

neighbors of
KONA

Big Island Kama'āina Magazine

APRIL 2026



*Hawai'i Small Business
Development Center*

*Helping Kona
Businesses Prosper*

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Cover Feature



A Free, Local Resource for Kona Entrepreneurs & Small Business

By Theodore Van Der Merwe | Photos by Hannah Koki | HAWAII FAMILY PORTRAITS

THE STORY OF THE SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER (SBDC) - KAILUA-KONA

Adjacent to the innovation happening at NELHA, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) serves as a quiet yet powerful force behind the rise of local entrepreneurship on Hawai'i Island. For decades, this local branch of the Hawai'i Small Business Development Center Network has been a trusted hub for business thinkers, dreamers, and doers — offering confidential, no-cost advisory support that helps ideas become enterprises and small enterprises become sustainable pillars of community life.



For anyone launching a startup or navigating the challenges of scaling a business in West Hawai'i

WHAT THE SBDC DOES

Established in 1990 and accredited by the ASBDC, a national network of business support centers, its mission is clear: to help small businesses form, grow, and thrive. With funding from the SBA and University of Hawai'i, they offer free one-on-one business advising, workshops, access to market research, and critical guidance on planning, financing, and strategy.

For anyone launching a startup or navigating the challenges of scaling a business in West Hawai'i, the Kailua-Kona SBDC can be a first and enduring partner—especially in a place where unique economic forces, such as tourism cycles, high operating costs, and supply chain challenges, make strategic planning essential. The Hawai'i SBDC can help you develop business plans, financial forecasts, go-to-market plans, loan readiness, buying and selling your business, hiring employees, and more.

EXPERIENCED ADVISORS

SBDC business advisors are seasoned professionals with hands-on experience in the areas that matter most to small business success—business planning, marketing, finance, operations, and human resources. They are not just academics; many have owned businesses, led teams in the private sector, or worked directly in industries they now support. Hawai'i SBDC advisors hold multiple certifications in both business and AI and engage in ongoing professional development, including the practical use of AI to strengthen small business decision-making.

Ken Hoyle leads the Kailua-Kona Center and brings over 40 years of experience, including work with many Silicon Valley startups. Long-time advisor Marty Kennedy—an entrepreneur herself—provides remote support and brings deep expertise in finance, human resources, and strategic business planning.

“Supporting local businesses is my kuleana. Sharing knowledge and helping my neighbors succeed is deeply fulfilling—and strengthens our community.” – Ken Hoyle

REAL SUCCESS, REAL STORIES

Numbers tell part of the story — statewide in 2024, the Hawai'i SBDC supported over a thousand clients, helped start nearly 75 new businesses, and contributed to capital infusions of nearly \$30 million into local economies. Locally, last year, the Kailua-Kona office advised over 230 local clients and helped create 24 new businesses, resulting in 41 new jobs.

But the heart of the SBDC's impact lives in the journeys of individual business owners:

- Kona Coast Plumbing — A third-generation plumber partnered with the HI SBDC to secure startup financing and build a strong business foundation, quickly growing into a trusted, 5-star plumbing service in West Hawai'i
- The Kini Shop — A bespoke swimwear brand celebrated for its size inclusivity, supported by SBDC advice in early stages, now graces Hawaiian fashion shows and collaborative collections.
- Kanaka Portables — A portable toilet rental service team turned to the SBDC to craft a business plan that helped secure financing, shortening what is typically a multi-day loan review to just one day.

Roc Da Moto, Surf City Images, Head to Sole Massage, and many local businesses illustrate how the Center helps entrepreneurs move from skilled craft to structured business, combining authentic talent with sound strategy.

Each of these stories shows how personalized advising — from business planning to financial forecasting and marketing strategy — makes the difference between a passion project and a viable livelihood.

WHY IT MATTERS IN KONA

Kailua-Kona's economic landscape is defined by its natural beauty and vibrant tourism, but also by its isolation and high costs. In such an environment, local businesses must be nimble, strategic, and deeply rooted in community needs. By offering no-cost expertise and mentoring, the SBDC enables entrepreneurs to better meet these challenges.

For many, its presence means confidence — confidence to take a chance, to plan deeply, to invest in people and place, and to build businesses that reflect the aloha spirit and economic resilience.

Whether you're dreaming of opening your first shop, expanding your services, or spinning up a side hustle — the Hawai'i SBDC in Kailua-Kona stands ready to help you plan, persevere, and prosper.

Sign up for free advising at hisbdc.org. [KONA]