

PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS

Friday, May 2, 2008

Energy company builds on green foundation

Pacific Business News (Honolulu) - by [Nanea Kalani](#) Pacific Business News

Myron Thompson is seeing green from green technologies.

His 4-year-old company, **21st Century Technologies**, is flourishing in Hawaii's booming alternative-energy market as homeowners and businesses search for relief from rising fuel and energy costs.

The 11-employee firm, based out of Thompson's Niu Valley home, handles green consulting and installation of energy-efficient technologies for residential and commercial customers.

Its revenues have more than doubled in each of the past two years, breaking the \$1 million mark in 2007.

Thompson, 56, attributes his success to an ambitious mission tied to performance standards.

Mission expands

"We're growing really, really fast, and because of that, we keep in mind that our kuleana grows and we have a chance to make a broader impact," he said. "Our original mission just increases."

The firm's mission stems from a long-standing principle that Thompson's father, the late Myron "Pinky" Thompson, instilled in him early on.

"This all kind of goes back to my family's background and values and a guiding principle that my dad taught us: to help create a safe and healthy Hawaii," Thompson said. "From a business and purpose point of view, this line of work seemed like a good fit."

His father, who died in 2001, was a supporter of Native Hawaiian rights, served as a Bishop Estate trustee for 20 years, and led the Polynesian Voyaging Society for 22 years.

21st Century's installation work ranges from basic solar water heaters to photovoltaic systems and wind generators. Its consulting arm offers such services as energy-usage assessments and eco-friendly recommendations for new buildings.

Thompson, who holds a business administration degree from the University of Denver, says his background in computer technology and general business consulting helps him run the business.

He said his knowledge of alternative-energy technologies has been self-taught over the past decade through extensive research. He also was quick to enlist the help of skilled executives, including senior project coordinator Jon Abbott and technical director Dwight Streamfellow, who has more than 30 years of experience with renewable technologies.

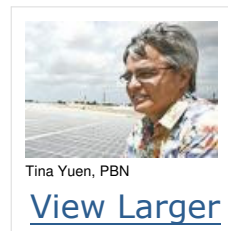
The company began by focusing on the residential market, but commercial work has picked up for both its consulting and installation services.

21st Century Technologies also is branching out through international consulting contracts, including with Shangri-La Resorts, a China-based international hotel developer.

Thompson also has set up deals with established Hawaii architectural firms -- such as Group 70 International and WATG (formerly Wimberly, Allison, Tong & Goo) -- to serve as a green consultant for planned projects in Hawaii and abroad.

Selective hiring

As demand grows, Thompson says he is selective in hiring, preferring a commitment to the



environment over work experience.

"We hire people who have the same set of values as the company, who are committed to our mission," he said.

But having such a broad do-good mission can be a challenge at times.

"Because our work with sustainability principles is so broad, we have opportunities coming our way to do a lot things," Thompson said, noting, for example, some pro bono consulting the company did on Kahoolawe. "We have to keep in mind this is still a business and make sure the company stays profitable."

He does this through daily monitoring of the company's financial performance with the help of his wife, Sakura.

"Having a management structure helps keep us focused so that we can do our social mission," said Sakura Thompson, who was an independent business consultant before joining 21st Century Technologies last October as director of administration.

The company uses a computer program that graphs its daily retail, residential, commercial and consulting sales.

"It allows us to grow in a steady pattern and helps the long-term survival of the company," said Myron Thompson. "As long as the graphs are going up, I know we're OK."

To stay competitive, the company stays up to date with technologies and products.

At the end of last year, it began using a remote monitoring system that immediately e-mails Thompson in the event that a client's solar panels are underperforming or malfunctioning.

The new technology is in use at the company's recently installed photovoltaic system on the roof of South Shore Equipment in Waipahu. Owner Tom Frazier said that since the 540 panels were installed on his building in December he has seen his monthly electric bill drop from \$1,600 to zero.

"I always liked the idea of solar power and, with oil prices hitting record highs, it was really affecting our electric bill," Frazier said. "We're generating more electricity than we're using, so we get credited the difference from the utility."

Tax credits

Frazier arranged for Bank of Hawaii to pay for the \$800,000 system and lease it back to him. Under the agreement, the bank gained the state and federal tax credits for installing a commercial solar-electric system.

"At the end of the lease, we'll have paid about \$400,000, but we can write off each payment," Frazier said.

Thompson said the system will save Frazier an estimated \$1.4 million in energy costs over its 40-year lifetime.

With a steady flow of business lined up -- Thompson noted nine "strong" installation deals expected to be completed by the end of the year -- the company plans to start construction in early 2009 on a new office and showroom.

Small-business issue

Building on the "green" revolution.

Strategies

- Conduct heavy research on markets and suppliers.
- Be mission-driven while closely tracking business performance.
- Have a staff committed to a green mission.
- Collaborate with established architects and developers on projects.

- Invest in the latest technologies to stay competitive.

nkalani@bizjournals.com | 955-8001

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