

# Ehara Aims for a 'More Business-friendly' Hawaii

BY CATHY CRUZ-GEORGE

George Ehara, this year's president of the General Contractors Association of Hawaii, couldn't be more proud of the group's impact on Hawaii's businesses. "The GCA is the voice of the building industry," says Ehara, division manager of the Hawaii office of Swinerton Builders. "It is crucial to the economy that we have a strong construction industry, as it continues to be a source of well-paying jobs in Hawaii."

Ehara also couldn't be more pleased with the caliber of leaders serving in the GCA for 2015-2016: 1st Vice President Clay Asato of Koga Engineering; 2nd Vice President Cedric Ota of Waterfront & Foundations Division at Hawaiian Dredging; and Treasurer and Controller Joyce Furukawa of Royal Contracting.

"Their experience in varied backgrounds helps to ensure that we represent all our members," Ehara says.

GCA leaders have plenty on their plates, as Hawaii's building industry rebounds in 2015. Based on construction-permit data, building activity in 2015 is expected to rise 12 percent over the previous year, according to First Hawaiian Bank's economic forecast.

The boom is an ideal time for the GCA to roll out Ehara's goals for the group, including strengthening ties with public and private partners, giving back to the community and furthering the group's legislative agenda.

But as the industry continues to rebound, he says challenges are inevitable: New employees entering the workforce bring new safety and healthcare issues to the table. Additional work in the industry results in overtime in bids and selective bidding processes. Companies competing for highly skilled managers and workers drive up labor costs and increases in overtime pay.

One of the GCA's goals at the Hawaii State Legislature this year is

## About George Ehara

**President,**  
**General Contractors Association**

Division Manager, Swinerton Builders

**Education:** Construction Management, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

**Hobbies:** Fishing on his kayak and spending time with wife, Jeanette, and two sons, ages 10 and 7.

to reduce construction-related costs for everyone, including taxpayers, he says. In this session, the GCA fully supports House Bill 550, which prohibits bid shopping and eliminates the subcontractor-listing requirement.

"The concern [for the industry] is that if overall costs continue rising, the industry could get to a point where some projects don't pencil out, and we are no longer feasible," Ehara says. Ideally, he wants to see long-term, sustainable growth in the construction industry—rather than the peaks and valleys that led to the 2008 boom, followed by a recession.

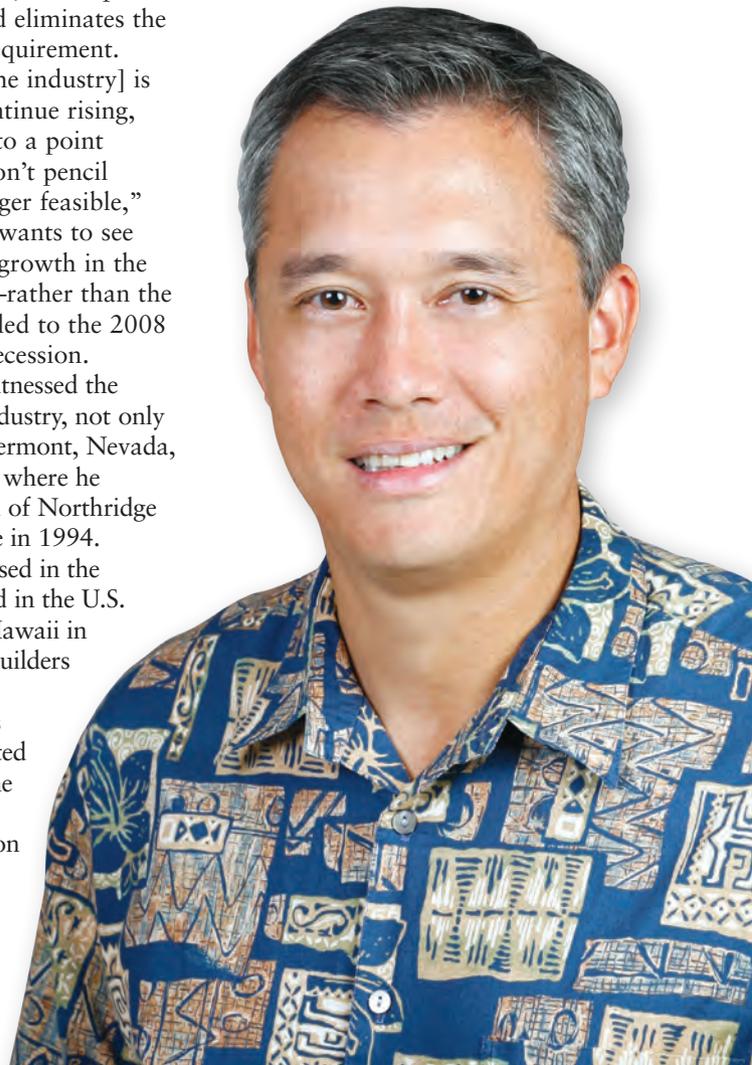
Ehara himself has witnessed the cyclical nature of the industry, not only in Hawaii but also in Vermont, Nevada, Oregon and California, where he helped rebuild the town of Northridge after the 6.7 earthquake in 1994.

Ehara—born and raised in the Philippines and schooled in the U.S. Mainland—moved to Hawaii in 2003, after Swinerton Builders tasked him to re-open a Hawaii office. That was after Swinerton had exited the Hawaii market in the early 1980s. Today, the local branch of Swinerton has 200 employees and annual revenues of \$200 million.

In addition to re-introducing Swinerton to the local market, the move to Hawaii in 2003 allowed Ehara to reconnect with family members. Maunawili was where his grandfather, a papaya and banana farmer at the turn of the century, had toiled hard in the sun, laying down the family's roots.

Ehara displays a similar dedication and work ethic toward his leadership role at the GCA. "It is critical that our industry is thriving and able to meet the challenges of the coming years," he says.

He has one final goal for the group: "[I hope] for a more business-friendly environment in Hawaii, so that our member companies can continue to thrive and create new jobs." 🏠



George Ehara