

# The Truth about the Booth

*The booth was built by Maui Airlines and placed at the original commuter terminal, south of the old tower.*

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## Maui Airlines Quits Isle Market and Moves Operations to Guam

By Stephanie Castillo  
Maui Correspondent

**KAHULUI** — Maui Airlines, the commuter carrier that had been flying late-night passengers between Kahului and Honolulu, has pulled out of Hawaii and moved its operations to Guam.

Vice President Bob Christian, who was contacted this week on Guam, said the company ended its Hawaii operations about two weeks ago after deciding to in March.

The company began its Hawaii operations in February 1985.

The unannounced closure has stirred "a lot of rumors," said Christian. He said the company has not filed for bankruptcy.

"We didn't make any announcements because there didn't seem to be enough local traffic to inform," he said. "We had been a non-profitable operation for a long time. We're now concentrating on profitable routes."

When its operations here were successful, the company flew up to five round-trip flights a night, seven days a week, he said.

The Guam operation, which was started last September and still uses the Maui Airlines name, serves the Northern Mariana Islands. The company averages 3,000 passengers a month and has captured 90 to 95 percent of the Japanese visitor market, Christian said.

ONE PERSON who has been upset by Maui Air's departure from Maui is Tom Hanchett, manager of the Kahului Airport. He claims that the company pulled out without giving notice to "anyone" and owing money to "everyone."

He said he has been unable to reach Christian and other Maui Air officials for several weeks. He said he is sending a notice to its Honolulu office formally ordering the company to stop its

Mainland," he said.

Christian said that Mainland carriers the company served in Honolulu and travel agents were told of the move to Guam.

Telephones at the Honolulu office as well as at the company's Maui Airport booth, an 800 reservation number and phones at the company's corporate offices in Newport Beach, Calif., have been disconnected.

HANCHETT and Honolulu Airport Manager Barry Fukunaga

manager have been unsuccessful.

As far as owing the state or others money, Christian said, "We have a grip on our accounts receivable and our accounts payable. As far as we know, no notices have been filed against us, there are no problems with creditors that we're aware of."

Maui Airlines is owned by a group of investors from Newport Beach.

The company's permit to operate on Maui was delayed for several months by a legal fight in California over who founded the company. A Santa Ana man, claiming he started "Air Maui," said he was ousted by the Newport group, which renamed the company Maui Airlines.

WITH ITS permit clear in January 1985, the company began its Maui-Honolulu operation the following month. Almost two months later, Maui Air reported it was carrying nearly 1,000 passengers a month and expected to capture a larger share of the estimated 3,000 visitors arriving late at night at Honolulu Airport wanting to fly to Maui.

Airline officials said they also planned to start deluxe sky tours of Maui and "a night on the town" package deal for Maui residents wanting to spend an evening in Honolulu.

After operating only four months, the company's Maui-based president and several



**MAUI AIRLINES**

operations and to vacate the premises.

The company still has its Kahului Airport office, an airplane parked there and one parked at Honolulu Airport.

"We don't know what happened. They never notified us of any changes. The last time night security saw anyone at their booth was almost a month ago," said Hanchett.

"People have been coming with tickets and finding them not here. They didn't even tell travel agents here or on the

said the company owes the state several months' back rent for both airports.

Fukunaga said he also has been unsuccessful in reaching company officials and also is drawing up papers to evict Maui Air.

When told of the difficulty Hanchett and Fukunaga were having trying to reach someone from the company, Christian said, "I'm not sure just what the problem is."

He said there have been "some problems" with the phone lines, and attempts to reach his Hawaii



**GONE FROM MAUI**—Maui Airlines has left Hawaii for Guam, leaving an empty ticket booth at Kahului Airport. — Star-Bulletin Photo.

other officers quit.

Jack O'Neill, who had been the company's director of sales and marketing, said he, president Charles Ceppi, the reservations manager and the chief pilot left the company because the Newport Beach investors "weren't paying bills."

"They were trying to get us do their dirty work. We had people threatening us — sometimes physically — for not paying the bills, which we had no control over," O'Neill said.

He said he was unaware that the company had stopped operating its flights here.

Maui Airlines was a short lived business venture. I had just arrived in Maui to reorganize the Maui Flight Center, recently acquired by Hemmeter Aviation. We provided aviation gasoline (avgas) to Maui Airlines. When they closed their doors they owed money to all. They didn't declare bankruptcy, they just left town. I knew the management and told them that I'm taking their booth for payment. They said fine...





Late that night, after the inter-island flights had ended and all was quiet, I had our maintenance staff take the forklift to pick up the booth and bring it to the east ramp.

Back in 1986, the road from the main terminal to the east ramp was right below the end of the runway and the forklift and booth made a slow but easy trip to the newly constructed heliport.



The following morning, Tom Hanchett, Airport Manager came to my office to inquire about a missing booth. I explained Maui Air's debt for fuel and I was taking the booth for payment. He stated that the DOT-A is also owed money and he wanted the booth. I told him it would be used as part of our new hot refueling ops at the heliport.

He was a little disappointed that he didn't take control of it a day earlier and didn't have a better relationship with the booth fairy. At the end of the day... all is well at Kahului Airport.

Another little Maui Airlines story...

Just after arriving in Maui (April 1986), I temporarily stayed in a condo in Kihei. I got a call from Jeff, who I knew from my days at South Pacific Island Airways but now was with Maui Airlines. Jeff was part of the management team at Maui Airlines and came over from Honolulu with Bob to do some marketing for their new airline. They asked me if I would like to have dinner with them and I agreed to meet them at a little place along South Kihei Road. We started with drinks, followed by dinner with more drinks.

Hemmeter Aviation had already been providing fuel to Maui Air and we discussed their plans to expand with additional airplanes. At the time, Aloha Airlines and Hawaiian Airlines last flights out of Maui back to Honolulu was about 8:00 pm and Maui Air was providing flights up to midnight. They felt that there was always people trying to get back to Honolulu after a night in Maui and they would be the only provider of this late night service.

They showed me complimentary flight coupons they brought with them, that would be used to help with their marketing plan. They hoped to get them out to the right people, so they could experience their great service. Dinner is over, the drinks are not. As the evening continued, Bob and Jeff started to mingle with the ladies that seemed to be multiplying at this establishment. I recognized that the more they drank the more their coupons were being dispensed. I stated that they should be a little more careful with their flight coupons. These young ladies may not be your target customers.

I reminded them they had to drive back to the airport for their late night flight and suggested they take a taxi. They said they were fine as they continued to enjoy the evening. I said my good night and left them there with their new friends and what was left of their coupons.

The following day, while at the office, I called Maui Air's Honolulu office to check on Jeff to see if they got back safe and sound and to follow up on some business we discussed the night before. The office said that they were in a car accident and both were at Maui Memorial Hospital. I hung up the phone and went over to the hospital. They were banged up a bit but were being released and preparing to return to Honolulu. On their return to the Kahului Airport the previous evening, just before midnight, Bob was driving and fell a sleep. Mokulele Highway had sugar cane fields on both side of the road for some miles and when they veered off the road and went barreling through the cane, they had a head on collision with an abandon car. In the middle of a cane field?

They survived, Maui Airlines not so much.

