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Melvin Teruya, daughter Kim Baxter and granddaughter Kalyn Baxter are part of the family team that runs Honolulu Electronics.

## Radio days

**One family, 3 generations and  
a whole new electronics business**

By Russ Lynch

Back in the days before the word "electronics" was in general circulation, a small shop in Kaimuki sold and fixed radios and other appliances and supplied gear for amateur radio operators. The shop is no longer in Kaimuki, but is still run by the family that had it in the 1930s.

The former Kaimuki Radio Co., now updated to **Honolulu Electronics**, is a much different business now, a high-technology retailer and wholesaler with expertise in computer networking, fiber optics and advanced electronic testing and metering.

Now at 679 Auahi St. in Kakaako, the store still sells ham radio parts. Melvin Teruya, president, says he does repairs once in a while.

"I can do some repairs, but I am really too busy with the other aspects of the business," he said. "If I had to charge somebody for repairing something, they'd be better off to go out and buy a new one."

"From being a parts store, we've kind of niched out into high-tech products," said Teruya, 55, who spent a lot of his childhood around his dad's store.

But it is still very much a family business. Teruya's wife, Gerianne, is a vice president and works in the store. Their daughter, Kimberly, is an employee, having first worked in the store counting inventory some 15 years ago.

Kimberly brings her nine-month-old daughter Kalyn to the store, to a play area set aside near the front desk, when she can't get a sitter, so much of the time there are three generations on the premises.

Teruya said having the family close has worked well. "When it comes to major decisions concerning us, we kind of share," he said. "It's a shared thing. It has to be."



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Geri, who has been working there about 10 years, agrees. "We've managed OK. We sit in the same office. Of course, my back is to him any time I want," she joked.

"We do have our arguments and stuff, but people are amazed, even friends and family. They say, 'How can you handle this?'" with mom, dad, daughter and granddaughter all together all the time in a relatively small space.

Geri, who worked in reservations at Hawaiian Airlines before her husband persuaded her to come into the business, said shifting to a business crammed with electronic gear forced her into a whole new learning process.

"It was definitely foreign," she said. She said she is still learning, but with the experience she has behind her

now, she chuckles at the occasional caller who obviously thinks he has to talk to a man if it's something technical. When the phone rings and she answers it's not unusual for a man at the other end to say, "Can I talk to someone in parts?"

Everybody in the store does a bit of everything and can help just about anyone.

Kim went to Kapiolani Community College but did not study anything that would be specific to a life in the electronics business. She learned on the job, she said.

Kim particularly likes it that her parents let her bring Kalyn into the store. There's a play rug and toys on a section of the showroom floor. "You get to see everything, the new things she does," Kim said.

Kaimuki Radio was founded about 1930, Melvin Teruya said. "My uncle (Jack Teruya) and my dad (Tom) bought the business before the war, in 1939," he said.

Jack sold his share of the business to Tom and Melvin in 1985. Tom died in 1994, leaving the business to the next generation.

Kaimuki Radio Co. was incorporated in 1955. In 1959, the store left Kaimuki and moved to 819 Keeaumoku St. and was given the name Honolulu Electronics, although Kaimuki Radio still exists as the parent company. It stayed at Keeaumoku until 1990, when the family moved the business to Kawaiahao Street in Kakaako. Two years ago it moved to Auahi Street.

The store is well known among ham radio operators, with many references to it popping up on the Internet.

But the Internet is doing its bit to kill that hobby, Teruya said. Rather than buy transmitters and go through the effort of getting a ham license, many people these days prefer to find others with similar interests by communicating on the Internet, Teruya said.

He still has ham radio customers, though it's not like the old days. Honolulu Electronics used to keep ham radio antenna masts in stock, for example. That's no longer feasible, Teruya said.

"Dad was an old-time ham radio operator and used to sell ham equipment," Teruya said. When TV first came out in the early 1950s, Teruya remembers his father putting a set in the show window of the Kaimuki store. "Families used to gather outside to watch it," he said.

Teruya, who is now 55, says he "kind of grew up" in the family business, starting to visit and help in the Kaimuki store when he was a kid.

He went to Iolani School, then to college on the mainland and finished his education at the University of Hawaii. He did get some formal technical training, at the Electronic Institute in Kalihi, but mostly he learned the trade by doing things in the family store.

"We used to sell amateur radio products. I got a ham license, built radios, tinkered around and did repairs," he said. That was in the days when radios had glass tubes in them and transistors weren't yet in use.

Tubes had to be replaced, burnt-out wires needed redoing. "We used to do all that. We've kind of evolved since those days," Teruya said.

"Now, we're more involved in computer networking, selling cables and parts. We sell a lot of test equipment, batteries, stuff you won't find at CompUSA," he said, referring to the giant neighbor less than a block away.

"If you do find it at CompUSA, we're going to be a lot better pricewise," he said. The business is always bringing in new things, too, such as the "super bright" light-emitting diode (LED) flashlights that promise 100,000 hours of bulb life.

It sells pencil-shaped detectors that can tell whether there is electric current in a line by touching the outside of the insulation and super-fast chargers for AA-size batteries for digital camera users.

But it also has traditional voltage meters, standard screwdrivers, line-strippers and a wide range of other tools, gadgets and parts used by professional electronics repair people as well as do-it-yourselfers.

The store does a lot of business with the state and the city, Teruya said. It has supply contracts for everything from household batteries to technical equipment.

"There are 125 different vendors or contractors I buy from, some local, some elsewhere," he said.

Aside from the immediate family, Teruya's niece Tracy is a minority partner.

"And there's Ernie. He's been here so long he's part of the family," said Teruya, referring to the store's only non-family employee, Ernie Magaoay.