signs of this commitment to tech are apparent all over the firm's office, where 3D visors, a gold Xbox controller for a massive flat-screen monitor, wooden tripods and brass theodolites sit side-by-side with a refrigerator-sized 3D printer.

As an advocate for tech in Hawaii, Hirota has been a founding sponsor of the Punahou robotics team (he's an alumnus there); a University of Hawaii regent from 2008 to 2012 with the Office of Mauna Kea Management helping to establish the Thirty-Meter Telescope as well as establish the UH Cancer Center; the Dean's Advisory Counsel for the UH College of Engineering; and more.

"When I was a Regent, I was on the science and technology judging group for the state Science Fair," he recalled. "And I made a point to talk to every single student to know where they were going to school. As a Regent, my belief was that we had to make UH just as important as every other school in the country — and it could be."

His professional service has included serving as national director and president of the American Consulting Engineering Companies of Hawaii. In 2009, he was named Engineer of the Year by the Hawaii Society of Professional Engineers.

What drives his advocacy for all of Hawaii is his feeling that, "this community deserves more and better. The only way you can attempt to do that is to get involved."

Hawaii's hope in holding its ground on a global level, he said, rests with education at all levels — public and private, from kindergarten to college.

"There are going to be even more new things coming and what is education going to do? Allow their students — public, private and the universities — be less competitive?" he said. "Because there's a monster world out there."