

# The bottom line: Profits keep businesses afloat

## THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



I received an e-mail this week in response to a Maui Chamber of Commerce position from a man in our community

who was expressing a view different from the chamber's on a particular issue. I appreciated his thoughts and the way in which he shared them. One statement, in particular, jumped out at me. The writer commented that "business interests are usually, and understandably, bottom-line oriented." I found it a very interesting comment, particularly in the context of the e-mail where the inference was that businesses are looking out solely for their own interests.

It was a comment that made me pause, because I realized others may have this perception as well, and therefore I wanted to comment on it.

Yes, businesses do look at the bottom line. They must to stay in business. No apologies are warranted for that. Yet, I'm surprised by a changing sentiment where some have come to view the word "profit" as a bad word, as if making money to keep a business growing, supporting its employees and their families, contributing to the community, and providing valuable products and services needed by our residents is wrong.

I don't think those people realize what it takes to get a business started and run it. Entrepreneurs typically must invest the bulk of their wealth in a single asset: their business venture; that's a huge risk that most of us aren't willing to make. Often their home is on

the line as collateral for business financing. And, it's a scary venture as the success rates for small business startups are not high. Many fail within the first two years and even more within the first four years of operation.

Further, according to 1999 research by the U.S. Small Business Administration, approximately 10 percent of all companies in the United States, including those that have been established for many years, fail each year. So, yes, businesses do look at the bottom line, and it's important for us as a community to create an environment where our local businesses can thrive and grow. Profit is not a bad word. Without profit, businesses fail and the community loses goods and services they have come to rely on.

However, their own bottom line is not the only thing businesses look at. While businesses

understand that a healthy community and economy are paramount to their success, they genuinely care deeply about the community. Because they live here! The majority of people running local businesses are local residents who also care about the environment, our educational system and our quality of life. They want what's best for Maui Nui too. Therefore, the chamber's mission and activities have always had a broader context. Our mission is: to advance and promote a healthy economic environment for business and to advocate for responsive government and quality education, while preserving Maui's unique community characteristics.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce:

- Encourages business and community prosperity by promoting economic programs designed to strengthen and enhance

the financial opportunities for all businesses within the county.

- Serves as an effective non-partisan, nonsectarian voice for business on legislative, business, social, governmental and community issues affecting Maui.

- Identifies and overcomes obstacles that are detrimental to the business climate and community growth.

- Supports civic, social and cultural programs designed to increase the functional and aesthetic values of the community.

- Promotes lifelong learning.

Yes, the Maui Chamber of Commerce brings together widespread interests to foster positive action on issues of common concern to the business community. We advocate on behalf of our membership to provide equality and give our members a voice in the political arena; take action on legislative issues that impact their bottom line; and work toward im-

proving Maui County's and the state's economic climate to help businesses succeed. However, we have more than 100 different position statements on a myriad of business and community topics, including: economic development, county and state government affairs and regulatory matters, education, health, public safety, harbors, highways, environmental affairs, and more.

We are a diverse organization, enriched by members who are leaders in our community — willing to stand up, get involved and take pride in helping to keep Maui No Ka Oi. They can be proud to let their employees and customers know that they are working for their interests as well, on issues that affect us all. And, that's the bottom line.

■ *Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.*