



Mari Lei Kobayashi

Entrepreneur
Class of 1996

By Alison Tengan

For Mari Lei Kobayashi, every day brings a different job and different challenges. This is because Mari wears at least five different hats.

While still in high school, she started her own company, Sweetie's Pies, and has baked pies, muffins, and turnovers for Cafe 100, K's Drive In, and other restaurants. She's had a real estate license since 2000 and is affiliated with Ray Kobayashi, Realtor. She works as a custom solid surface counter-top fabricator and custom cabinet maker. She is also a Miss Fix-it, specializing in remodeling kitchens and bathrooms. Finally, since 2006, she has been a manager of Hilo Bamboo, a flooring business that sells and installs bamboo flooring. Through the years, she has done jobs all over the island. Her most famous client was the golfer V.J. Singh, who wanted bamboo flooring in his Hamakua mansion.

With so many jobs, her life is an adventure. She's always learning new techniques and new methods and adjusts her busy schedule to keep on top of things. When asked which job she likes the best, she said she likes fabricating solid surface counter-tops because it brings out her artistic side. Most of her skills were learned "on the job," first working with her father, who is a building contractor with R.K. Builders, Inc. Her first major project was building her own house.

Wanting to live and work on the Big Island, she went to UH Hilo and pursued a degree in Agri-Business with a minor in business. She worked several jobs to finance her education and support herself. She said that it was tough working, going to college, and trying to find a balance all

at the same time. She was able to finish quickly and earned her degree in three and a half years.

When asked how she is able to maintain such a busy pace, she says, "Everyday, I feel I am blessed. When your mind is clear, you can achieve your goals." Since construction is a predominantly male-oriented field, her petite size belies how strong she has to be to do the job. She surprises her male counterparts when she is able to lift heavy beams and works as fast and with as much knowledge as journeyman carpenters. Because her work is very physical, she is in great shape. When she has some rare time to relax, Mari is learning Shuntzen training with her two puppies, draws and paints, and cooks.

She says that she remembers Waiakea High School's excellent teachers. Right after she graduated in 1996, she worked part-time at the school helping students prepare for job interviews with a special career preparation program.

In giving advice to students who want to pursue her way of life, she says, "You can do anything that your mind can think of; all you have to do is try. When you truly enjoy what you are doing, everything just follows... with ease. Accept your challenges. They are fun. Be thankful and appreciate each day".

