



well and Lake Wilson. “We finally turned a corner,” says Nakatani regarding the repairs to the water infrastructure, which had been in disuse for more than a decade.

Since the acquisition of land from the Galbraith Estate, another \$30 million has been spent for the Whitmore Project for irrigation, the purchase of additional land from Dole and Castle and Cooke, and for the planning and design for a wastewater reclaimed irrigation system.

To further the vision for the Whitmore Project, the ADC pulls in the resources of at least a dozen state agencies and other organizations, including the Hawaii Housing Finance Development Corporation, to build workforce housing in Wahiawā and Whitmore Village; and the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources for research and development of new niche crops as well as troubleshooting existing plants.

Dela Cruz’s philosophy for engaging all these stakeholders is to “leverage all the resources for the town...take anything you can think of that a business would want to benefit from and layer it all in one area so we can decrease the overhead for the farmer,” he says. “This is all new territory. There’s no precedent for these kinds of things.” ■

Live, Work, Play ... in Wahiawā

The Whitmore Project plans to bring a town and farmlands back to life

“KAKA’AKO CANNOT HAVE THE EXCLUSIVE ON LIVE, work, play,” says state Sen. Donovan Dela Cruz. He, along with the state’s Agribusiness Development Corp. (ADC), are spearheading the Whitmore Project, a plan to revitalize agriculture in Wahiawā. Once the site of thriving sugar and then pineapple plantations, much of the ag land in the area has lain fallow since 2004, when Del Monte left.

Plans for the Whitmore Project include at least 1,200 acres in agricultural production, an agribusiness-technology hub that will provide food safety, packaging and processing facilities, and workforce housing. The emphasis is as much on revitalizing farmlands as it is rebuilding a community and economic opportunities within Wahiawā. In addition to the ag-tech park in Whitmore Village, the state acquired the old Tamura’s warehouse in the middle of Wahiawā town to develop into more processing facilities and to “create main street activity in town for agritourism,” says Dela Cruz. He also envisions a pedestrian bridge over which workers, residents and visitors can walk from Whitmore Village over Kaukonahua Stream to the town center.

The Whitmore Project plans center around the 1,700 acres acquired from the George Galbraith Estate in 2012. The non-profit Trust for Public Land (TPL) purchased the land for \$25 million, assembling funds from the state, the U.S. Army, City and County of Honolulu, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and D.R. Horton Schuler Division. TPL

transferred 1,200 acres to the ADC and 500 acres to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs; the state guarantees the land is preserved for agriculture.

The ADC was established in 1994 to help guide Hawai’i agriculture after the fall of sugar and pineapple. It started accepting applications for the 1,200 acres three years ago and received around 70 applications. “We had more applicants than land,” says James Nakatani, the ADC’s executive director. “We selected the ten best proposals that we had. The obligation was small farmers ... and we excluded non-food generating farms.” The ADC awarded 35-year leases for three farms: 230 acres to Sugarland Farms, one of the state’s largest farms; 160 acres to ‘Ohana Best, which plans on growing Asian vegetables; and 50 acres to Ho Farms, which grows produce such as tomatoes and cucumbers. The long leases help give stability for the farmers, allowing them to obtain loans and invest in infrastructure. In addition, the ADC offers rent credits for improvements to the land.

Currently, Sugarland has planted about 95 acres in melons, which will be ready for harvest in the summer. Nakatani says he hopes to award the remaining leases once a reliable water supply is established. Water sources include a plantation-era



Sen. Donovan Dela Cruz

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