

Straube's Aviation Services

I first met Jim Straube in the mid 80's, when I was tasked with reorganizing Hemmeter Aviation's new acquisition of the Maui Flight Center. This acquisition came just after acquiring General Aviation Services, with both operating older aircraft service equipment. Jim Straube came by shortly after my arrival in Maui and expressed an interest in assisting with the refurbishing of the fuel trucks and other servicing vehicles. Everyone was impressed with Jim's efforts. So much so, other operators asked him to paint airplanes and helicopters. Jim may have started as an autobody guy but quickly became not only the best aircraft painter in Hawaii but one of the best in the nation.

Jim had the expertise to perform miracles when it came to spray painting. He also had the patience to work through the multi layers of rule and regulations by the many agencies that were involved with this industry. What was difficult was the Department of Transportation, Airports Division's position on how he could do his business.

When I first worked with Jim, I was dealing with DOT-A as well as other agencies on moving large volumes of Jet-A and even though there were industry standards that guided us, the state's rules were mostly non-existent. Not until 1993, did we receive new Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR), Title 19-37 Fuel Handling Procedure at Public Airports which we disagreed with various paragraphs but complied accordingly.

HAR Title 19-14-3 Public Conduct at Public Airports was in place throughout the 80's and beyond. It stated, (1) other controls and restrictions. No person shall, at, within or upon any public airport: (8) Spray paint in the operational area, open area, or other site on any public airport property which is not specifically designed or designated for such activity. As we moved into the 90's, the EPA pushed the states to ensure compliance with old as well as new regulations for air quality.

Jim recognized his newfound career path in aviation and set his goal to become THE approved painter in Hawaii. You would think that the State of Hawaii would be happy that he stepped up to the plate and would do everything they could to assist. His efforts would also make them look good in the eyes of the many agencies that were stepping up their own requirements. But that is not what the state does.

Jim looked for property to put up a facility that met all requirements. The Maui airport has not had available lease lots for years, so Jim looked to Honolulu International Airport for an opportunity to put in the proper facility. He was able to secure the old HATS building on a 30-day revocable permit. It wasn't a true hangar because it didn't have doors, but Jim made the appropriate modifications to ensure it would meet the minimum standards to paint. Even though he would have liked it to be more than it was, it was still the best aircraft painting facility in Hawaii to date.

Another issue that Jim had to contend with was the DOT-A's own non-enforcement of the rules governing operations at public airports. Most all aircraft and helicopter operators were still painting in and around their own hangars. Jim was paying a premium for compliance and not getting the business due to non-compliance of others. No doubt, the quality of Straube's painting was far superior to what was being done in and around those other hangars and that did allow his business to grow. It wasn't

long before the DOT-A decided that his 30-day revocable permit would be revoked. The state had other ideas for the building and now that the State of Hawaii, DOT-A had added the Kalaeloa Airport to their jurisdiction, offered Jim to relocate into Hangar 110. Hangar 110 was a large military hangar developed back in the 1940's. The ground floor was doable with the second floors being off limits due to the poor condition of the facility.

Jim now must dismantle his paint business from Honolulu International Airport and relocate to Kalaeloa Airport. This took many weeks before he was operational, and the loss of business revenue was substantial. Jim's son Jacob, who had already been part of the business for many years, is now managing the Hawaii operations. Once they became operational the business started coming in again. The large space gave Straube's Aircraft Services the opportunity to paint large aircraft which brought in Hawaii's military business. Jim was the only tenant in Hangar 110 when he first moved in. As new tenants moved in, they expressed their concerns of a painting business being close to their aircraft or business. The DOT-A started to request more of Straube to keep any overspray coming from his 25% of Hangar 110.

Jim always wanted his own standalone facility but again working with the DOT-A was difficult. He was finally given a lot at Kalaeloa Airport. While he was still in Hangar 110, the DOT-A gave notice to all tenants that they needed to get out for a restoration project. The State of Hawaii put millions of dollars into Hangar 110 and once completed, planned on putting aeronautical tenants back in. After the two-year renovations, the entire building was leased to the Department of Homeland Security for a stand-by facility in the event there is a mass international immigration issue.

Straube's Aviation Services finally got their standalone facility even though they were required to leave Hangar 110, 2-years before their new facility was operational. That meant NO business coming in for those two years. By that time, Straube's Aviation Services had multiple locations on the mainland that carried Hawaii until their facility was built.

You may ask, how was painting of aircraft being performed during the time that Straube's Aviation Services was non-operational. He was the only qualified facility. Each time he was mandated to move his operations there was lengthy downtime. The last being 2 years! The answer is the same as it always has been. Operators are in non-compliance with HAR Title 19-3. It would indicate that the state really doesn't care until another regulatory agency says they should. The DOT-A should be in partnership with its tenants to ensure success. That type of relationship does not exist in Hawaii, unless...

Jim Straube is a success story in so many ways. I am extremely happy for him and his family for they all have been part of that success. They have worked hard for so many years. This success has not been easy, especially when it comes to how the State of Hawaii, Department of Transportation, Airport Division does its business.