

## Community Investments Vol. 15, Issue 2 Cooking Up Business Aloha Style

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The Culinary Business Incubator (CBI) opened its doors in 2003 to entrepreneurs with an appetite for success and a mind for culinary innovations. CBI is situated in the heart of Kalihi, an economically depressed area on the island of Oahu, with a population of 25,000. CBI evolved from community meetings held with area residents to elicit economic development ideas. The participants engaged in the discussions consisted primarily of refugees from Southeast Asia, native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders who were unemployed and living on public assistance. These individuals were desperately seeking revitalization and self-sufficiency opportunities. Overwhelmingly, a commercial kitchen emerged as the most popular suggestion and as an ideal medium to provide self-employment prospects in the food sector. Many of those interested in such ventures had been discouraged by regulatory provisions, which are not only capital-intensive but also cost-prohibitive.

In 2001, Pacific Gateway Center (PGC) engaged in a major capital campaign to get others who shared the same vision to complement the resources needed for the development of CBI. PGC was established in 1973 as a private nonprofit and has been a frontrunner in devising PGC is the only SBA intermediary lender and CBDO (community based development organization) in the state. PGC is also certified as a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) and Community Development Entity (CDE) by the U.S. Department of Treasury.

Boasting 20,000 sq. ft. of culinary equipment space, CBI is undoubtedly the nation's largest kitchen incubator. The setup includes 12 fully-equipped kitchens with everything imaginable from deep fryers to convection ovens, multi-range burners to chillers. These kitchens are ideally structured and well-suited to their purpose of providing a state-of-the-art facility for the "Iron Chef" aspirants of Honolulu to prepare their various ethnic cuisines. In addition to local outlets, the food will be available wholesale to establishments that cater to tourists and other high-end clients on other parts of the island.

With fifteen students currently enrolled in CBI, CBI is very close to its maximum capacity of twenty students. Applications are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis, with priority given to residents of the surrounding public housing complexes. Traditional entrepreneurship coursework such as marketing, business plan writing, finance and small business management is complemented by specific training related to the culinary industry such as safety and sanitation. In addition to the kitchen facility, a computer lab, day-care center and business center complete the "ready to cook" experience that CBI promises to the entrepreneurial hopefuls. We anticipate that students will remain enrolled with access to all of CBI's services for three-to-five years depending on their growth strategy, after which time they should be ready to take on bank loans to expand their business to its full capacity. Lending is only one of the opportunities available for banks to support the Culinary Business Incubator. Others include providing technical assistance in finance and accounting, basic budgeting, grants, etc. With PCG's 30-year track record of success, range of community development services and pool of 50 staff that speaks over 35 different languages, students enrolled in the Culinary Business Incubator are certain to find the ingredients they need for success.

To learn more about supporting the Culinary Business Incubator or other programs offered by the Pacific Gateway Center, email [Dr. Myaing](mailto:Dr.Myaing) and visit the website at [www.pacificgateway.org](http://www.pacificgateway.org).